JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Representation of Nature in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native:* A Critical Reading

Dr Suresh Kumar Singh
Associate Professor (Department of English)
Bajrang Mahavidyalaya, Kunda, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh.

Abstract:

This research paper is a modest attempt to explore Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native (1878)* from several core perspectives. The paper also analyzes human experiences and representation of nature throughout the novel. Hardy had considerable difficulties finding a publisher because of the contentious subjects in the book. *The Return of the Native* rose to prominence in the 20th century as one of Hardy's most read fictional narratives.

This book has won praise for its ability to successfully create a compelling story, engaging characters, and a beautiful natural environment in Egdon Heath. The paper examines the depiction of the country and country life as the most distinctive embodiment of creative talent of Hardey. Stewart Luke, a reviewer, notes in his notes on *The Return of the Native* that the novel is set in Hardy's Wessex on Egdon Heath and that, despite its deep darkness, it "remains one of his most popular works today". This paper investigates social class and how it works in daily life.

Key Words: Nature, Fictional Narrative, Human Experiences, Country and Country and Country Life.

Paper

This paper provides a critical evaluation of Thomas Hardy's book The Return of the Native and concentrates on Mrs. Yeobright, one of his characters. Victorian England, where the book is set, was a tremendously affluent historical period. A tight social hierarchy also governed the society. Women in Victorian society were considered second-class citizens and given identities that their familial responsibilities, such as those of wife, mother, daughter, and widow. Hardy's personality is explored in light of how she performs in light of these assignments.

Except for the epilogue, the story is completely set in the vicinity of Egdon Heath and lasts precisely a year and a day. On a Saturday in November, Egdon Heath gradually darkens as dusk approaches. From how it was described in antiquity, not much has changed. An old roadway and an even older barrow are the sole signs of

activity. Along this route, an elderly guy wearing period-appropriate attire is moving along and has just caught up to another traveler who is now strolling next to a vehicle.

The second guy is recognized as a reddleman by the red hue of his skin, his attire, and his van, which sheep farmers used to mark their herd with red chalk to identify them. The reddleman tells the elderly guy that he has a young lady in his van during their short talk, but he won't disclose anything further about her. The reddleman notices a Celtic barrow on top of the heath's highest point as he leaves the elderly man to pull over and rest. He recognizes the figure as a lady. He is taken aback to realize that numerous other people have taken her position.

It is considered to remain "unmoved" in its "old permanence," waiting endlessly. The wind is its ally, and the storm is its lover. Its unique foliage gives it an old brown robe, and its gorgeous face suggests sad potential. Egdon is animated and given personality by Hardy. Because some critics have gone as far as to characterize the heath as one of the novel's main characters and others have argued that this landscape takes on the persona of the region's ancient, pagan past, it should come as no surprise that one of the locals will later accuse one of the main characters, Eustacia Vye, of being a witch. Thinking about Egdon Heath as a symbol aids in our comprehension of the book.

According to Hardy, such a "gaunt waste" with its "chastened sublimity" would come to stand in for a new standard of beauty for the contemporary man. Of course, this is a subtle dig at contemporary culture and how it perceives the cosmos. The first human character does not emerge until the paper, and even then, they are unnamed. Egdon is at the very least demonstrated to be hostile to humans. When human beings do eventually come, they are dwarfed by the neutral or even hostile Egdon in their presence. For instance, Clym will often be shown in the novel as a small bug flitting over the face of Nature.

The first people's appearance concerning their surroundings and the heath's significance as a backdrop and symbol both illustrate Hardy's theme: The cosmos in which man exists is both mostly uncaring and potentially hostile. The narrative foretells a lot of what will happen later. These characters- Captain Vye, Diggory Venn, and Thomasin Yeobright- are subsequently recognized as being the elderly man going home and the reddleman carrying the young lady to her home—which alludes to Clym Yeobright's more significant homecoming. Hardy suggests that the young lady in the vehicle is having some kind of issue and concerns are raised regarding the reddleman and the woman on the barrow (Eustacia Vye).

Hardy has introduced most of the primary individuals whose future events in the story will be concerned without naming them just yet. Because he prefers to tell his tale in a succession of little scenes, Hardy has sometimes been accused of managing the storyline ineptly. In this work, such sequences do occur often, and it may be disturbing to go from one scene to another so fast, particularly when a change in point of view is involved. However, one of the numerous lengthy passages with a lot of detail is included in the paper. However, indeed, shorter sequences are more commonly utilized than longer ones.

