

# The Rhetoric History of Culture and Nature: The Return of the Native

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## ABSTRACT

*The effects of industrialization during the Victorian era on the environment in Britain were huge, leading to numerous criticisms. Despite this, there has been limited research done with an ecocritical approach to the Victorians' interactions with the environment. Further, only a handful of scholars have analyzed Victorian novelists' representations of their time's ecology. This article discusses the relationship between man and nature as represented in Thomas Hardy's novel "The Return of the Native". Analyzing this work helps us understand Victorian ecological and social criticism of the linkage between man and environment, often considered at the time to be psychologically and biologically strange and intriguing. Analyzing the novel's different characters and their qualities and interactions with the environment helps us to understand the link between man and his environment today. This article explains how and why Hardy portrays the place of man in the world using the setting of Egdon Heath.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Land, Ecocriticism, Nature, Writing, Ecosystem, Environmental Rhetoric.

## INTRODUCTION

In the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth century, England experienced a dynamic industrial and agricultural transformation due to technological change. According to Herber Sussman, machines and industrial factories were developed since the eighteenth century, leading to new methods of manufacturing and production (p. 336). Among many literary works with industrial themes, Thomas Hardy's fiction and poetry reflect the human surroundings and environment, signifying his concern about the relationship between man and environment. The major themes in Hardy's novels include coexistence, human-wildlife conflicts, and man's fate (Brown, 1961). Furthermore, in his mental development and early life, Hardy had a meaningless view on religion.

Thomas Hardy's work has been subject to numerous criticism and praise because of his approach to writing. Some critics like Deleuze indicated that the characterization and concepts of Hardy's *The Return of the Native* are not subjects or people, but are a collection of intensive sensations. There is a lot of individualism in Hardy's work with a lack of subjects, which can be seen as de-psychologizing. This implies that Hardy is interested in material objects over people.

The portrayal of Hardy's sensory experience allows one to focus on his interest (Byerly, 1996). Elaine Scary and Thomas Peterson have noticed how the way Hardy shows attention to people works against the development of round and deep characters with vivid lives. The material account of human subjectivity by Hardy belongs to the traditions of the nineteenth century, and is at once scientific and literary. The approach was inconsistent with the metaphysical and theological concepts of rational or spiritual agency (Chew, 1921). The approach found significant support in Darwin's theory of evolution. Hardy asserts some interest in rhetoric which is evident through his work. The effect of this rhetoric is a salutary effect on the practice and theory of composition and basic writing. When talking about rhetoric, most people argue that it is only persuasive discourse: Aristotle's rhetoric is authority. But Deirdre (2001) turns against this and asserts that normal discourse is also rhetoric.

According to William Lyon, the literary works of Hardy create a perception that Hardy stopped having faith in the concept of the mustard seed (502). Hardy focused on the physical world and its relationships with human beings. Their reflections are important because they help us understand the relationship between man and the environment. The relationship between nature and culture has been derived from the relationship between man and the ecosystem. Unlike other contemporary writers who focused on domestic life, gender, and industrialization, Hardy's focus was on the ecosystem and the natural world. Hardy communicates his thoughts through fiction and poetry to express his experience and contemplation of the time in which he lived (Deen, 1960).

This article focuses on Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and his views about the relationship between man and environment. It analyzes scholarship of the fictional Wessex region portraying Egdon Heath as the principal setting and a living character, discussing the concept of ecocriticism. This article helps readers understand how Hardy portrayed man's role in the environment.

## BACKGROUND

Hardy is one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth century because of his perfection of fictionalized commentary. The setting of his fiction and the natural world is Wessex, which represents a rural environment. Hardy depicts Wessex with humor, appreciation, and sympathy, portraying ancient rural culture. The setting enabled Hardy to familiarize the reader with elements such as water and trees that have significant value to everyone in the world. The use of natural settings he was familiar with shows attention to constant communication between individuals and the natural world. Regionalism in Hardy's work also implies that the reader must have a background and understanding of a rural context to fully contextualize Wessex.

