

Ecological Consciousness and Human Weakness in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

Hayder M.Saadan M.Ridha AL-Hasani

Al-Mutafawqeen Secondary School, General Directorate of Education in Najaf,
Ministry of Education, Iraq.

haideralhassani1983@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0002-3814-2034>

Abstract

This research paper examines the interrelationship between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the need to achieve a harmonious balance between them to avoid environmental degradation. This bleak life is made up as a result of the industrial revolution and human changes. Through an analysis of Thomas Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native*, the study highlights the novelist's environmental awareness and how the novel's characters interact with environmental issues. The study relies on the framework of modern ecological criticism to understand this interaction, indicating that environmental conservation requires a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. It aims to pursue the argument on the vital relationship between humans and nature from an environmental perspective, this interaction has become more urgent in light of contemporary environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. By analyzing *The Return of the Native*, the study examines how Thomas Hardy embodied nature as an influential force in the characters' lives, and even as a pivotal element that reflects the conflict between humans and nature, especially in light of the transformations witnessed by the Victorian era and the rise of industrialism. In addition, the study reflects that Hardy's environmental awareness is still relevant in the context of the environmental challenges we face today. The analysis highlights the pivotal role of nature in shaping human destinies, highlighting that ignoring this interaction can lead to the exacerbation of environmental crises. The study also calls for a re-evaluation of the relationship between humans and the environment through practical references aimed at promoting environmental sustainability. These ecological studies address the importance of environmental education, improving environmental policies, and encouraging reconnection with nature as an integral part of human identity. This integrated approach is the basis for a deeper understanding of environmental challenges and the search for comprehensive and sustainable solutions to them. In conclusion, the study proposes a set of

recommendations that can contribute to addressing contemporary environmental challenges and is directed to researchers, environmental activists, and stakeholders in environmental conservation efforts.

Keywords: Ecosystem, Skepticism, Transformation, Ecocriticism, coexistence

الدوعي البيئي والضعف البشري في هاردي عودة المواطن

حيدر محمد سعدان محمد رضا الحساني

وزارة التربية\المديرية العامة للتربية في النجف الاشرف \ ثانوية المتفوقين الاولى

haideralhassani1983@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0002-3814-2034>

الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الدراسة العلاقة المتبادلة بين الإنسان والطبيعة، مؤكدة على ضرورة تحقيق التوازن المتناغم لتجنب التدهور البيئي. حيث إن الحياة الكئيبة تتكون نتيجة للثورة الصناعية والتغيرات البشرية. ومن خلال تحليل رواية توماس هاردي عودة مواطن، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الوعي البيئي للروائي وكيف يتفاعل أبطال الرواية مع القضايا البيئية. تعتمد الدراسة على إطار النقد البيئي الحديث لفهم هذا التفاعل، مشيرة إلى أن الحفاظ على البيئة يتطلب فهما أعمق للعلاقة بين الإنسان والطبيعة. تهدف إلى متابعة الحجة حول العلاقة الحيوية بين الإنسان والطبيعة من منظور بيئي، أصبح هذا التفاعل أكثر إلحاحاً في ظل التحديات البيئية المعاصرة مثل تغير المناخ والتلوث واستنزاف الموارد الطبيعية. خلال تحليل رواية عودة المواطن الأصلي، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تجسيد توماس هاردي للطبيعة كقوة مؤثرة في حياة الشخصيات، بل كعنصر محوري يعكس الصراع بين البشر والطبيعة، خاصة في ظل التحولات التي شهدتها العصر الفيكتوري وصعود الصناعة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تعكس الدراسة أن الوعي البيئي لدى هاردي لا يزال ذا صلة في سياق التحديات البيئية التي نواجهها اليوم. يسلط التحليل الضوء على الدور المحوري للطبيعة في تشكيل مصائر البشر، مبرزاً أن تجاهل هذا التفاعل يمكن أن يؤدي إلى تفاقم الأزمات البيئية. كما تدعو الدراسة إلى إعادة تقييم العلاقة بين البشر والبيئة من خلال توصيات عملية تهدف إلى تعزيز الاستدامة البيئية. وتتناول هذه التوصيات أهمية التعليم البيئي، وتحسين السياسات البيئية، وتشجيع إعادة الاتصال بالطبيعة كجزء لا يتجزأ من الهوية البشرية. هذا النهج المتكامل هو

الأساس لفهم أعمق للتحديات البيئية والبحث عن حلول شاملة ومستدامة لها. وفي الختام، نقترح الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات التي يمكن أن تساهم في معالجة التحديات البيئية المعاصرة، وهي موجهة إلى الباحثين والناشطين البيئيين وأصحاب المصلحة في جهود الحفاظ على البيئة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظام البيئي، الشكوكية، التحول، النقد البيئي، التعايش

Introduction

Hardy (1840-1928) was a prominent author in England during the 19th Victorian era and early 20th centuries. He wrote a lot of literary works for his English nation, besides essays, verses, and short stories. He is well known for his love of nature and the environment, which are set in different places in his works. *Return of the Native* is considered one of their masterpiece books that was first published in 1878, it is considered one of his finest literary works. The narrative depicts a great range of natural ecosystems. As a result, the world of narrative no longer revolves around humans, but has instead progressed into a society centred on "Heath." It is not only human activities that are included in this world, but he also shows the diverse changes in highlands and streams, as well as day and night, besides the sounds of animals. There has been a significant expansion of the planet in *Return of the Native* to include the whole environmental level. The natural things create noises, as well as the autonomous existence of a soul, which distinguishes them from others. In doing so, Hardy undermines the human universe of

conventional fiction and represents the author's environmentalist worldview (Isaksen, 2015).