The people shown on Rainbarrow are people who have traveled to the countryside to create the customary Fifth of November bonfire. Timothy Fairway, Grander Cantle, Christian Cantle, Humphrey, Sam, Olly

Dowden, and Susan Nonsuch are among those in the group. They talk about the marriage of Damon Wildeve, an engineer turned innkeeper, and Thomasin Yeobright, Mrs. Yeobright's niece, which they all presume took place that exact day as they see the fire. They also talk about Mrs. Yeobright's initial opposition to the union before mentioning Mrs. Yeobright's son Clym's anticipated visit from Paris. A statement about Captian Vye and his granddaughter Eustacia is made in response to the blaze in front of his house. Christian's poor judgment when it comes to women is also extensively discussed. When their fire goes out, Fairway and Susan Nonsuch lead the way through the embers in a wild dance. The reddleman Diggory Venn arrives and interrupts the dancing by asking where Mrs. Yeobright's home is. Olly Dowden is sought after by Mrs. Yeobright, who then joins her on their way to the Quiet Woman Inn, the future home of Thomasin.

Hardy claims that the bonfires illuminating the heath this evening are "more the lineal successors from tangled Druidical rituals and Saxon festivities than the fabrication of public emotion over Gunpowder Plot." Guy Fawkes is the subject of The Gunpowder Plot, and November 5th is recognized as Guy Fawkes Day in remembrance of a plot to blow up the British Parliament. Even though it seems that this day is no longer honored in other parts of the isolated, rural island of Egdon Heath, it is still observed there, as is shown later in the book. Hardy uses the occasion of the bonfire to depict the heath dwellers as traditional, superstitious, and inclined to accept folk knowledge. They all seem to adhere to the maxim "No moon, no man," which is especially relevant in the case of Christian Cantle. Additionally, they seem to believe in the presence of spirits that only visit "single sleepers," such as Christian. Even Fairway doesn't challenge any of these ideas. Christian Cantle declares that he is a "man of the mourn fullest - making," and that such knowledge and superstition rule his life. He is portrayed by Hardy as a ridiculous character, a repulsive individual whose only flaws and anxieties identify him. He is the embodiment of all the rural or regional people's anxieties. Grander often mentions his military service in 1804 as evidence of his self-described bravery. In his songs and erratic jigs, he frequently mocks old age.

A year and a day have passed since the novel's opening scene. Hardy recognizes the Aristotelian unity of time in this barely avoided the clutches of death; another was ill and a widow, as critics have noted. The heath is still intact and unaltered from when we first arrived.

After Wildeve passes away, Thomasin obtains a significant estate and voluntarily moves in with Clym. Clym spends his time getting ready to become a preacher. Venn, who is now a dairy farmer and is of normal color, calls, and Thomasin is happy to see him. Even though Thomasin doesn't attend the celebrations on Maypole Day, Venn can take one of her servant girl's gloves.

Thomasin runs towards Venn after learning what he has done from the servant. Following this encounter, Venn and Thomasin often cross paths. When Thomasin says she wants to marry Venn, Clym is going to propose to her, believing he must do so to fulfill his mother's desires from when she was still alive. Clym does not stand in the way of Thomasin and Venn's marriage, first objecting due to his mother's memories, then approving. The health people assist Fairway as he stuffs a mattress with feathers as a present for the newlyweds on the day of their wedding. Clym walks away after giving the bride away. He runs into Charlie

and offers him a remembrance of Eustacia's hair. Following the celebration, Clym is left alone in the home at Blooms-End as Venn and Thomasin go for Venn's farm. Soon after, Clym starts practicing his trade as a traveling preacher, first in Rainbarrow.

The addition of this book to Hardy's original plot for the novel has many effects, most of which are fairly obvious. For instance, it lessens the impact of his proof that the cosmos is hostile or at least indifferent to man. Contrary to Eustacia, Clym does not hold God or Destiny responsible for his destiny. Human people have always hesitated to imagine a ruling authority of lesser moral worth than their own, according to Hardy, and even though they sit down and cry by the rivers of Babylon, they make up reasons for the tyranny that is the source of their tears. Eustacia Vye, however, never thinks twice about placing the blame on Destiny since she believes that it has a dubious "moral character."