According to Alison Byerly (1996), nature is a wilderness and exists in the absence of man, but for Hardy, man and nature are in constant contact. Hardy's perception of man and nature is based on the realities of the rural life; a partly fictionalized yet realistic setting. Hardy focuses on a localized physical environment because the setting is crucial to his message; Hardy is even described as a historian of Wessex. The choice of Wessex in his literary works reflects his main interest in examining the relationship between man and nature, the environment and the community. The choice of setting significantly indicates a socio-ecological approach in Hardy's fiction. Hardy focuses on the mental and physical presence of land and nature. The description of the rustic life provides a living continuity that is a background to the setting and also attached to it.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The industrial revolution led to environmental degradation and significant advancement in technology. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, writers and other commentators were divided on the issue of the impact of the industrial revolution and environmental destruction. Some supported industrialization while others supported environmental conservation. Many literary works emerged during this period, with a principal focus on the interactions between man and the environment. One of the significant authors during this era was Thomas Hardy, who had interest in addressing the importance of the relationship between man and nature (Ferguson, 2012). Hardy's important *The Return of the Native* identifies the role of man towards nature. This article looks into the ways Hardy used this novel to portray the unique relationship and interactions between man and nature. The author addressed the numerous questions about the role of man towards nature and the importance of nature in man's life.

## RESEARCH AIM

The objective of this research is to identify the relationship between man and nature as related in *The Return to Nature* and to surmise the role of man towards nature. Further, it aims to identify the impact of Hardy's novel in addressing the causes of problems in the ecosystem.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The article focuses on answering the following questions: How does *The Return of the Native* illustrate the relationship between man and nature? What is the role of man in the environment as shown by different characters in the novel?

## JUSTIFICATION

This article furthers our understanding of the past and present relationship between man and the environment. It showcases the emergence of human problems that are associated with poor management of the environment. The main source of

man's resources is nature, and therefore, there should be a focus on the preservation of nature (Ingham, 2003).

And yet, man embarks on industrial activities leading to the collapse of the environment. In the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, there was a wave of industrial activity harmful to the environment. During this period, there were limited channels for addressing such problems. Writers played a huge role in educating the masses as well as criticizing the government. Hardy and others used their literary works to highlight challenges facing society. Hardy expressed his thoughts on the challenges arising if man is detached from nature. His novel was significant because it expressed the symbiotic relationship that exists between man and nature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The words ecology, nature, and environment are often used interchangeably because they share similar connotations of the good. The works of Hardy are literary texts that function as acts of environment that can affect a person's role in caring the world. The interactions between characters and environment by Hardy in *The Return of the Native* portrays them as being equal in the novel (Dixon, 2011). In his description of Egdon Heath, Hardy indicates that it was a place perfectly in accordance with man's nature. Hardy's preoccupation with the environment and human relationships in Egdon Heath expresses his ecocritical insight and existence. In Hardy's fiction culture and nature are strongly linked and separating them cannot change the relationship between the power of nature where man's activities take place. Wessex helped Hardy to present his characters as part of the chosen ecology, providing adequate topographic information that helps readers find analogues for this fictional area in their own physical worlds (Erchinger, 2012).

Hardy's and others' representations of man and environment are often explained by ecocriticism theory, mid-Victorian theory and Victorian industrial ecological theory. Hardy is described as a proto ecocriticism author due to his analysis and concern with the man-nature, or culture-nature, relationship. William Rueckert first discussed ecocriticism in 1978, leading to update of ecological concepts in literature studies. Hardy's Egdon Heath depicts the reality of human fate in relation to the environment. *The Return of the Native* illustrates the heath as a wilderness where man works and makes a living. The only industry that Hardy supports in his works is agriculture because of its positive effects on nature (Hutchings, 2007).

One of the basic principles of ecocriticism is interdisciplinary reflection on humanity's responses to nature. Hardy's concerns about the relationship between man and environment tends to be influenced by human issues. According to Jonathan and Christopher, the primary task of ecocriticism is raising consciousness of the contact between individuals and the environment (as cited in Garrand, 2004). Manes and William describe nature as a silent subject that practices shifts and forces from an animistic to symbolic presence. The relationship between man and environment is defined by the existence of all natural elements and life is influenced by this relationship (Benvenuto, 1971).

## METHODOLOGY

The article uses qualitative methods. Data was gathered from a literature survey of books and articles discussing the relationship between man and nature, and perceptions of this relationship. *The Return of the Native* is principally analyzed with other sources based on their suitability to the research topic.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Hardy does not bind the physical world to a single interpretation such as rural, agricultural, natural, or wild in *The Return of the Native* but instead embraces all of them. The vicinity of Egdon Heath is the environment and setting of the novel, and all actions revolve around it, its presence and its power. The environment is as important an element in the novel as the characters. The description of nature as wilderness implies nature is an uncontaminated state and a way of reflecting on the human condition. Yet the wilderness is a place where humans live. Hardy notes with Egdon Heath that civilization was its enemy (Boumelha, 2010).