Hardy began his creative career with poetry, but he rose to prominence through his writing about ecological awareness in English society. Hardy used descriptive, the local language, as well as his consideration of natural surroundings, he skillfully incorporated human connection with the surrounding environments into his writings, particularly in his major volumes, this talent has always been praised by many readers. The depiction of economic battles as well as love, marriage, and friendship, besides the issues of human existence, are indicated in his works. These literary works are primarily discussed by reviewers, previous studies have attempted to analyze Hardy's output in the context of ecocriticism, concentrating primarily on the most successful novels *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders*, both have shown ecological elements. *The Return of the Native*, reveals the ecological fact, that humans are at odds with the ecosystem and each creature responds otherwise to it. In addition, Hardy's work

looked at how nature is depicted and humanized to help ecological thinking. The history of ecocriticism, as well as Hardy's ecological awareness, are offered before getting into the major issue (Heidari, 2016).

This research examines what is known about Hardy's position on environmental issues, looking at what can be determined from his literary works. Some conservation efforts associated with "return" are described in length, demonstrating, the novel's influence on a real environment, which makes the paper more interesting for ecocritical study. It offers a theoretical framework, within which certain fundamental ecocritical notions, as well as parts of spatial theory, relevant to the study, will be examined. The study focuses on the embodied sensory representations of the landscape that Hardy uses to convey the bio chronotype of Egdon Heath from the viewpoints of numerous human and nonhuman characters, as well as the embodied sensory descriptions of the landscape itself (Ibid). The research concludes with a substantial ecocritical assessment of *Return* links to the actual environment that served as inspiration for the book, with a particular emphasis on conservation programs that are expressly linked to the novel. It is argued that the narrative and the countryside are constantly co-developing and conversing with one another (Weeks, 2021).

2.1 Literature Review

Ecocriticism is a literary study that examines how nature is portrayed in literary works as well as the relationship between literature and the surrounding environment. Although its beginnings in the 1970s, it only became a recognized academic subject in the early 1990s and has grown steadily since then. It is a new field of investigation about the ecosystem, experts are currently in the process of defining the scope and objectives of the subject matter. Various commentators have approached the definition of the word from a variety of angles. Rueckert first used the word "ecocriticism" in his essay "*Literature and Ecology: (1978) An Experiment in Ecocriticism*," which was published in the journal *Ecology and Literature*. Throughout the 1980s, there was an increased interest in the study of nature writings and in reading literature that was concerned with "green" matters, and by the early 1990s, ecocriticism had evolved as a distinct field within the literature departments of American colleges (Garrard, 2007:359).

Ecology, according to the Contemporary Ecosystem, is an interconnected and autonomous process. It covers not only the environmental ecology but the psychological ecology and the social ecosystem as well. On one hand, they are self-sufficient, while on the other, they are interdependent.

Among the three, the natural ecology is the base, and the other two have an impact on the development and the process of the former. Consequently, human relationships with nature, are important factors in contemporary ecology. Ecocriticism looks at how authors organize, express, and characterize the three qualities of literature from the perspectives of wholeness, connection, and harmony. The study tries to identify the historical and cultural foundations of ecological issues and encourage the transformation of human views toward the environment. The *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* is a distinctive book by American writer, Mark Twain, the work has gained great attention from numerous critical genres since its release in 1884. Few, however, have attempted to analyze the work from an ecocritical point of view (Heidari, 2016). This thesis aims to analyze human relationships with nature, from an ecocritical viewpoint, allowing more extensive readers to enjoy the novel's natural setting. Meanwhile, the research might show Mark Twain's natural sentiments and ecological concern and urge humanity to ponder ecological challenges.

The study demonstrates that Mark Twain is a writer with an ecological conscience. While most Westerners were still enamoured with Robinson Crusoe's heroic spirit, he addressed the societal issues generated by the isolation of

humans from nature. When it comes to his explanations of the ecological systems of the natural world, the spiritual realm, and social life, Mark Twain shows that the natural environment, human nature, and human interactions were altered under the effect of industrialization. He also stated his ecological critique of the bourgeois society and his wish to return to nature. This article is made of three sections, namely, an introduction, a major body, and a conclusion. The study's relevance, methodologies, and originality are explained in the introduction, which includes a short survey of the relevant literature from domestic and international studies of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A broad introduction to Ecocriticism is provided in the opening chapter. This gives readers a better sense of what the movement is all about. *Huckleberry Finn: An Adventure in Three Dimensions* explores the human connection to nature, to other people, and to oneself in the book, presenting a holistic view of ecology that encompasses all three aspects of the novel's worldview. Third, Mark Twain's reflections on human relationships with nature, others, and oneself are examined via an examination of his eco-perspective, social awareness, and spiritual return. The conclusion examines the theoretical importance and the practical benefit (Heinzl, 2011).