The first five novels' overall plotline moves in the direction of challenging the universe's governing force. Instead of portraying the cosmos as fundamentally hostile to man as he does in subsequent, Hardy does so in this book. The demise of Wildeve and Eustacia after Book Five logically completes the framework that symbolizes Hardy's work. Clym's intended profession and emotional life have already been defeated. In Book 6, he does indeed transition to becoming an "itinerant open-air preacher," although this scarcely matters in terms of the novel's overall framework. The inclusion of events in the last book extending more than eighteen months destroys the unity of time represented by the year and a day during which the events in the previous five volumes take place. And if, as some critics claim, Hardy also manages the unity of action in the novel (from signal fire to signal fire, as it were), then it is also broken up by the extra volume. Venn, whom Hardy had previously used as "the connection" in the story, is forced to take on a more active role and ends up being married to Thomasin in Book 6. This may be done to provide Thomasin, the kind girl who, at least in the first five volumes, asks for little and receives even less, a happy ending.

Egdon Heath emerges as a living manifestation of nature thanks to Hardy's sensitivity to nature from the very beginning of the book. About this, Stewart Luke notes that the majority of his Hardy books are situated in Dorset in the south of England. He gave the traditional name for it, Wessex, to the whole region of southwest England. Wessex includes Dorset. The Wessex he depicts in *The Return of the Native* is a heathland where the soil is light sand, making it completely worthless for cultivating anything. (5). Egdon Heath, which is unsuitable for cultivation, is the "heathland" described in this passage. People make a living by producing brooms or cutting grass (5). It seems immobile, sluggish, and outdated. However, despite its appearance, the region is alive with snakes, heath croppers, butterflies, ants, and rabbits.

Moving ahead with the same idea, Hardy calls it ‚a near relation of the night', and when night came it showed ‚an apparent tendency to gravitate together in ‚its shades and the scene' (3- 4). In its ‚black fraternization, 'the obscurity in the air mingled with the obscurity in the land.

Hardy tries to personify Egdon Heath and endow it with human thoughts and emotions. He looks upon it as a gigantic figure of a man. When other creatures began to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Continuing in the self-same strain, Hardy writes:

Every night Heath's Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis- the final Overthrow. (4)This sentence alludes to "the strength and the ageless nature of the heath," and it fosters Establishes "a gloomy tone" and "an air of dread or suspense" (62). The heath is given the derogatory names used for men and given the attributes of a serious thinking individual. Haggard Egdon, for instance, "appealed to a deeper and scarcer instinct, to a more freshly learned feeling, than that reacts to the kind of beauty termed appealing" (4). Although the word "haggard" may be used to describe Egdon, it usually refers to someone who seems worn out and dejected. The following Hardy quote strengthens this notion further:

The time seems near if it has not arrived, when the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain, will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind (4-5).

The gloomy feelings of a serious person, like Clym Yeobright, fit with Heath's gloomy feelings, which have a wild beauty to them. It is "permanent, untamed, and dourly independent" (62). Prof. Jayakanta Mishra writes the following in response to Heath's interaction with humans: "Egdon Heath then lives." As he does with his human figures, Hardy initially shows it as an item in the background before showing it in motion. As a result, the forest is initially depicted before gradually coming into view. It does have a massive human existence (39).

The common byproduct of Egdon Heath is Clym. Since he was born and raised here, he has assimilated into the local environment, including its sights, sounds, smells, and physical features like plants, animals, birds, snakes, and croppers. He gives up everything to merge with Heath, including his lucrative diamond company in Paris. To better the lives of those living on the heath, he leaves Paris' high life, status, and fortune behind and returns to his original territory, the heath. He makes it clear that he is a heath and dirt kid.

Varied personalities are given different impressions and emotions by Egdon Heath. Thus, Egdon serves as Eustacia's equivalent of Hades, desolate land of death and devastation. She keeps saying, "It seems like a prison to me." It is my burden, my suffering, and it is the cause of my demise; health is a harsh taskmaster to me. Later, Egdon retaliates by punishing her in the end. She falls into the turbulent torrent and drowns.

Additionally, Wildeve is also made to pay for his hate for Heath. I detest it too, he declares, and God, how lonely it is! As a result, Egdon harms people who despise it while being nice to those who do. Due to this, Clym is spared, but Wildeve is obliterated.

