Chapter 2

The Return of the Native (1878)

Ian Gregor in his book, The Great Web opens his discussion on The Return of the Native by remarking that 'there are not many things which can be said with safety about The Return of the Native....' What does it signify? It signifies that the novel is open to more than one interpretation. The postmodern uncertainty about the ultimate meaning of a text informs the novel just as intensely as the evocation of the pagan, pre-Christian forms of life. John Paterson in his essay, Hardy's Anti-Christian Document observes:

In its central action in the suffering and death of Eustacia Vye, in other words, The Return of the Native dramatizes the tragic humiliation, in the diminished world of the modern consciousness, of an heroic, pre-christian understanding of life.

The pre-Christian understanding of life is now challenged and shaken by the new forms of life outside Egdon Heath, symbol of a traditional community. In the postmodern world all the established notions of meaning and truth are viewed skeptically. In The Return of the Native Hardy seems to be ambivalent towards the ancient stable culture and the emerging new one. He is sure of the strength of ancient culture. However, there are enough tensions in the novel between these two forms of life.

Page references to The Return of the Native are to the Penguin edition (1978)
This tension finds expression in Clym's modernist tendencies and Eustacia's craving for the same. But unlike the postmodernists, Hardy seems to remain certain about the values embodied in Egdon community. However, he is not blind to the crisis of culture which is the central focus of the novel. While his cultural imagination remains intact, his major characters are caught in a web of tension and conflict between the two worlds. The two worlds are presented antithetically.

Hardy has always been irresistibly drawn to the primitive vitality embodied in a rural community. However, his increasing awareness of changes around him compels him to examine the possibilities of the new world in the context of the new scenario. In *The Return of the Native* Hardy closely analyses the traditional and the modern worlds. There is a marked tendency in recent critical discourses to cite this novel as an example of Hardy's inconsistence. What appears to be inconsistence is, in fact, the mark of his greatness as an artist, for he is a relentless searcher of truth without any totalizing tendency. He is not a didactic writer.

In the creation of the character of Eustacia Vye, Hardy is celebrating the vitality of natural forms of living. And in Clym Yeobright's alternation between the traditional and the modern, and in his final return to the traditional community of Egdon Heath, Hardy is subjecting the new
civilisation to a critical scrutiny. So the novel is full of tension between the
civilisation to a critical scrutiny. So the novel is full of tension between the 
old and the new. It is Eustacia who embodies most intensely the tension 
between the two worlds. The heath, against which Eustacia rebels, is 
metaphorically a microcosm of the invincible universe as well as the 
traditional human society. In this connection Dale Kramer observes:

The heath may in a large sense serve as a symbol of the circumstances of 
life which destroy the rebel; but it is simultaneously a manifestation of 
universal nature with which Eustacia is capable of being in full accord.¹

Though Hardy is on the side of the heroine in her tragic battle against the 
universal forces, he does not support her in her irrational rebellion against 
the Egdon community. Eustacia is craving for a world that Clym is 
disillusioned with. She is looking for fulfilment outside her natural station 
in life.

With characteristic Hardyan empathy for his tragic heroes and 
heroines, Hardy explores the predicament of Clym and Eustacia. The 
structure of the plot creates a world of conflicts between dream and reality, 
balance and imbalance, moderation and immoderation, acceptance and 
rebellion. Whereas Clym is a representative of moderation and balance, 
Eustacia is a negation of both. In dramatizing the tragic life of these two 
major characters, and of Damon Wildeve, Hardy is once again engaged
into a critical enquiry into the problematic of human life. The ultimate impression that the novel leaves upon us is Hardy’s belief in the enduring values of ancient culture. As in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy creates two groups of characters opposed to each other in their responses to life. Ian Gregor observes that the ‘novel is similar in substance if not in mood *to Far from the Madding Crowd.*’ It is this mood which makes some critics to become uneasy about Hardy’s position. And, of course, this variation of mood is quite central to his imagination, especially in his later novels. Once replying to a friend’s objection to his philosophy of life, Hardy replied:

A friend of mine writes objecting to what he calls my “philosophy” (though I have no philosophy merely what I have often explained to be only confused heap of impressions like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show)

What Hardy is trying to do in *The Return of the Native* is a detached evaluation of both kinds of life. It is through the character of Eustacia Vye that he brings out the disturbances caused by the gaudy new civilization. She is the most powerful, almost mythical character in the novel. Hardy’s sympathises with both Clym and Eustacia when they suffer for the spontaneous expression of what they deeply believe in. Noorul Hasan makes a very perceptive observation in this connection:

To say that *The Return of the Native* is written to justify Eustacia or Clym is to go against the grain of the narrative. But it might be said with justice that the novel is an examination of the moral quality of their life.

