

Understanding Nature and Humanity: An Ecocritical Study of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the relationship between humans, Nature, and humanity and establish a harmonious coexistence, particularly in the wake of industrialization. This article aims to analyze Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Return of the Native*, from an ecocritical perspective and shed light on Thomas Hardy's ecological consciousness as reflected through the novel's various characters, settings, and plot. The primary objective of this study is to assess how the novel's characters respond to and engage with environmental concerns. Another aim is to trace the evolution of the concern for Nature and humanity, from the Victorian era to the Present, among writers, artists, and intellectuals. The third and final objective is to underscore the significance of reconnecting with Nature, as depicted in the novel.

Methodology: This study has used the theory of ecocriticism, a relatively recent theoretical framework. It investigates the intersection of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, exploring potential solutions for our contemporary environmental predicaments. It constitutes a qualitative research endeavor predominantly employing ecocritical theory to investigate the relationship between the novel's characters and the natural world.

Findings: The study concludes that interconnection between humans, humanity, and the natural world is needed to avoid the consequences of environmental degradation, which is being tolerated by humankind. This paper proposes several recommendations to ameliorate contemporary environmental challenges that hold value for researchers, environmentalists, and all stakeholders committed to environmental conservation.

Keywords: *Ecocriticism; Ecological Awareness; Industrialization; Thomas Hardy; The Return of the Native.*

1 Introduction

England transitioned from an agrarian and handicraft economy to machine manufacturing throughout the middle to late nineteenth century. This industrialization has been criticized by many social activists, authors, and critics and has greatly impacted society, the country, and its people. On September 22, 1995, the Washington Post published a manifesto that said,

"The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life expectancy of those of us who live in "advanced" countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and damage the natural world. It will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in "advanced" countries. (Kaczynski, 2023)

The changes due to industrialization are reflected in the writings of the authors. One of the objectives of literature is to define the inextricable connection between human beings and their natural surroundings. Sophie Austin says rightly in her "The Importance of Literature in Modern Society," 'Literature acts as a form of expression for each author. Some books mirror society and allow us to better understand our world.' (Hoggart, 1996). Similarly, Thomas Hardy, the Victorian author and a conscious individual, recorded his frustration with the changed world in his novels and poems. Unlike other Victorian authors who portrayed the creeping of industrialization into the social niche and gradually disintegrated society, Thomas Hardy made a connection between human beings and the physical world further to explore the relationship between nature and homo sapiens.

"Among many industrial themes and works of art, Thomas Hardy's poetry and fiction reflect the environment and the Nature surrounding human beings, signifying his concern about human place and the relationship between man and land. The concepts of human-nature conflicts, coexistence, and man's fate are major themes in Hardy's works." (Mohammed, 2017).

At Present, the environment has posed a serious threat to both human society and the environment as a whole during the past few decades. The changes from agrarian to machinery have caused much suffering to human life. Humanity is compromised under the name of 'development'. According to the United Nations, generating power, manufacturing goods, cutting down forests, using transportation, and powering buildings. Are the causes of changes in climate and Nature which have severe consequences on human life, i.e., drought, health risks, food crisis, loss of species, as well as impact on human psychology (United Nations).

Moreover, there comes the necessity of Eco-criticism, which is a relatively new theory that studies "literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation" (Mambrol, 2016). From the ecological perspective, Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is still relevant in today's world to understand the ecological disaster that has been going on for a long time and thus reminds us to be aware of our needful. This paper represents the relationship between Nature, humanity, and the individual being interwoven through the landscape of different characters, settings, plots, and themes of the novel. *The Return of the Natives* makes us aware of the environment and realize our responsibilities, as our behavior towards Nature has consequences that affect the world in turn. Thus, human awareness about the physical ambiance around each individual can create a new perspective on ecology for far better sustainability.

2 Literature Review

Dr. Mohamed Adel Mahmoud attempts to demonstrate how Nature functions as a mysterious force to impact the characters and the setting in the study "Nature as a mysterious Force in the novel *The Return of the Native*. He tries to understand the people, setting, and personalities to show how they are connected. Additionally, he wants to suggest that Nature ultimately replaces God and treats people as they ought to be treated.