Diggory Venn is also treated kindly and sympathetically by Egdon. One may say that the reddleman Venn embodies the spirit of the heath. In the book, he serves as "the link." He is in love with Thomasin and at battle with Wildeve. As a result of their sympathetic, or at the very least sensible, attitude toward health, Venn and Thomasin are rewarded and their marriage is solemnized in the end. I couldn't be happier anyplace else at all, the woman claims. She, therefore, locates her lover on the heath- the one who had offered to defend her while she was in need.

As a result, via Egdon Heath, nature assumes the role of an active actor, punishing or rewarding people according to how they perceive it. Egdon was present for reciprocity, Hardy says. Its wind buddy and lover

were the storms and the storm. Then weird phantoms moved in, making it their home. (5).

The wind and the storm are two complementary aspects of nature. What about its interaction with humans, though? Hardy responds, "It was at now a location completely accordant with man's nature. It was neither frightful, horrible, nor ugly; neither banal, unmeaning nor tame; but like man, slighted and enduring; yet withal strangely enormous and mysterious in its swarthy monotony." Its lonesome appearance hinted at the sad potential. (5). Egdon is a menacing character of loneliness and solitary by nature. It seems to be both enormous and enigmatic. Its state is healthy, furious, and briary; its result is terrible and disastrous.

Hardy was naturally predisposed to focus on the sad side of life. A renowned Hardy expert named George Woodcock has correctly said that Hardy had grown to adore "the Greek tragic dramatists" (15). The Heath, according to Hardy, remains changeless and inviolate in appearance. Hardy writes:

On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was several varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets<. West Egdon believedin Blooms-End time, East Egdon in the time of Quiet Woman Inn. Granter Cantle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older faiths were shaken. (136).

Here, time advances according to many beliefs and patterns. However, there is no set time for Egdon Heath. Egdon Heath is described as being alive with butterflies, and grasshoppers whose husky voices on every side formed a murmured chorus. The Heath is teeming with snakes, plants, croppers, birds, and grasshoppers in addition to butterflies and grasshoppers.

The trees mentioned in the paper are undoubted "battle crimson, savage, and wild," and the "ferocious weather" has "splintered, lopped, and distorted" their boughs. Some of them are "blasted and split as though by lightning," according to the trees. They seem to have black side stains like those left by a fire. What a lovely and compelling lyrical picture! The ground is covered in piles of cones and dead branches. The paper as a whole paint a drab, lifeless, and depressing image of the setting. We might infer from this image that Nature is not very sympathetic to the traveler, especially on this voyage. We discover later that Mrs. Yeobright leaves the home disillusioned when Eustacia refuses to let her in; she later passes away on the Heath.

Eustacia gathers her possessions and articles as she chooses to leave Clym. She leaves her home in the advancing darkness by her arrangement with Wildeve (a married man, married to Thomasin). Hardy says the following:

The scene without grew darker; mud-colored clouds bellied downwards from the sky like vast hammocks slung across it, and with the increase of night a stormy wind arose; but as yet there was no rain. (369).

Eustacia, therefore, dares to leave her home and go forth in the engulfing darkness despite her fragile mental condition and the fact that all of her hopes of Paris and a prosperous life have been dashed. She is just considering leaping into the turbulent stream to terminate her life at this point. She has companionship from the natural world, such as loneliness and darkness.

Clym Yeobright, Eustacia's spouse, anxiously anticipating her reaction to his letter (which remains in the

possession of its bearer, Fairway, who does not deliver it to her in time). Rain and wind are in tune with Clym's sorrows. Hardy presents the situation as follows:

To Clym's regret, it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house, and filliped the eaves-droppings like peas against the panes. (377).

Rain and wind are therefore working against Clym's expectations and wishes. They seem to suggest that Clym and his wife Eustacia's marriage had reached a breaking point. In actuality, Clym and Eustacia are opposites, and their temperaments and emotional states are incompatible. Because of this, the story veers toward a tragic conclusion. Eustacia and Wildeve lose their lives, but Clym does not. Thomasin becomes Clym's ally at the book's conclusion. He reveals to her his intended future profession as a parish priest.