Method questions that eco-critics may ask:

- (1) How is nature portrayed in literary works? What are some examples?
- (2) How does the physical-geographic setting of the book influence the structure of the novel?
- (3) How do the metaphors of the land influence our perception of it? In addition, how does teaching or creative practice connect to real-world political, sociocultural, and ethical conduct toward the environment and other non-human living things?
- (4) In what ways is technology — transgenic organisms, reproductive systems, and sexualities — subject to critical scrutiny in terms of its effects on the environment and society?

Eco critics' basic assumptions, beliefs, and approaches are summarized here.

- (1) Eco critics believe that human civilization is inextricably bound up with nature.
- (2) Environmental critics think that all life is interrelated. Ecocriticism expands the definition of "the globe" to encompass the whole biosphere.
- (3) The literary treatment, description, and "thematization" of land and the environment have an impact on how the land is seen and used.

(4) Literary ecology, as described by Joseph Meeker, is "the study of genetic themes and the relations discovered in literary texts," according to the definition. It is also an attempt to discover the role of literature in the study of human ecology.

(5) Ecocriticism, as ecocritics believe, is "the presentation of environmental and biological ideas to the study of literary works" (Al-hasani, 2024)

2.2 Environmental criticism

Ecological criticism is identified as ecocriticism and "green" criticism is a promising area of literary analysis, it examines the association that humans have with the ecosystem. Nature is envisioned in literary works, and environmental critics investigate how this is done. As a result, if the readers want to realize their present attitude toward the natural world, they should go no further than the literature that has shaped it. While writers such as Thoreau and Wordsworth may spring to mind first when thinking about environmental problems, literary answers to ecological concerns are as ancient as the problems themselves and may be found throughout history. In Western literature, environmental concerns such as deforestation, air pollution, endangered species, wetland loss (including the loss of wetlands), animal rights, and unbridled consumerism have all appeared as contentious subjects for

hundreds, and in some “instances”, thousands of years (Zheng, 2020).

2.3 Ecocriticism as a literary theory

In general, conventional theory considers linguistics, cultural background, or social background to be essential factors; eco-critics, on the other hand, consider nature to be the most important aspect since they feel that our progress as a civilization is primarily based on natural causes, because of the world in which we live is not just comprised of linguistic and social features, but also other factors. It is merely one of the numerous variables that have contributed to the existence and development of humanity throughout history. Nature and the environment have a significant impact on all aspects of existence, including human life, and as a result, nature is the most important component of this theory (Clamp, 2020).

Following its transformation into a theoretical area, green criticism was divided into two branches, one of which grew into a branch devoted to analyzing the representation of natural components in literary works created by academics from all over the globe. Green studies are just a subset of regional literature since they consider the contrasts in nature seen in various parts of the world. Nonetheless, the writers and poets who are well-known and well-established in the world of literature will continue to serve as the primary source of ideas,

study, and discoveries in this sector. (ibid)

3.1 Thomas Hardy's inspiration in nature:

When it comes to Thomas Hardy's work, particularly his novels, there is a remarkable amount of attention paid to the natural elements, nature plays an important role in Hardy's writings. Hardy depicts a complicated web of interrelated existing organisms, through it, human beings are only a small portion, and in which even the minimum and most inconsequential creatures, such as insects, are given important roles and, to a certain amount, despite their apparent insignificance. This emphasizes the interconnectedness of diverse life structures concerning their natural environment roots. Hardy's creative images about the vivid natural environment, where the fiction is situated, is a good starting point for an ecocritical reading, as is the analysis of Hardy's motivation toward the dwelling environment in Egdon Heath (Kerridge, 2001:76).

The megalithic burial mound known as Rainbarrow can still be seen on Egdon Heath, and visitors may cross the road that appears conspicuously in *The Return of The Native* while strolling through the ancient woodland area. The heath was Hardy's childhood community setting, he combined his experience of the specific wildlife and plants of the region with a

study of biological scale, which he gathered in his literary notes, to create a more complete picture of the environment. When one looks through the trifles of useful knowledge that Hardy accumulated in his notebooks an intense investigation that led up to the writing of *The Return of the Native*, one finds tidbits from history, ancient Greek and Roman literature, and entomological and botanical details mixed in with historical and literary references. Hardy explicitly acknowledges the link between extinct genera and those that are still alive. There is a clear association among forces that act on human and animal existence once again underscores his ecological view, according to which all living species exist in a system that is interrelated and interdependent on one another. Hardy's understanding of the problem of genus destruction, his books are appropriate ever in this era of a widespread variety of destructions. Hardy's novel is also a cautionary tale about the importance of maintaining the environment (Feuerstein, 2018: 26).

Hardy seems to blur the traditional differences between humans and nonhuman creatures, which is problematic from an ethical sense. Using the posthuman lens, Anna West investigates Hardy's empathic attitude about animal life all around him, demonstrating the impacts of his sense of legitimacy for animals as well as human beings. Eco-critics explain Hardy's

understanding of evolutionary philosophy influenced his belief. The child Jude's empathy for animals, confirmed by his avoidance of earthworms in his path and his receiving a thrashing for permitting barren birds to eat the seeds, he finds them as friends, he grows older, and he is paralyzed by fear at the prospect of slaughtering a pig as an adult. In harrowing detail. Hardy's poem "The Puzzled Game Birds" has a similar sentiment: "They are not those that used to feed us/When we were young—they cannot be These forms that now bereave and bleed us." When Hardy refers to animals as "friends," when he depicts censorious human cruelty and treachery, he disallows a position that would allow any practical moral distinction between human's other creatures (Holton, 2017).