The article "An Ecological Interpretation of *The Return of the Native* by Zheng Dongxia attempts to interpret the novel from an ecocritical perspective. According to Hardy, the ecological system values both humans and Nature equally. Additionally, he tries to show how a person's alienation from Nature leads to limited interaction with it. The study also demonstrates the novel's significant ecological theme, which maintains that people should respect and coexist peacefully with Nature.

In "An Ecocritical Reading of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*," Himan Heidari aims to analyze Hardy's novel from the perspective of ecocriticism and study where Hardy's ecological consciousness originates from and how it is represented and interwoven in the characters, setting, and plot of the novel. It also focuses on the characters to tell us about today's ecological crises.

S. Meenakshi discusses the inner consciousness of men and women in "Thomas Hardy as an Interpreter of Nature." The essay portrays Thomas Hardy as a naturalist who writes straight-forward and in primeval settings. It also reveals that Hardy may need to be more open when dealing with the more nuanced personalities of highly civilized men and women.

In his essay "Culture and Nature: Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*," Saman Ali Mohammed explores the Victorian view of how people interact with their surroundings. The study demonstrates how Hardy, for example, expressed his ecological awareness by simply depicting any harmony or discord between man and his environment. One also comprehends the location and significance of Egdon through the scholarships about the made-up county of Wessex in Hardy's fiction. This essay examines how and why Hardy represents the genuine position of man in Nature, with a particular emphasis on Egdon Heath, and the significance of this portrayal in everyday life. Saman Ali Mohammed's other essay, "The Representation of Nature and Man in Thomas Hardy's Selected Works", aims to identify the themes of land, writing, man, and Nature in Thomas Hardy's chosen literary works. The study demonstrates how someone like Hardy expressed his awareness of Nature by depicting any harmony or discord between man and his surroundings.

Sandip Kumar Mishra examines the ecocritical ideas as envisioned in some chosen works of international literature and English-language writing from India in "Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature." This literary analysis that emphasizes the environment helps readers develop ecological literacy and eco-consciousness, which helps them take excellent care of Mother Nature.

Unlike other papers, our paper investigates how humanity, humans, and Nature are interconnected. The paper examines the settings, characters' impulses, and a few incidents of the novel and explores the humanity in the characters. There is a nexus between the characters and Nature to exhibit the harmony and conflict of how humanity is entangled with the nurturing of Nature. This investigation is necessary to realize that Nature and humanity are interlinked and should support each other.

Research Gap:

Ecocriticism is a relatively new field of literature and ecology "from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature" (Environmental Humanities Initiative). Thus, very little research has been conducted on *The Return of the Native* from an ecological perspective. There is hardly any paper in this novel that makes a connection between Nature, humanity, and humans using ecocritical theory. Moreover, there comes the necessity

to investigate how Nature, humans, and humanity are associated and presented from an ecocritical perspective in *The Return of the Native*.

3 Research Methodology

This is qualitative research that has used 'ecocritical theory' to evaluate Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Return of the Native*. Next, Marxist theory is applied to correlate capitalism with industrialization and to show how materialistic development ruins the real development of Nature and affects humanity. Also, different secondary data from various sources is used to interpret and investigate the text.

4 Objective and Research Questions

The research objective of this study is to analyze the impact of environmental degradation and the destruction of Nature on humans and humanity as portrayed in the novel, elucidating the interconnectedness between ecological harm and its effects on human experiences, behaviors, and societal dynamics. To achieve this objective, the present study is guided by the following research question:

- How is the interplay between humans and Nature reflected in the novel from an ecological perspective?
- How are humans and humanity affected by the destruction of Nature as reflected in the novel?

5 Analysis

5.1 Interplay between Man and Nature

Man and Nature have a close connectedness. Nature has the power 'to produce delight' (Emerson, 4) and sadness. Though Nature is always compared with 'god' and spirituality, in *The Return of the Native*, Egdon Heath is represented as a human being. She plays the role of a protagonist and, simultaneously, as an antagonist, depending on how the characters live upon her. She has a great influence on almost all the characters in the novel. Thomas Hardy was conscious while portraying Egdon Heath and put her in a strong position to strengthen her relationship with humans and humanity. Thomas Hardy describes Heath and her strength by saying, "The storm was its lover, and the wind was its friend." (Hardy, 1878, p.1). She is represented as the most primeval state of Mother Nature, as Thomas Hardy portrays:

"Ever since the beginning of vegetation, its soil had won the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation." (Hardy, 1878, p.5)

The Heath has her moods and characteristics, pretty much like a human being: "It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly nor hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, insignificant, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring." (Hardy, 1836, p.5). She is kind towards good people who are kind to her, and she is harsh to people who do not care about her and thus is associated with different shades of humanity. The word 'humanity' refers to the characteristic 'that makes us human, such as the ability to love, have compassion, be creative and not be a robot or alien.' (Ben-Nun, 2021, p.1). Humanity sees its terrible side in *The Return of the Native* when Eustacia, being disappointed with Clym Yeobright, does not let her mother-in-law enter their house out of fear of being caught for her adultery. Devasted, Mrs. Yeobright heads towards home: "Her eyes were fixed on the ground; within her two sights were graven—that of Clym's hook and brambles at the door, and that of a woman's face at a window. Her lips trembled becoming unnaturally thin, as she murmured, "'Tis too much—Clym, how can he bear to do it! He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me!" (Hardy, 1878, p. 288) That old lady died of shock on her way back home.

The Return of the Native conveys a deeper understanding of the nature-human relationship through the portrayal of the characters. On one side, we see the sons and daughters of Nature, i.e., Clym Yeobright, Diggory Venn, Thomasin Yeobright. on the other side, we have the products of industrialization, i.e., Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildev. Thomas Hardy, being conscious, realized how human beings are violating 'Mother Nature' and heading towards killing humanity. So he created the characters of Clym Yeobright, Diggory Venn, and Thomasin Yeobright, who represent simplicity and connectedness with Nature. Moreover, he also realized humanity was compromised under the name of 'ambition' and 'development,' so he created the characters of Eustacia and Wildev to represent the bitter side of industrialization.

In the Victorian age of industrialization, the revolution sped up the population's move from the countryside to the city. 80 percent of the populace in 1900 resided in urban areas. These cities were "organized" geographically based on social class, with the fortunate residing near the city center and the poor living in the inner city.

"In an age of burgeoning technology and industry, the common working man suffered what to the modern reader would seem brutal, degrading, and almost unimaginable conditions with patient resignation and the sense that survival is its end. Industrial workers labored daily from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. without health benefits, bonuses, or vacations. Adult factory workers were forced to leave their children with little to no supervision in drafty homes with inadequate septic systems, no running water, toilets, and little ventilation. Half of all children died before the age of five due to neglect and malnourishment. By 1839, nearly half of all funerals were for children under ten."

(Scott,2018)

Now, it is easily understandable why the novel's protagonist returned from city life and dedicatedly wanted to be a furze cutter. Industrialization sews the pompous city life in the eyes of Eustacia; that same industrialization brought Clym back to Nature, who had already experienced city life by himself. In terms of humanity, it is the human being or the characters of the novel and their thought process that makes the heath god or evil towards them, and Egdon Heath determines the fate of the characters who live on her. For example, Heath caused the dilapidation of Eustacia, who never wanted to stay in Egdon Heath and always wanted to escape from her. Even Mrs. Yeobright dies by being bitten by the poisonous snake, as she was not happy with her son's decision to stay back in the Heath and live the simple life of a farmer. Wildeve was also punished due to his multifaceted and unruly way of living. On the other hand, Clym Yeobright, Thomasin, and Diggory Venn found their destiny and happiness on that same Heath. Thomas Hardy focused on living a simple life that collaborates with Nature, which brings happiness, and thus rejected the pretensions of city life and capitalist society.

As a nature writer, Thomas Hardy very well depicted the relationship between Nature and humanity. As Woolf puts it, Hardy is an "observer" who feels sympathy with Nature and sees it as a "force" he is ecologically conscious and aware of the environment and shows concern for Nature-

"He already proves himself a minute and skilled observer of Nature; the rain, he knows, falls differently as it falls upon roots or arable; he knows that the wind sounds differently as it passes through the branches of different trees. But he is aware in a larger sense of Nature as a force; he feels in it a spirit that can sympathize or mock or remain the indifferent spectator of human fortunes" (Woolf, 1953, p. 246)

So, Hardy created the character of Clym Yeobright, who is compassionate towards Mother Nature and represents humanity and bridges between Nature and humans. Clym, from a merchant, dramatically shifts his ambition to be a school teacher from that of a merchant. He does not feel uncomfortable being a mere furze cutter with Humphrey, representing his symbiotic relationship with Nature. He talks about his business in Paris with disgust: "I hate the flashy business. Talk about men who deserve the name. Can any man deserving the name waste his time in that effeminate way ... I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain." (Hardy, 1878, p.175).