The beginning of the novel shows some level of separation between the environment and man but later depicts how interconnection can be achieved by humans accepting and challenging the environment. Despite the many changes experienced in human life and the environment, Egdon Heath remains unchanged. The unchanged nature of the heath implies the unchangeable relationship between nature and man (Birch, 1981).

The behavior of the characters is also of significant importance because it enables the readers to echo their qualities, in contrast to nature. Eustacia's believes the heath is an unimportant and dim place as it impedes her marital happiness (Childers, 1981). Significant in the same way is Mrs. Yeobright who becomes a victim of the harsh environment and ends up being bitten by an adder because she cannot walk from heat exhaustion (Berger, 1990). Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia are victims of external forces which imply that the heath is not a place to be acted against.

Other characters adapt to the heath and survive, showing the heath to be perfectly in line with man's nature. For instance, Clym Yeobright is a character that has a good relationship with the heath. Clym leaves Paris, a place that has all that man could dream for, and comes to live at the heath. Clym represents the unchangeable nature of the relationship between man and nature (Bate, 1999). Clym's is blind not to see Eustacia's primitiveness. Thomasin Yeobright and Diggory Venn also adapt to the heath and are neither heroic nor tragic. Venn marries and Thomasin happily brings up a baby. The character Oak also has a very good relationship with nature and can read signals from nature.

## DISCUSSION

In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* characters' visions are unreliable, as they fail to see clearly or misinterpret what they perceive. Egdon Heath "could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen" (Hardy, 1907, p. 1), consequently, unclear vision is characteristic of its inhabitants. Egdon is a place of voyeurism where characters are constantly watching while being watched, never free from the

gaze. Characters try to interpret each other's internal psychology while looking at their external bodies which generates misinterpretations with repercussions.

Consequently, seeing becomes a powerful state where the subject is passive to the watcher's imagination. Characters are delusional, channeling their vision to what they choose to perceive at the cost of generating true visual impressions. Vision provides individuality, with everyone perceiving the world differently. Consequently, the reader does not necessarily receive a "true" portrayal of Egdon and its visual representations. Hardy's novel was written at a time when technological developments such as the camera, and increasing opportunities for travel by steam train, gave people new methods for viewing the world. Flint states there was "expansion of diverse opportunities for differing sorts of spectatorship, [and] a growing concern with the very practice of looking, and with the problematization of that crucial instrument, the human eye" (2000, p. 2). At the time of Hardy's writing, increasing opportunities for interpretation was synonymous with a rise in spectatorship that generated problems of perception and its reliability, and this informed *The Return of the Native*.

The inability to see clearly is most distinguishable in Clym, who incurs blindness from reading in the dark, "acute inflammation, induced by Clym's night studies" (Hardy, 1907, p. 241). Coombs states that "reading is a narrowly focalized mode of perception ... Its concentrated cognitive activity depends on the subject's ability to block out a larger field of stimuli" (2011, p. 3). Clym becomes delusional, his attention narrowly focused on becoming a teacher. He loses contact with his mother, loses sight of the world around him, and forgets the need to earn a respectable living. He becomes intolerant to the light that helps others to see distinctly: "The sun was shining directly upon the window-blind, and at his first glance thitherward a sharp pain obliged him to quickly close his eyelids" (Hardy, 1907, p. 241). Clym becomes so narrowly focused on his ambitions and marriage to Eustacia that he forgets how to see broadly with an open mind-set; the light becomes painful, threatening his narrow focus.

Clym becomes self-absorbed and isolated, like Egdon Heath, "He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odors. He might be said to be its product" (Hardy, 1907, p. 171). The heath becomes visible in Clym's countenance, he embodies it as it projects onto his skin, showing he had learned to feel Egdon by refusing to clearly look at it. Clym's embodiment of the heath is exemplified when he begins working as a furze-cutter, a job which did not require the same narrow focus as reading. Clym's "life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things" (Hardy, 1907, p. 244).