3.2 Hardy's Viewpoint on Environments and Its Effects on Human Psyche

Thomas Hardy was a notable writer in the Victorian era, he was regarded as the best writer and poet of the Victorian period who wrote about nature. Hardy was a prolific writer who penned fourteen novels, four collections of short stories, eight collections of poetry, and "epic-drama," *The Dynasts*, throughout the course of his eighty-eight-year life. Hardy's "Wessex Novels," written between 1871 and 1895, showcase his inventiveness and aesthetic prowess, and they place him in a class by themselves

among Victorian authors. Up to now, the works of Hardy have already been examined from a broad range of critical views. Other scholars devote their attention to the thematic relevance of Hardy's Wessex texts, some study the psychoanalytical treatment of the characters and suggest the modernity of Hardy's writings, and some explore feminism in his novels, while other critics have revealed his links to Darwinism. Although the two Wessex novels of Hardy—*Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*—are examined in this study, a new critical method, eco-criticism, is used, which is especially suited for an investigation in the literature of the worldwide environmental problem is used (Holton, 2017).

This study explains the critical state of our planet and analyzes the origin of the ecological crisis to figure out the ideological and cultural foundation of the ecological problem. The only way to resolve the ecological catastrophe is to raise environmental awareness among the public. The research covers the advent of ecological literature and ecological criticism by presenting an overview of the new critical theory via its general definition, ideological genesis, academic background, key tasks, and relevance. The paper then concentrates on the examination of Hardy's literary production and his ecological concerns. Many critics and academics have

investigated his books from various viewpoints but very few have analyzed his novels from an ecological standpoint. Hardy's *Characters and Environment* novels are rich in ecological insight. Hardy's personal experiences, the genesis of ecological ideas, and his relationship to the Industrial Revolution are mentioned, which reveals Hardy to be a writer who is mindful of environmental issues. The essay is dedicated to an ecocritical analysis of Hardy's depiction of the natural world in his two novels: *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*. The two sculptures demonstrate Hardy's deep-felt concern about the ecological system (Myers, 2005).

Throughout the use of lyrical language and exquisite descriptive imagery, Hardy conveys a beautiful depiction of rural England in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Here people dwell in a location named Weather Bury in the Wessex region where people are embedded in the stable local ecology and rely on nature for harvest and happiness. Throughout the story, nature and human behaviour are intertwined to produce a seamless whole. Peace and tranquillity can only be found in the big outdoors. However, in contrast to Hardy's realistic depiction of rural life in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, he uses overt symbolism in *The Return of the Native* to paint a more evocative picture of the natural world. Hardy's use of symbolism

vividly illustrates the personalities and inner world of his characters, revealing the author's deep understanding of the link between nature, life, and society, namely, the natural world maintains a likeness to our human world and nature is a living existence of human equality (Myers, 2005). Chapter Three addresses the interaction between people and nature represented in Hardy's works, which exemplifies Hardy's idea of "non-anthropocentrism". Nature is an organic aspect of the complete ecosystem in which man is not superior to nature but equal to it. Humanity is not the master of nature, and the universe does not revolve around us. Hardy's characters' destinies in both works are heavily influenced by their relationships with nature; those who are cut off from nature suffer the consequences, while those who remain connected to nature find lasting happiness. In a word, humans are strongly tied to nature and their lives rely on nature, thus human beings should respect nature and return to it. Hardy's environmental sensitivity is summed up at the book's end. Global ecological catastrophe is threatening us all the time; thus readers need to reanalyze Hardy's works from the viewpoint of ecocriticism in literary study and environmental defence. In today's ecological society, Hardy instils in us a belief in the interconnectedness of nature and human life and offers guidance on how to manage human-nature interaction. As a

result, this article hopes to raise readers' awareness of the need for environmental conservation via Hardy's writings.

3.3 A harmonious coexistence between man and the environment

The Return of the Native also provides a more in-depth knowledge of the interaction between man and the environment. Nature, according to Hardy, is the wellspring of all life. Aside from human beings, all other species in nature are non-artificially created entities. These creatures get the privileges of human beings who live in the natural world. Humans are on an equal footing with, and with no superiority over, any other living entity on the face of the earth. People must take care of animals protect them, and live in peace with them, rather than abusing them without regard for their species. Hardy expresses his admiration for the pleasant and harmonious interaction that exists between man and nature. Infinite possibilities exist within the inherent ease and splendour expressed by Hardy. The novel's protagonist, Clym, is out working on the heath, and the animals around him treat him as if he were one of their own, treating him with excitement and kindness (Mattar, 2008: 22)

Bees buzzed about his ears, giving off a warm atmosphere, pulled in the heath in such large numbers, and weighed them down to the ground. When Egdon breathed, the weird, amber-coloured

butterflies he made, which had never been seen anywhere else, quivered in his lips, landed on his bent back, and played with the sparkling tip of his hook as he waved it up and down. Flies flew about him, completely oblivious to the fact that it was a man. It is possible to achieve the ultimate degree of harmony when Clym and the natural animals are entirely interwoven. The novelist observed the expansion of societal physical affluence as well as the widespread degradation of natural resources by humans. When confronted with the hard realities of life, Hardy delves deeply into the link between man and the environment, and he conveys his views via his art. Hardy's natural life is away from the dust, demonstrating his strong affection for the natural environment. Human beings are becoming increasingly concerned about their living environment as the global ecological crisis worsens. As a result, they are mobilizing the environmental protection movement, to the people to appreciate the landscape, go back to the natural world, and observe the principles of nature (Fromm, 2009).