The Return of the Native is renowned for its in-depth description of that vast rural area known as Egdon Heath (which is an integral part of Wessex). Perhaps nowhere else does Hardy go into such detail about the picturesque setting of the Heath. Except for Chapter I of Book First, Hardy depicts Heath in various scenes throughout the book. Egdon has a powerful and enduring presence. On the heath, which is in a variety of moods, there is always a sense of mortality. It can alternately exhibit wildness, beauty, and impassivity.

There is nothing gloomy, evil, or terrifying about Egdon Heath, according to the humble and kind Thomasin. She is at home on it, just like Clym. At the book's conclusion (Chapter VIII, Book Fifth), she navigates the storm with her infant:

To her, there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but the impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care and possibly catch a cold (383).

Thomas is kind and composed. She understands how lonely Clym feels. Egdon is also helpful and nice to such folks. The gaming scene, Mrs. Yeobright's sweltering stroll over the heath, the meeting of Eustacia and Clym beneath the eclipse of the moon, and Eustacia and Wildeve's drawings at Shadwater Weir are only a few of the Heath's most memorable scenes. Stewart Luke comments on Egdon Heath by saying, "When we think of Egdon, we think of dancing, furze-cutting." The Quiet Woman, regional superstitions, bonfires, time, history, and the mysterious reddleman are just a few of the things that come to mind. (61).

Egdon Heath undoubtedly has a significant influence and dominates The Return of the Native. In Book III, Chapter V, Clym and his mother, Mrs. Yeobright, disagreed about Eustacia. She disapproves of Eustacia as his wife has injured him. Clym decides to leave his mother's home in Book 3, Chapter VI and sets off in quest of a cottage. He passes a fir and beech tree plantation on the route.

Young beaches that had just been wet were being subjected to brutal wounds, including amputations, bruising, cripplings, and lacerations that would leave scars that would be evident until the day of their burning. Each stem was torn at the base, where it wobbled like a bone in its socket. At the start of every gust of wind, the branches made convulsive noises, as if they were in anguish.

Here, the suffering of the trees echoes Clym's suffering. They make Clym's pain worse and make it more dramatic and impactful. The whole account is factually documented, but it also foreshadows Clym's future sorrow as a result of Eustacia's leaving and his mother's agonizing death. Egdon Heath is now being battered by the storm. Because of this, "Those storms that tore the trees gently caressed the furze and heather." Egdon was created for situations like this. (221).

To sum up, we might say that Hardy is a lover of nature and that he created Egdon Heath out of that love. However, due to his disposition, which makes him inclined to perceive the dark and shady side of life, he has painted Egdon in the same gloomy color. One of his four major tragic novels and the first one at that is unquestionably The Return of the Native. Another one of his great books, The Heath, is set amid nature, on the Heath. Hardy captures it in all of its various moods, shapes, and tones, which is a glittering addition to his artistic crown. Due to this, David Cecil refers to him as "a great artist" (111).

Works Cited and Consulted

Albert, Edward. *A History of English Literature.* George G. Harrap., 1958.

Blunden, Edmund. *Thomas Hardy.* St. Martin's, 1942.

Bormetha, Penny. "Introduction*" in Kramer, Dale, The Woodlanders.* Oxford University Press, 2005.

Cecil, David. *Hardy the Novelist: An Essay in Criticism*. Kalyani Publisher, 1975.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native.* Atlantic Publishers, 2013.

---. *The Return of the Native.* Penguin, 1978.

Luke, Stewart. *York Notes on The Return of the Native.* York Press, 1980.

Luke, Stewart. *The Return of The Native*. Longman Group Ltd. 1980.

Luke, Stewart. *York Notes on The Return of the Native.* Longman, York Press, 1980.

Mair, G.H. *Modern English Literature*. Atlantic Publishers, 1998.

Mishra, Jayakanta. *Lectures on Thomas Hardy*. Garg Brothers, 1958.

Matchett, William H. "*The Woodlanders,* or Realism in Sheep's Clothing. *Nineteenth, Century Fiction,* 9 (1955): 241-61.

Millgate, Michael. *Thomas Hardy: A Biography,* Oxford University Press, 1982.

Pinion, F. B. *Thomas Hardy: His Life and Friends.* Palgrave, 1992.

Pite, Ralph. *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life.* Picador, 2006.

Rickett-Compton, Arthur. *A History of English Literature*. Thomas Nelson And Sons Ltd., 1955.

Woodcock, George. ‚Introduction', *The Return of the Native.* Penguin, 1985.