On the other hand, Eustacia is the product of industrialization and capitalism. Being constantly in a sense of superiority, Eustacia despises Heath's fellow creatures and is constantly cut off from the Heath people; she is never seen to be helpful to anybody. The subtle beauties of the Heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapors. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine" (Hardy, 1878, p. 76). Though she hates Egdon Heath, Eustacia usually preys on others by taking advantage of their love weakness: "She uses Johnny to tend her bonfire, which is a lover's signal to Wildeve; she is not above trading on her physical charms and using Charley to gain a role in the mummers' play in order to catch a glimpse of Clym; she sees Clym not so much as a human being but as a key to unlock the glittering world of Paris; and although her pride is deeply mortified, she agrees to use Wildeve's services in fleeing from Egdon when her marriage finally breaks down" (Dutta, 2000, p. 44).

Industrialization and capitalism exploit the working-class people like Eustacia does in *The Return of the Natives*. It is accepted that Victorian industrialization is the consequence of capitalism and greatly impacts humans' life - "It brought about thorough and lasting transformations, not just in business and economics but in the basic structures of society" (Foster, 2003). In a capitalist society, owners are typically wealthy, increasing their money when invested (Wray, 2009). As the owners do not share their profits with the workers, the economic condition of the working-class people does not change. However, it develops a desire in working-class people to live a wealthy life. The middle-class and lower-middle-class people develop a fascination for the pompous city life, as Eustacia does in the novel. Her desire to live a showy life in the city complicated the novel's plot, especially when she married to escape to Paris and her husband, who came back from Paris, did not want to go back. So, when these two characters, Clym and Eustacia, come together, readers can easily compare materialistic desire with Nature's simplicity. Eustacia had everything in Egdon Heath, but her love toward Clym Yeobright stands on some materialistic value, like living in Paris, as she says: "To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me, but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all." (Hardy, 1878, p. 201)

The attitude of the characters in Hardy's book can be used to classify them. The descendants of Egdon are Clym, Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin, and Venn, who recognize her. For instance, Thomasin, although financially secure after her husband passes away, does not want to leave her hometown and is healed gradually after her husband's death rather than leaving Heath with resentment towards it. The gradual passing of the seasons heals her progressively, and Venn is frequently shown to be so comfortable in Egdon that he can run across her at full speed throughout the night without losing his balance. 'Humanity' is also shown through the character Venn, especially when he accepts Thomasin's child as his own and remains persistent in his love for Thomasin. Clym's longing for Heath closes his eyes to compassion for Nature, and even at the end of the novel, he survives the catastrophe that engulfs Eustacia and Wildeve because Nature embraces him for the love he has for it. Eustacia and Wildeve, on the other hand, see Heath as a place to flee with all their purposeful speed. It is ironic and fitting that both of them pass away in a stream close to Shadwater Weir.

5.2 An Ecocritical Study of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

The history of ecocriticism is short. As a theory, it began in the 1990s. However, 'from ancient times to the present, various people have voiced concerns about the natural world at various times and for various reasons.' (Estok, 2014). Ecocriticism is ethical and committed to connecting literature and the natural world. It believes that the natural environment is significant rather than just being a subject of thematic study. In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty gives an easy and simple definition of ecocriticism:

"What, then is ecocriticism? Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies." (Glotfelty, 2009, p.XVIII)

Though there is no established date for the birth of ecocriticism, the term 'ecocriticism' was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978 and defined as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty, 2009, p. xxviii). The contemporary ecology movement's emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s parallels ecocriticism's development as a literary theory field. Particularly emerging from American literature, ecocriticism has long been regarded as an important subfield of literary analysis. The second half of the 20th century saw a growth in environmental consciousness due to the obvious and rapid environmental changes occurring throughout the globe. Environmental catastrophes like species extinction, ozone depletion, and deforestation began to be seen as legitimate worries for humanity and gave rise to the environmental movement. "The environmentalism movement made its presence known through various mediums to provoke general societal, specifically political, concern for environmental issues. As new environmental considerations developed in other domains, so did they emerge in literary criticism, resulting in the birth of ecocriticism." (Garner, 1995) Ecocriticism not only talks about theory, but it also takes a stand to save Nature to save humanity:

"Regardless of what name it goes by, most ecocritical works share a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. We are there. Either we change our ways, or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to the apocalypse." (Glotfelty, p.xx)

Studying how individuals in society behave and respond to the environment and ecological issues is one of ecocriticism's key objectives. "This form of criticism has gained much attention during recent years due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies." (Mambrol, 2018). Ecocriticism is a deliberately inclusive approach sometimes referred to as "green (cultural) studies," "ecopoetics," and "environmental literary criticism."

Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is a novel that portrays the author's concern about returning to Nature. Egdon Heath, the fictitious landscape, represents the power of Nature and how human beings are affected by their actions toward Nature. This novel portrays the beauty of rural Nature and laments the ignorance of the exquisiteness of Nature. Egdon Heath, having her own emotions and moods, strengthens her relationship with human beings and serves the purpose of saving humanity. Thus, *The Return of the Natives* becomes one of the greatest novels to be interpreted and analyzed through ecocritical theory.

Cheryl Glotfelty proclaimed a decade ago in her essay "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," "All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism considers the interconnectedness between Nature and culture" (Glotfelty, 2009, p. xix). *The Return of the Native's* ecocritical reading means interpreting the relationship between man and Nature. It also reads the human perception of Nature and projects humanity as the basic nature of human culture. M. John Britto, in his paper *An Ecocritical Reading of William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"* (Britto, 2012), showed that human beings feel superior and egotistic among all species. Being superior, he does not care about preserving Nature and other species of the world. In the modern world, we suffer from different environmental issues, including climate change, air pollution, ecological collapse of the ocean, and scarcity of fresh water. A movement to preserve Nature is necessary when the advancement of industrial machinery changes the world's atmosphere, especially when humans are claimed to be superior to other species worldwide.

So, the authors, out of their responsibility, write about preserving Nature to show their concern about the world; through their writing, the readers also get concerned about their surroundings. In *The Return of the Natives*, Thomas Hardy created a fictitious Egdon Heath, an imaginary preindustrial agrarian place that represents 'Mother Nature.' The novel's settings, plot, and characters revolve around Egdon Heath. By creating Egdon Heath, Hardy takes shelter in the bosom of Nature and rural countries and disapproves and criticizes the industrial society that dreadfully changed the face of Nature. "Hardy's interest in going back to nature, as the novel title suggests, is a reaction to the industrial revolution in favor of nature that reflects his ecological consciousness" (Heidari, 2016, p. 64).

Thomas Hardy consciously created two groups of characters: one can be categorized as the sons of Nature, and the other is the product of industrialization. Clym Yeobright, a well-off merchant, returned to his native place and was thinking about settling down in that small rural place. Again, his cousin Thomasin Yeobright does have

lowes for Heath but to marry someone loyal. Though she had to go through a lot of hurdles in her life, she was patient and never left the small country. She said, "I like what I was born near to; I admire its grim face." (Hardy, 1878, p. 316). For Thomasin, the Heath is a great place to walk in the wild, where the green grass is still a paradise for her children. After the death of her husband, Nature healed the wounds of her heart: "Spring came and calmed her; the summer came and soothed her; the autumn arrived, and she began to be comforted." (Hardy, 1878, p. 348) As "the most natural native of the heath" (Hardy, 1878, p. 40), Thomasin is close to Nature, and Nature brings her comfort and happiness. At the novel's end, Thomasin settles with the best man on Heath, Diggory Venn, who, though not good-looking, truly represents the essence of mother nature and plays the novel's conscience. He is always there by the side of the vulnerable and weak, and whoever needs help, he "limits and controls the action as much the same way as the heath itself does." (Hardy, 1878, p.50)

The harmonious man-nature relationship is reflected in the sons of Nature in *The Return of the Native*, as they have established intimate and inseparable connections with the Heath. They inherit the fine traditional virtues of the ancestors of the Heath: diligence, loyalty, benevolence, simplicity, and endurance. Their life forms are in harmony with the living of the wilderness, showing a primitive natural character. By depicting the son and daughter of Nature, Hardy conveys his appreciation for the natural virtues that human beings should have, reflecting the ecological thoughts of advocating Nature and returning to Nature.