In today's world, with the ongoing devastation of the earth's natural environment, animal slaughter and even the appearance of certain wild creatures are becoming more and more common, and some species are at the point of extinction. A growing number of people are becoming concerned about animals and advocating for their preservation. To

be sure, the brilliant British writer Thomas Hardy displayed his ecological awareness in his books about a century ago when he advocated for nature, encouraged people to return to the environment, and lived in peace with nature. Voiced his concern for the safety of animals, Hardy's foresight is completely represented in his literary works from the standpoint of the broader ecological balancing system. Hardy's works are not merely about landscapes; they also contain inherent values, as well as their ideas and emotions, and they are intimately connected to the characters' thoughts and feelings. All the creatures that make up the biological community of nature are interconnected and interdependent upon one another. Hardy's imagery of these things is an unavoidable aspect of his work. Hardy spent a great deal of time thinking about the connection between man and the environment after being confronted with the harsh truth, and he communicated his ideas via his writings. Hardy's natural life is spent far away from the rush of city life, near to nature, which demonstrates his strong appreciation for the natural world. Human beings are becoming more concerned about their living environment as the global ecological problem worsens. As a result, they have started to demand an ecological preservation movement, encouraging people to respect nature and return to the natural world (Isaksen, 2015).

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Egdon Heath Influence on The Natives

The heath is a natural feature of the landscape and is often referred to be a desolate place. According to the earliest descendants, the heath is a ferocious, desolate, and lonesome landscape which poses a danger to human survival. It's also secretive, wicked, and unpredictably unexpected. According to Thoreau Nature, according to Hardy, is a biological ecosystem that includes all living things. Everyone in this natural ecosystem has a distinct life worth and inherent purpose that distinguishes it from the others. The health of the environment, as an environmental whole with natural value, is the foundation of individual life. Human beings depend on the wild for survival, and the wasteland provides a consistent supply of food and water. It is possible to argue that the building of the natural prototype of the wilderness reflects Hardy's advanced ecological idea, which places a focus on nature and the necessity of life. (Mattar, 2008)

Throughout the novel, the heath represents little cosmos with its autonomous significance, as well as a certain overwhelming preventive power that humans cannot resist. A wide expanse of unenclosed wilderness, from the past to the present, Egdon heath has remained almost unchanged, keeping its

most primal condition of nature. Its earth has worn the same old brown attire from the beginning of time, a natural and invariable garment of the specific formation, ever since the beginning of time." Even though this heath was rowdy since the earliest times, it retains its magnificence, which can never be obliterated. Society and civilization are its most dangerous adversaries. It is merged with the sky and depicts the unique domain of humanity and the globe, as well as the natural merger of heaven and earth, among other things. Human people seem so insignificant in the presence of Egdon Heath. As well as feelings and moods, the heath has its own: "It was at this moment a location exactly accordant with man's nature—neither frightful, repulsive, nor ugly; neither banal, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and lasting." Because Hardy is filled with sentiments for nature, his writings are brimming with care and admiration for the natural world. The sublimity of nature is the source of all of nature's splendour. Nature's sublimity is derived from the vigour, vibrancy, and strength of the elements that comprise it. People often use the discovery and adoration of natural beauty as a means of promoting morals and philosophical thought. (Feuerstein, 2018: 26). The destiny of the characters who dwell on the heath is likewise determined by the heath. Mrs. Yeobright dies after being attacked by a snake on the heath because

of her opposition to her son, and Thomasin, finds her joy on the heath, the author provides book lovers with a one-of-a-kind atmosphere that is not exposed to human training and usage. While Hardy's earlier works show ecosystems, the atmosphere in "Return of the Native" is unlike any other setting depicted in Hardy's other works.

4.2 Egdon Heath as the main character in the narrative

In Hardy's writings, the backdrop is vibrant and vivid, and it counts more than the characters that move through it. The smaller pattern of life is painted against the backdrop of dark, passionate Egdon, of lush, sappy passion and feelings of the forests, of the unfathomed stars: The Return of The Native, the Indigenous Peoples, the modest, pitiful pattern of man's moral existence and struggle is drawn upon the enormous, unfathomable pattern of some *primaeval* morality bigger than anything even the human intellect can comprehend. The scene in the book is possibly Egdon Heath's most compelling single narrative. Egdon is not simply the setting for the story; it also shapes the storyline and the personalities. It is sentient in the sense that it feels, talks, and kills (Isaksen, 2015). Egdon Heath is the main character in the narrative, not just a supporting character. The author gives us a sense of the dark barren moor reaching as far as the eye can reach under the gathering winter

twilight in four pages of continuous eloquence. The sound of a human voice is permitted to break the quiet only once its sombre mood has gone deep into our awareness. The quiet pervades the whole novel, an ironic commentary on the dilemma and protest of the few fleeting human beings who, for a small while, break the monotony. Hardy delivers a precise and minute description of this gloomy and dismal heath, where the darkness comes early, and the day takes its time. Hail and storms are common in this area. Time does not influence one's health. "Neither hideously terrible nor ugly, neither ordinary, unmeaning nor tame, but slighted and lasting," writes the author.