The irony of Clym's punishing blindness and short-sightedness is that his world becomes even smaller, as he is isolated in the natural environment of the heath, only seeing what is immediately in front of him, then blind to anything visible. The metaphorical shrinking as he associates with insects also represents a degradation in society, where his career has been reduced from that of a successful diamond seller to an agricultural laborer. However, Clym's shrinking from society is what he wanted: "In returning to labour in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the chafing of social necessities" (Hardy, 1907, p. 191). While he has become indistinguishable from the heath he has not escaped the gaze. Mrs Yeobright

watches her son cutting furze, as does the narrator, and consequently the reader. The reader sees narration, only perceiving what is presented by the narrator. The reader's vision is obscured, never able to see the full picture. When Clym descends into blindness, so does the reader, who can no longer see what he saw, with images withheld from view.

Clym's blindness also symbolizes castration, a punishment for gazing intently at the female body. The male gaze is an exercise of power that subjectivizes women. Consequently, Clym's blindness prevents him from asserting his masculine power. Before his blindness, Clym viewed her "moon-lit face, and dwelled on every line and curve in it. Only a few hair-breadths make the difference between this face and faces I have seen many times before" (Hardy, 1907, p. 193). Gossin argues that "What Clym should see by reading her face is evidence that the terrain of Eustacia's psyche is composed of the same contradictory elements as that of the lunar surface" (2016, p. 4).

The moon illuminates Egdon Heath's topography with the "Bay of Rainbows, the somber Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams" (Hardy, 1907, p. 191). Clym can discern the unstable emotions that emanate from the terrain, such as happiness, somber, anger and desire, but he fails to interpret the same meaning in Eustacia's physiognomy. He perceives Eustacia's countenance differently than the face of the moon, he does not see these negative emotions as he is distracted by her beauty. The moon's eclipse of the sun symbolizes Eustacia's beauty masking her emotions, and Clym is distracted by this mask, therefore his vision warped. He fails to recognize the threat Eustacia's feminine sexuality poses to his masculinity. He also ignores the signs that their marriage will be destructive to his relationship with his mother. Clym was described with "an inner strenuousness was preying upon an outer symmetry" (Hardy, 1907, p. 135). While he is thoughtful, his outlook is misdirected, thinking too pensively, such that he ignores the broader picture. Hardy presents the female body as something that should be studied closely and regarded cautiously, which Clym fails to do. Clym regards Eustacia with the same narrow mind as reading, he forgets to observe the warning signs surrounding her beauty. The face comes to portray an inner psychology where Clym's internal struggles are "preying" on his body, threatening his eyesight, and reflecting on his exterior.

Clym's inability to see clearly means he must perceive his surroundings auditorily and using his imagination: "his ear became at last so accustomed to these slight noises from the other part of the house that he could almost witness the scenes they signified" (Hardy, 1907, p. 367). This generates many problems with spectatorship, as it suggests vision does not require the use of the human eye. Clym's blindness stimulates his imagination, and he begins to construct his own world and is driven to solitude.

The 1895 novel *Jude the Obscure* by Hardy (2008) similarly walks the same road of meandering relationships, love, marriage, and divorce. They depict romantic entanglements in which issues of marriage, divorce, love, and pretense are all present. The hero Jude is portrayed as a fervent dreamer who aspires to study at the prestigious University of Christminster. However, before he can pursue this dream, he is lured into marriage by the seductive and opportunistic Arabella Donn. This marriage seems to be built on false love as Arabella would later claim false pregnancy. Their marriage is short and Jude decides to pursue his old dream and

move to Christminster, where he meets and falls in love with Sue Bridehead, after first being denied entry to the university. In a further twist, Jude and Sue do not end up together even though they love each other. Sue opts to marry Richard Phillotson but this marriage fails and they get a divorce. Even then Sue does not marry Jude, even though they are both divorcees, because of her rebelliousness. However, they indulge in an illicit affair in which they bear two children. Sue then remarries Richard. Jude's eldest child hangs himself together with his two siblings. Jude dies after trying to make up with Sue, leaving Arabella in search of new romance. This novel is one of fluctuating romance, unstable marriages, and divorce as the truth faces formidable challenges.