On the other hand, Eustacia, the product of industrialization, wants to consume Clym Yeobright to escape Heath. When she learns about Clym's desire to settle in Heath, she initially does not believe him. Guided by a materialistic life, it took much work for her to understand the simple way of life. She married a merchandiser, and she dreamed of leaving the countryside and settling in some other city. However, when she understands that Clym will stay at Heath as a school teacher, she becomes a sad woman who loses the meaning of her life.

"It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure, and the proud fair woman bowed her head and wept in sick despair at the thought of the blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him." (Hardy, 1878, p.199)

Eustacia does not even think twice about being disloyal to her ex-lover Wildeve and gets convinced to leave Egdon Heath with him, who has recently won a fortune. Wildeve and Mrs. Thomasin Yeobright fall into the same category. Appearance and status are significant for Mrs. Yeobright, as she could not accept her son being merely a furze cutter or school teacher; when he heard about Clym's life plan, she said, "After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym." Mrs Yeobright spoke calmly, but the force of feeling behind the words was but too apparent to one who knew her as well as her son did" (Hardy, 1878, p. 128). She has traditional beliefs and considers a man's material achievement a sign of his value in life. And so she had a tragic death on Egdon Heath that brings pity to the mind of the reader. Last but not least, Thomas Hardy has portrayed the character of Damon Wildeve, who can fall into the materialistic category. Wildeve is a hedonist who finds happiness in the company of a woman. He is not loyal to his wife and needs clarification about what he wants from his life. When Eustacia asks if he loves her, he replies, "I do, and I do not, said he mischievously. That is, I have my times and my seasons. One moment you are too tall, another moment you are too do-nothing, another too melancholy, another too dark, another I don't know what, except- that you are not the whole world to me that you used to be, my dear" (Hardy, 1878, p.282). There are similarities between Eustacia and Wildeve: both are unaware of their actions' consequences. Moreover, both of them face a tragic death at the novel's end.

5.3 The Relationship between Humanity and Nature in *The Return of the Native*

The current glorification of capitalism is distorting the perception of reality. Capitalism focuses on industrialization and the economic development of the country. In the process of this financial development, humanity suffers. Capitalism is supposed to develop the life of every human being. However, sadly, under the shade of capitalism, the rich become richer, and the poor become poorer; thus, it does not serve the purpose of humanity. Skolimowski, in his essay, said, "The present hosanna of capitalism is distorting our picture of reality ...In a society that is so successful and so affluent, there should be no aggression and violence. Alas, structural violence is now a part of our daily life. It is not limited to poor countries (according to the precept, poverty breeds violence) but is hugely evident in rich countries. The time has arrived to see with more clarity the whole picture and especially to see that how we bring about our prosperity is steeped in violence and is a carrier of violence. To put it bluntly, Western modes of economic development are not benign scientific models but hidden vehicles of violence." (Skolimowski, 1997, m p.1) The killing at Christ Church in New Zealand on March 15, 2019, also proves that violence and aggression exist even in developed countries. So, the idea of a successful, developed society is vague, and so-called success and money cannot bring peace to a society. It is peaceful coexistence with Nature, empathy, sympathy, and love that serve the true purpose of living a human life.

Chris Waugh, in his essay "Is capitalism causing climate change?" asked if capitalism is responsible for destroying Nature, and he answers his questions in affirmation by saying, "Capitalism can be claimed as the main cause of global warming and effectively the climate crisis, reducing the life span of many species on earth. ...Due to capitalism and competition between companies, food production and waste is high, with about a third of fruit

and vegetables being rejected for being the wrong size or shape before they even reach the shops. Moreover, when this food is thrown away, it rots and releases more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere." (Baer, 2012)

Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* represents Hardy's awareness of Nature and his belief in protecting it as a constant force. The very title of the novel suggests his idea of returning to Nature by not being stimulated by the pompous city life. He tried to show that a simple life in rural settings can bring mental peace and serve the purpose of humanity. Skolimowski, in his essay "Human Value and Capitalism" tried to show that, historically, human beings have always craved power and destroyed humanity by being selfish. However, being superior, humans should take more care of their surroundings as a component of Nature. At the same time, capitalism makes people think about gaining materialistic wealth. In the process, they become selfish, only thinking about 'I, me, and myself.' Thus, despite claiming superiority, human beings still could not escape the shed of barbarism. As a result, we cut down trees, exploit the river, pollute water, kill other animals unnecessarily, and thus pollute our environment.