Egdon is, in a sense, Hardy's natural personification. The tale is set in the open air for around three-quarters of the time, and we are continuously pulled to the shifting moods of the heath and the responses of the major characters to it. Egdon represents the whole cosmic order in which man is simply a little particle; it is the embodied Immanent Will commanding practically all in Hardy's scheme of life. D.H Lawrence brilliantly portrays the role of Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native in his excellent, Study of Thomas Hardy, reproduced in Phoenix: "What is the genuine essence of tragedy in the book?" It's the health that you're looking for. The innate life swells upon the ancient *primaeval* dirt. Eustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobright, Clym, and

all the rest are born from the body of this primitive earth (Holton, 2017). They were an unintentional crop for one year. What difference does it make if some are drowning or dead, while others are preaching and married? "The Heath endures." Egdon, on the other hand, is not in vain. It can't be in vain since "it is everlasting." What is fruitless is man's goal."

Health adds a unique layer to the activity, desire, enthusiasm, disappointment, pain, and death are all played out against the huge and majestic backdrop of Egdon. Pastoral nomads are a natural element of the environment. Christian Cantle, Grander Cantle, Timothy Fairway, and other rustics are emotionally associated with the heath because they are steeped in its culture and ideals. In August, the peasants dance. In a sense, time is sped up; centuries pass by, and they act as their forefathers did. The destiny of several individuals in the narrative is largely decided by their attitude toward their health. Characters who have been cut off from nature are all undone in some manner. Eustacia despises the heath because she is an outsider with a fundamental incongruity with it, and she feels crushed by it (Zheng, 2020: 90). Egdon Heath is cordial and amiable to Clym since he is a local. In its success, the health swallows him up like a furze-cutter; in its misfortune, the heath takes him up as a furze-cutter. The reddleman is said to

symbolize Egdon's spirit. He utilizes Egdon as an ally in his fight against Wildeve, tracking out his location and assisting Thomasin. Only the Reddleman and Thomasin may be half-happy in the story, owing to their contentment with a simple, monotonous existence and their belonging to the heath. Wildeve is a member of it as well, but because of his irresponsible behaviour, he loses his right to reside on Egdon Heath.

The novel's action takes place once again in Egdon. It is where all of the important events take place. Eustacia takes Wildeve to the village fair and then to the Rainbarrow, where the rustics build a campfire, the game of dice is played, and Mrs. Yeobright dies tragically. Hardy recognized in the heath not just a dark open stage for the neo-Greek play he planned to present, but also a chance to accomplish something like the classic unity of location. According to a well-known critic, the trouble with Egdon is that it always threatens to shift from background to front. It's a case of health being given much too much weight. "It's only that it's overdone in terms of its tragic potential," George Wing counters, "in terms of its depiction as a hero in this sad love story." However, without Egdon, *The Return of the Native* might fall apart. This narrative could not be told anywhere else than among the solitudes of Egdon. It's an inextricable aspect of Hardy's worldview, an extended metaphor of the

inevitable power that develops and moulds human personalities. Because of the Egdon Heath, the enormous unknown morality of life itself, what we term the 'immorality of nature,' surrounds us in its endless incomprehensibility (Dongxia, 2020).

4.3 Characters Belong to Nature

Clym seems to be another son of nature who stands out in the narrative. For centuries, the environment has served as a sanctuary for the soul and a source of solace for humans in numerous ecological literary works. Humans should return to the natural world as their best option for escaping contemporary society. However, on the other side, he did his best to convince the protagonist to avoid contemporary society and return to the natural world. Despite this, his paintings are filled with tragedy. The characters in a narrative typically have a difficult time returning to nature. The protagonist of his writings is confused by the interaction between nature and civilization. He was born and raised on the heath, and he is a native of the heath who knows a lot about its secrets. He has worked in the jewellery industry in Paris for many years, but he has a deep hate for capitalism and looting, so he has decided to return to his birthplace. He lives a modest and inexpensive life on the heath, working with the peasants and embracing nature. (Isaksen, 2015)

Heath is "energizing, invigorating, and relaxing," in his opinion. "I'd rather live here than anyplace else in the world," he said. As a youngster, Clym's life was inextricably linked to health, and anybody who gazed at it would immediately think of Clym. In the words of Hardy, "If anybody had any knowledge of the heath. Everything about it affected him —the sights, sounds, and smells. "He may be regarded as a product of it." In his portrayal of Clym, Hardy emphasizes Clym's desire to return to a peaceful existence in connection with nature. In the narrative, Clym is shown as a typical eco-man. Clym likes to take long walks alone in the woods or on the heath. All that matters to him is the heath's flora, fauna, and insects. There were creepy and swooping entities that he recognized as familiars, and they appeared to accept him into their group. As befits a heath creature, Clym's living form has a rudimentary natural appearance. Lance believes that Clym's life is valuable because of his connection to nature. Clym is a perfect embodiment of Hardy's ecological ethics, which support equality between man and the environment. To understand Hardy's ecological ethics, it is necessary to understand his love for nature, which he sees as a manifestation of this love (Kerridge, 2001).