On the other hand, in *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia keeps dating Wildeve though they are both married. Wildeve cannot pursue Eustacia even though she is his downfall, as he says: "the curse of inflammability is upon me, and I must live under it, and take any snub from a woman. It has brought me down from engineering to innkeeping: what lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn" (Hardy, 1907, p. 62). On the one hand, Eustacia is in her relationship with the knowledge that it is not built on true love. She keeps pretending, even though it means nothing to her. The reason for this is the fact that she has eyes on Clym, the diamond dealer, when she hears that she will be coming from Paris. Even though her reasons are in line with her pursuit of vainglory, she ends up falling in love with him even before they meet. She fantasizes about marrying him and persuading him to go with her back to Paris. When she realizes that Clym returned because he was tired of city life, her dreams are shattered. She then plans to get back with Wildeve, who is now engaged to Thomasin. This forces them to carry on their love affair in secret, leading to the death of Wildeve. Quarrels between Eustacia and her husband make Wildeve offer to elope with her to Paris, but both drown on the way. The entanglements of love in these novels are both the strength and the downfall of the protagonists.

Clym's myopia leads him to become a preacher, "others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else" (Hardy, 1907, p. 390). Ironically, Clym teaches morality – which he failed to achieve in his own life – failing to see the bigger picture. Clym "could be seen from all adjacent points as soon as he arrived at his post" (Hardy, 1907, p. 389). Clym gains access to wider vision as he delivers the message of a being that transcends the isolation of Egdon Heath, providing him a purpose.

Preaching is liberating, but still subjects him to the gaze of others. Working in the heath affected his health: "His eyesight, by long humoring in his native air, had grown stronger, but not sufficiently strong to warrant his attempting his extensive educational project" (Hardy, 1907, p. 385). While weakened by his sight, Clym now finds internal strength, as preaching shows him that people are metaphorically small compared to God. Similarly, Eustacia does not require eyesight to generate images, "overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon" (Hardy, 1907, p. 108). Eustacia is attracted to the unknown and the unseen, as she imagines images that do not exist. Consequently, Eustacia's vision and outlook on life become unreliable.

Eustacia patrols the hills, seeking a physical and metaphorical viewpoint, and subsequent power. She commands the highest position on the terrain, "Above the

figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe" (Hardy, 1907, p. 17). Eustacia goes for her walks in the darkness with no discernible features. She is closely associated with the darkness and it becomes a physical representation of her "depression of spirits" (Hardy, 1907, p. 71). By seeking to recognize the world in the dark, Eustacia does not want to see clearly at all, but would rather perceive the world through her imagination. The narrator positions the reader below Eustacia, where we are not only looking at her, but she looks down upon the reader, emphasizing the complexity of the gaze, but also generating further problems of perception, because again Eustacia appears to regard something that does not exist in the realm of Egdon Heath.

Eustacia has a desire to escape Egdon Heath, and view the unseen, which in this case is notably Paris. When Clym returns from Paris, the wider world, Eustacia views him as her escape: "A young and clever man was coming into that lonely heath from, of all contrasting places in the world, Paris. It was like a man coming from heaven" (Hardy, 1907, p. 108). Eustacia does not have an image of Paris, so she compares it to heaven, which is also concealed and unobtainable. Heaven is the desirable place of rest for Christian souls; therefore, Eustacia suggests Paris would provide her eternal happiness. Defined as "the centre and vortex of the fashionable world" (Hardy, 1907, p. 109). Eustacia believes Paris would provide her a sociable life free from the isolation of the heath.

Despite the fact that Egdon Heath "could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen" (Hardy, 1907, p. 1), Eustacia fails to see any of its substance, or emerge herself within its offerings, which Clym can do as a furze-cutter. Eustacia fails to engage with the heath because of her constant desire to leave. In moments of recurring pathetic fallacy, Eustacia projects her depression onto the heath, where there were "to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough" (Hardy, 1907, p. 1). Coombs suggests, "The intrinsic meanings of Egdon are incomprehensible to Eustacia because she perceives the heath as echoing her own feelings" (2011, p. 960). Eustacia is self-obsessed and unable to see clearly; she chooses fantasy over true perception.

Eustacia distances herself from others, entering their worlds as an outsider, "raising (the telescope) to her eye (she) directed it towards the light beaming from the inn" (Hardy, 1907, p. 54). She looks from darkness towards light, signifying her hope to leave Egdon Heath. Gossin suggests the telescope represents "her desire to transcend the immediate space around her, if only in the abstract, as far as her field of vision will allow her to imagine" (2016, p. 147). The telescope zooms in, focusing on details rather than the whole picture. Eustacia uses the telescope to ignore the reality of the whole image and focus her interest on the details which interest her. The use of the telescope suggests Eustacia's own eye fails her desire to see, linking to Eustacia's need to imagine things which are not there. Eustacia's telescope allows the viewing of the invisible, using the telescope allows her to enter her own fantasy where she crafts her own vision.