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and action, subordinating their individual lives to certain primordial rhythms and rightness in which it instinctively believes.\textsuperscript{6}

Hardy does not defend Eustacia entirely. His allegiance to her is a divided one. What he admires in her is her capacity for instinctive feeling. Her tragedy lies in her pathetic inadequacy to reconcile herself to her natural community. Hers is a fragmented consciousness. Eustacia struggles in vain to transcend herself, to run away from her own authentic being to an illusory world of fancies which would certainly delude her as Clym has been deluded. Her tragedy is partly due to her relentless attempt 'to change her situation or her surroundings in the search for a nebulous ideal.'\textsuperscript{7}

Man in Hardy’s fictional world is a part of the unity of nature, and there is an inherent equilibrium on such a landscape that cannot be disturbed by individual action. Clym is able to achieve such equilibrium in the novel. But Clym is not Hardy as he himself said though he is ‘the nicest of all my heroes, and not a bit like me.’\textsuperscript{8} What does it mean? It might mean that Clym lacks Hardy’s critical approach to the problems of life. ‘Hardy romantically conceived of nature as a symbol of human freedom, a condition of the liberated spirit, but at the same he viewed with mistrust its threat to the precarious stability of society.’\textsuperscript{9} In the novel Eustacia represents this threat. The \textit{Return of the Native} is the most pagan of all
Hardy’s works. And Eustacia, the heroine, and the heath are the external expressions of that paganism. Eustacia has a natural affinity with the heath. Her affinity with the Heath is best expressed in Chapter VI-‘The Figure against the Sky.’

Suddenly, on the barrow, there mingled with all this wild rhetoric of night a sound which modulated so naturally into the rest that its beginning and ending were hardly to be distinguished. The bluffs, and the bushes, and the heather- bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them it flew away. (p.62)

Paradoxically, it is the same heath which Eustacia is not able to reconcile to and which ultimately destroys her. With her primitive passion she rebels against a community which is beyond human control. In her passion for a modern life, she tries to disengage herself from her natural environment. It is a denial of her own very self. Eustacia’s futile struggle and ultimate tragic death is a stark reminder of the futility of human attempt to alter one’s lot. ‘The heath is’ observes Dale Kramer, ‘both a moral absolute and a universal solvent.’\textsuperscript{10} In Eustacia’s struggle against the rigidity of the heath, Hardy is presenting the hopeless battle between the individual and society. If we take the heath as a metaphor for the conventional society, Eustacia is a victim of its oppression. It does not tolerate her difference, her specificity. It is ‘this tension between land and character that Hardy takes up at the outset of the novel....’\textsuperscript{11}
Man’s effort to impose a rationalistic pattern on the natural world is resisted by the more powerful, enigmatic forces. Material changes may be made possible by sheer will and hard labour. But no such improvements can alter the fundamental, intrinsic character of the universe. The cosmic design is beyond man’s comprehension. It takes him by surprise, often ruthlessly shattering his earthly aspirations to the point of grotesque tragedy. Clym’s philanthropic ventures on the heath to educate its primitive dwellers into a rational life do not have any significant effect on the natives. Nor does Eustacia’s Promethean rebellion lead her anywhere except to her tragic end. The heath resists changes relentlessly:

The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. (p.14)

Man’s dream of a rational, well structured universe and the poignant awareness of the threats to the dream are well expressed in Clym’s failure to improve the conditions of the natives of Egdon heath through modern education. Rational consciousness and individualistic assertions are defeated by the universal forces. This is what the heath illustrates so powerfully. The novel is evocative of a time when man lived in perfect harmony with the universe, with an unfragmented consciousness. Eustacia’s rebellion is symbolic of man’s attempt to sever himself from his
natural community. Her life is a glaring example of the tragedy of not accepting the limitations of finite existence. Roger Ebbatson observes that ‘while the heath embodies certain ancient ways of life, it also acts as a barrier to new thought; its life and ways are primeval, its rituals derive their sanction from Nature.…’

Eustacia’s character is devised in such a way as to project two central themes of the novel: the forcefulness of primitive, instinctual life, and the inevitable tragedy of rebellion against one’s cultural community and the universal forces. Her tragedy is multiplied by her resistance to these two forces. Leonard W. Deen sees Eustacia grandly heroic: ‘Eustacia Vye, more than any other of Hardy’s protagonists, seems intended to be grandly heroic, to exist on a higher level of significance than the other characters in the novel.’ She is either above or below the average humanity like Dickens’s Sydney Carton in A Tale of Two Cities. Her utter failure to integrate herself with the native culture, which is the central focus of the novel, points to a total paralysis of her moral imagination. She is ‘at odds with her environment without having a moral alternative to it.’ She is averse to the finer aspects of communal living. She refuses to be identified with her natural community. However, in the creation of Eustacia’s character, Hardy seems to be more interested in her primordial
self than the moral complexity of her character and the cultural issues at stake.