Diggory Wenn is a conventional son of nature in the narrative and goes over the heath regularly. He is a client of the

heath and has become used to living there, as a reddish clay merchant, he spends most of his time on the heath. Wenn's body has a bloody red hue, which corresponds to the colour of the wasteland. In the heath, he is a part of the ecosystem, and he is a part of the wildness. He considers the heath to be an old friend and a valuable resource. For him to be able to do his task, he must be near to his beloved girl, Thomasin, and the expanse of the heath allows him to do so without troubling her, even in the middle of a stormy night, he can successfully guide the Thomasin over the heath because of his acquaintance with the terrain. Essentially, Wenn restricts action a similar attitude as health governs action. Even after being rejected by Thomasin, the immensity of their heath helped to shape his open-minded nature. He nevertheless went out of his way to assist her in finding happiness. Wenn's genuineness helped him eventually win Thomasin's heart, even if it meant marrying someone else for her to be happy. Wenn's dwelling kind is in tune with the natural atmosphere where he lives, and he exhibits a rudimentary natural character that is in keeping with his habitat (Ibid).

Thomasin is also a local of the city, as a lovely girl in the heath, she is praised for her naïve friendliness. Everything about the heath is wonderful in Thomasin's eyes. She loves health and does not want to leave it. For her. The

heath is also a wonderful spot to go for a stroll in the woods, where lush organic grass is still a haven for her kids to run about in. Several seasons have passed since her husband's death, and nature has begun to mend the scars in her heart and soul, Spring approached and calmed her; summertime arrived and comforted her; autumn came, and she started to feel comfortable. Thomasin is close to Mother Nature, the landscape provides her with relaxation, contentment, and joy, to name a few benefits. Her appearance more accurately reflects the harmonious man-nature interaction. The discord stuck between the heroine and the heath has far-achieving consequences. (Feuerstein, 2018).

As a result of Hardy's strong determination to restrain people's betrayal of Egdon Heath, when the environment is damaged, the sufferer is not the wilderness, but the man himself is destroyed. He has a unique viewpoint throughout his experiences in the life cycle. Hardy lives at a time of transition between the demise of the patriarchal order and the advent of modern civilization, which is depicted in the novel. In modern society, which has been defined by the invention of the telegraph and the development of machinery, people's wants have grown more out of control, resulting in them being more alienated from one another and a breakdown of natural ecological equilibrium. Hardy supplied the reader

with the outcomes of people's pursuit of market life to demonstrate that he is hopeful that humans would be able to live in harmony with the environment in the future. In the narrative, the Sons of Nature have formed deep and irreversible bonds with the flora and fauna of the heath. They are endowed with the good traditional values passed down from their forefathers and foremothers: loyalty, compassion, humility, and perseverance. Their lifestyles are in tune with the sense of existence in the forest, and they have a primal natural appearance to them. Hardy expresses his admiration for the inherent values that human beings should possess via his depiction of the Sons of Nature, which reflects the ecological concepts of championing nature and returning to nature (Heinzl, 2011).

5. The conflict between the natural world and culture

Hardy's ecological conscience is represented in his perspective of Nature, which begins with the description of the landscape. Using a new analytical technique called ecocriticism to analyze the novel, is applicable considering the worldwide environmental crisis, and it may help to raise people's awareness of the issue in contemporary times. Hardy's assessment of the link between nature and society, is reflected in this paper, the essay shows the conflicts among human beings, man and nature, and man and society become dreadful because of the

invasion of industrial civilization. Furthermore, it gives us valuable insight into the relationship between man and the environment, while also raising the reader's awareness of environmental issues. In a world beset by a widespread ecological catastrophe, the advent of ecocriticism had heralded the opening of a new hopeful hermeneutical horizon in our readings of the natural world and literature, respectively. Since the 1990s, the subject of ecocriticism has been given a theoretical foundation, there is a growing interest in broadening the scope of ecocritical practice by increasing the canon of texts. The paper Investigates the potential connections between literature and the environment, as well as the ecological situations with literary criticism (Clamp, 2020). When the novel was initially printed in 1878, vagueness was rarely recognized as the foundation of the novelistic structure on which it was formed. Egdon Heath is presented as the novel's first "character." It is evident throughout the work that the heath is both literally and psychologically significant. The characters are identified throughout their association with the heath, the climate changes of the heath even mirror the internal conflicts of the hero and heroine.

Clym finds the heath to be attractive; Eustacia finds it to be repulsive. It is precisely this type of discrepancy in perception that is at the heart of the novel's storyline. Hardy demonstrates

how Clym Yeobright abandoned the glitz and glam of Parisian city life and eagerly accepted the task of educating the Heath people as a schoolteacher in his novel. Many people are preoccupied with Hardy's moral viewpoints and unfortunate destiny themes in his works. However, in this work, Egdon Heath infuses a fresh ecocritical component into the overall plot. Clym and Diggory Venn have finally remained to continue their efforts to improve Heath, although Wildeve and Eustacia Vye, who despise Heath, have both died. True pleasure cannot be achieved by establishing separation from nature and cultivating a dislike for nature. Natura, in Hardy's writing, is a mysterious power with which to contend. Human beings seem to benefit from it at times, while at other times they appear to be harmed by it, this research demonstrates how the characters respond differently to nature. Natural destruction is illustrated in Egdon's Heath, which is a hostile environment for humans that is a source of great concern. Hardy's characters are "controlled by and submissive to their surroundings," according to the author (Merchant, 2010).