Like Clym, Eustacia's inability to see clearly is problematic, eventually driving her to suicide. Eustacia's suicide symbolizes her inability to live and carry on seeing in the real world which psychologically destroys her. Eustacia's death allows her to escape into permanent fantasy where she finds peace, "The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an

artistically happy background" (Hardy, 1907, p. 361). For Hardy, the world is metaphorically a painting, where Eustacia in the foreground never fitted in with the background setting of the heath, emphasizing her need to escape. However, Eustacia's corpse is gazed upon by Clym, Venn and Charley, so she never escapes the male gaze. Malton suggests "Eustacia finally renders herself an erotic spectacle entirely submissive to ocular penetration and, thus, to social control" (Malton, 2000). While Eustacia's soul escapes Egdon Heath, her body will remain there indefinitely, regarded by men who can assert masculinity over her now wholly passive body.

Like Eustacia, Mrs Yeobright is isolated by the heath, generating problems in her perception, "She had a singular insight into life considering that she had never mixed with it" (Hardy, 1907, p. 186). Mrs Yeobright is certain in her understanding, often resulting in prejudice: she judges Eustacia unfit as Clym's wife without knowing her, "I have no proofs against her, unfortunately. But if she makes you a good wife there has never been a bad one" (Hardy, 1907, p. 199). Mrs Yeobright's vision is compared to looking at a painting, "Communities were seen by her as from a distance: she saw them as we see the throngs which cover the canvases of Sallaert, Van Asloot" (Hardy, 1907, p. 186). These artists produced landscapes or paintings where the subjects' features were not distinguishable, showing Mrs Yeobright has an overall picture at the expense of detail. While she has an outlook on the world, she does not understand it. Consequently, her vision becomes unreliable like art: the artist or Mrs Yeobright depicts what she wants to see, leading to possible misrepresentation. Cohen states "Paintings do not look back, do not see themselves being seen" (2006). Mrs Yeobright's optical subjects become passive like a painting, they are subjected to a view which they are unable to contradict. Consequently, the viewer's outlook becomes powerful, yet often inaccurate.

Mrs Yeobright leaves Clym's house distressed and enters the natural world, where she attempts to understand people despite their absence, "a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare [...] To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower" (Hardy, 1907, p. 278). Mrs Yeobright is presented in a position of power as she realizes people are small in the world. Hardy alludes to Darwin's recently written *On the Origin of Species* which generated a new outlook on life, with humans denoted from a central position becoming just like ants in a process of natural selection.

In conclusion, Hardy presents issues with vision, as characters use alternative senses and their imagination to replace the physical act of seeing. Clym's myopia reduces his physical vision to match his psychological short-sightedness; however, he learns to perceive his surroundings through sound and memory. Similarly, Eustacia can construct images of things she has never seen, such as Paris. These examples denote the use of the human eye at a time when technological developments provided alternative methods for viewing the world, like photographs. It also suggests the eye is insufficient to provide total and complete vision. Vision provides power, but subjectivity results in misinterpretation, as seen through the character of Mrs Yeobright. Vision becomes unreliable as images are generated that do not truly exist. Consequently, Hardy uses vision to blur the lines between reality and fantasy, with the reader left questioning what they perceive, through the act of reading.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Return to Nature*, the Wessex region and Egdon Heath are used by Hardy to study human nature in an environment indifferent to the actions of humans. In the novel, the author does not separate the environment and man, highlighting the interaction and linkage of man and nature. The heath is a steady and organic place that controls the characters. It is the unsympathetic and unchangeable place of man, and the characters interact differently with the heath. Some characters accept the reality of the heath and achieve a good life with it, while others struggle to live on it. Character's destinies are influenced by their interactions and response to the heath. The attachment between man and the natural world is best shown through the character Clym who represents a combination of modern and primitive life that enhances the bond between nature and man. The attempt of man to escape from nature is dangerous and brings severe consequences. The only escape from the heath is through death, which also reinforces its symbolic role in man's interconnectedness.

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