Being a sensitive and conscious writer, Thomas Hardy was against industrialization; as he witnessed the effect of industrialization on rural life, he could have imagined what was coming shortly. In today's world, there is a grave concern about the global ecological crisis; humans are concerned about their survival and the survival of the ecosystem and are developing various strategies to revive what is depleted. Hardy also believes that the human conscience should extend its responsibilities to the biosphere rather than acting as an agent of ecological destruction. Eustacia, in *The Return of the Native*, could not think beyond fulfilling her desire. Moreover, that costs the life of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Yeobright, her lover, Damon Wildeve, and even her own.

Diggory Venn in *The Return of the Native* can be the strongest representation of the novel's impulse toward humanity with the notion of a man-environment relationship. He represents a dying trade, primitive and simple like Nature; in fact, he stains his skin and exudes the reddish color of the Heath itself. Since he remains in distant places and wanders in the Heath, he is not manipulated by self-centeredness and is a true representative of humanity; he remains purely dedicated to the Heath. He is in harmony with Heath, as Heath becomes the providence for survival as a redleman.

People depend on Nature, i.e., the plants, animals, and microorganisms providing crucial ecosystem services. Since humans and Nature are inextricably linked, it is important to understand Nature better. Researchers like Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour remind us that it is unethical and incorrect to regard the natural world as distinct from humans (Alberro, 2019). Nature, humans, and humanity are interconnected. We must consider them as a unit to address our serious environmental issues. We are at a point where we must admit that every single sector of industry is contributing to the planet's downfall. If superior, human beings need to take action to prevent falling apart. So, we must bring ourselves into harmony with the natural world to bring back humanity. Moreover, it is only possible by thinking about collective welfare rather than focusing on individuals' materialistic well-being.

6 Implications of the Study

When man goes against Nature, the destruction or disharmony in the surroundings is obvious. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia, while attempting to go against the flow of Nature, met an accident that took her life. Eustacia never wandered in the Heath to explore its topography, as she abhorred its simplicity. Had she observed the Shadewaters meticulously, she could have escaped death. The same happened with her boyfriend, Wildeve. When we deny the natural flow of Nature, resentment and discomfort are obvious. With the increasing pollution of the environment, now is the time to take action to save the world; otherwise, the whole human species will be under threat and could disappear from the world the way dinosaurs did. To avoid such a disaster, UNEP (United et al.) recommended a few programs and strategies, i.e., planting trees, not wasting food, buying seasonal food, recycling products, etc. Moreover, we need to love the world and be aware of not polluting our surroundings; we should be careful about using water and gas, as they are not renewable resources. Moreover, restoring Nature would be possible to restore humanity, love, and peace in the world.

In *The Return of the Native*, the dual personality of Nature is shown. At times it is benevolent, and other times it is vile when its harmonious balance is disturbed. Sometimes, she helps humans, and sometimes, she does not. So, we see constant stress in the interrelationship of man and Nature. Nature will help us when we help her; thus, a strong connection will be sewn between Nature, man, and humanity.

7 Conclusion

The research paper has explored and described the ecocritical perspective and ecological awareness through the portrayal of the novel's different characters, settings, and plots. The paper traces the development of the concern for Nature and humanity, from the Victorian era to the Present, among writers, artists, and intellectuals. This paper also underscores the interconnection between humans, humanity, and the natural world, as depicted in the novel, emphasizing that the consequences of environmental degradation will ultimately be borne by humankind. The paper has also shown that we are at a stage where we protect Nature or the destruction of Nature destroys us.

This paper inspires us to contribute to ecological thinking to preserve Nature. By consciously interpreting the mysterious magic of Thomas Hardy, this paper contrasts with the smallness and weakness of human beings.

Simultaneously, it suggests people not to violate Nature and neglect the relationship between man and Nature. Otherwise, human beings will eventually be rebuked and rejected by Nature.

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