According to Lance Butler, the residents of Egdon Heath "respond personally to one another and directly to (it)." The evil aspect of nature and her animosity for Eustacia Vye is revealed. Eustacia, who was born in the bustling port town of Budmouth and raised with

her grandpa on the Heath, despises her new home and is desperate to find a way out. Eustacia considers Egdon Heath to be an adversary, particularly when she finds herself amid a storm when the torrential rain seems to try to destroy her. On her way to Rainbarrow at the end of the story, the protagonist trips over tangled furze roots and rushes, as well as oozing masses of meaty fungus, which "laid strewn over the heath like the decaying liver and lungs of some huge beast" at the time of the novel's conclusion (Weeks, 2021). The reason for Eustacia's tripping is that the rain has entirely obscured the light of the moon and stars. Hardy is bent on demonstrating that the stars in their courses struggle against the ambitious, against the man or woman who wishes to climb above the ordinary lot by the grandeur of spirit, the greatness of ambition, or greatness of passion,' argues Walter Allen. And as Eustacia comes to a halt, pondering, at the summit of the Rainbarrow, the environment around her and her thoughts are both tossed about in equal measure. When Clym returns to his own country after spending time abroad, he finds that he has lost all desire for riches and social progress. "Clym achieves a degree of smart indifference," writes Hillis Miller "in which he may be delighted in the tedious and aware activity of furze-cutting." Nature's harshness manifests itself when Clym is on the verge of death in book five. Even though he is not

opposed to nature, he feels uneasy around it since it is so uncaring. In the words of Rosemarie Morgan Despite his affinity for the heathlands that are scarcely visible to him because of his gradually deteriorating vision, the tranquil Clym is manifestly incompatible with the Titanic power and majesty of Egdon's Atlantean presence." Or... he is no more valuable than a bug... a simple parasite of the environment.

Mrs. Yeobright, a respectable, class-conscious, and haughty lady who is also Clym's mother, suffers at the hands of nature as well. After a fruitless visit to the miserable couple, Clym and Eustacia, she is abandoned on the heath by her companions. The heath is a representation of nature's blinding powers. It eventually becomes an emblem of contemporary man's pessimism and despondency. Because it is "a lonely face indicating tragical possibilities," as Hardy defines it, it helps to prepare the reader for the disaster that is to follow. With his comprehension of the heath, Clym can see the bleakness of the overall human predicament and the insignificance of man in the grand scheme of things. Egdon Heath, the gloomy, environment whose powers govern obscurely the lives and fates of people who dwell happily among its gorsy wildness or feel brutally out of their element, is personified this time in the main character, according to Ernest Baker." "Egdon Heath represents the

whole of the cosmos, in which man is simply a little particle," according to the poet. According to Walter Allen while referring to the role performed by Egdon Heath, "the heath is more than simply a picturesque backdrop to the action; it is... an extended metaphor for the nature of which man is a part, in which he is trapped, which conditions his entire existence, and which cares nothing for him." His existence in connection to it is as fleeting as the bonfires built by the peasants from the heath furze to warm themselves (Weeks, 2021).

6. Conclusion

To conclude this paper, from the standpoint of ecocriticism, Hardy's *The Return of the Native* has significant illuminating value for us since it helps to recognize nature and establish a new interdependent connection between man and the natural environment. **Environmental** forces are the nature of all things, and only social order produced in line with the laws of nature can be considered moral, according to Hardy's message. The characters are no longer the crucial point of the environment, but rather are a factor of the ecology that surrounds them, with the careful representation of the strange magic of the **Egdon heath**, Hardy contrasts the human being's smallness and fragility with the mysterious magic of the Egdon Heath. At the same time, he advises people to avoid simply breaching nature's laws and to pay

attention to the link between man and the natural environment. Human beings will ultimately be chastised and discarded by nature if they do not change their ways. Hardy's assessment of the man-nature connection demonstrates that humans can endure in the face of nature's encounters. When people are near nature, they may integrate with nature, and then understand nature, resulting in a joyful existence that is in harmony with the environment. Every narrative has a beginning, middle, and end; but Egdon Heath is the most memorable in the rich history of Victorian fiction. The omniscient narrator's omnipotence was a constraint on Hardy's capacity to convey his understanding of how the world functioned, and he frequently chafed at the restrictions they enforced on his capability to express this perception of reality. Hardy's best works push the limits of the genre, to Egdon Heath, he comes dangerously close to upending the established order of things in the Victorian novel by emphasizing the value of the setting in connection to the people who live there. Those who live on the heath are not only immersed in a vividly depicted landscape but are also surrounded by an energy that may affect the character of those who are open to it.

Recommendations:

- Ecological studies need to combine literature with ecological science, sociology, and history to explore

the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

- Scholars may analyze classical works (e.g., Hardy's *The Return of the Native*) to reveal their ecological insights and relevance to contemporary issues.
- Literary writers need to associate literary themes to current ecological challenges like climate change, pollution, and protection efforts.
- The scholars must make research accessible by collaborating with educators, activists, and policymakers to inspire environmental awareness and sustainable practices

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