Eustacia’s ethical failure lies in her inability to strike equilibrium between the demands of her society and those of her individual impulses. The cleavage between her authentic self and society creates an irresolvable dichotomy which characterizes her whole life. Her extremities of feeling and fanciful life extinguish all other possibilities of reason in her. Hardy has an intense respect for her natural self. And in her relentless battle against the mute, indifferent cosmic forces that thwart her aspirations, Hardy is on her side, crying out:

O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond any control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all! (p.361)

It is the archetypal reaction of Hardy’s tragic heroes and heroines. What Eustacia forgets is that she is waging a war against forces beyond her control. To add to this, her relation with the heath lacks the communal insight and social flexibility. Hence, her tragedy. What she has not realized is that “to model our conduct on Nature’s apparent conduct, as Nietzsche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity.”

Within the cultural community of the heath, Eustacia’s rebellion is self-destructive. Her life places her in dialectical opposition to the inherent
ethos of the heath. Nor does she care to acquire any knowledge of the
heath. Consequently, the cultural chasm between her and the community
tends to increase at an alarming pace beyond reconciliation:

To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a
foreigner without learning his tongue. 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. (p.79)

Ever since her arrival on the heath, Eustacia treats it with supercilious
contempt, alienating herself in the process from its centre. She refuses to
bring herself into its fold and collective wisdom. She prefers a reclusive,
isolated existence except for her trouble-ridden romance with Damon
Wildeve, not because she finds him worthy of herself, but for "want of
better object" to love and to be loved to madness.(p.79) In her egoistic
world she places her own self above the interests of the people and
community that surround her. No one understands the otherness of
Eustacia more keenly than Mrs. Yeobright: "Miss Vye is to my mind too
idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or
to other people" (p.186) It is an echo of Eustacia’s own estimate of her
afflicted self: "I have not much love for my fellow creatures. Sometimes I
quite hate them."(p.193) Such deep rooted hatred is culturally offensive
and contains catastrophic implications for her own life. According to David
Lyon, individualism 'proceeds to confine us to the solitude of our own heart.'\textsuperscript{16}

From the time of her first appearance on the heath till her tragic, almost self willed death, Eustacia has chosen a gloomy course of confrontation with her milieu. To some extent her rebellious tendencies may be traced back to "her instinct towards social non-conformity."(p.78) It is a trait produced by frustration in social ambition. It is the general eccentric feature of her character to think and act contrary to what is practised by common humanity. For instance, on holidays, she would long for work; on working days she would prefer to rest; Sundays are hated by her, and on Saturdays she would sing psalms. "A blaze of love, and extinction, was better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years."(p.77) And "fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women; fidelity because of love's grip had much."(p.77) Eustacia's life is characterized by extremities; she never strikes a balance in life. Hence, her tragic incompatibility with life. The co-existence of diverse and disparate elements in her personality is amply expressed by Hardy in the chapter, "Queen of Night"
Eustacia stands outside the conventional definitions of good and evil. In understanding her character Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodern emphasis on individual specificity and particularity. Like Henchard she possesses a unique inner life which is in disharmony with the socially constructed external world. John Paterson sees the novel as a repudiation of the Christian, that is, modern and a celebration of the pagan:

For as a symbolic character, Eustacia belongs to a world that has not yet been touched by the spectral hand of Christianity: she reincarnates on the withered parish of Egdon Heath the larger and braver vision of the ancient Greeks.¹⁷

What Paterson tries to refer to is Hardy’s evocation of the unalloyed, unfragmented form of ancient, pre-modern existence. Modernism with its trinity of enlightenment ideals - reason, science and progress - could not bring about the desired result of human happiness. In celebrating the ancient form of life and its traditional ethical system, Hardy is sharing the postmodern disillusionment with modernism. Alasdair Macintyre’s *After Virtue* appeals to a pre-modern position following the failure of the Enlightenment project. In a famous passage he offers the stark alternatives:

*Either* one must follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic *or* one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative.¹⁸

In Clym’s return from the centre of modern civilization, Hardy is suggesting the hollowness of a life of reason and rationality. In the
primitive world of Egdon Heath, Hardy finds enough strength to lead a healthy life - both morally and socially. Interestingly enough, some postmodern thinkers also look back to the pre-modern culture for a remedy to the contemporary malaise. Lyotard, for instance, thinks that we are 'in the position of Aristotle's prudent individual, who makes judgments about the just and unjust without the least criterion.'

Foucault and Derrida, in spite of all their discord, could be said to agree in the end on ethics, deriving from the Greeks. Lyotard sees the postmodern condition as one of 'pluralistic paganism.' All these great thinkers hark back to the pre-modern. That is why we argue that Hardy's inalienable belief in the ancient form of living and its ethical values have a contemporary relevance. The British social theologian, John Milbank highlights 'the radicality and vitality of what could be thought of as a pre-modern position and its relevance to postmodern conditions.' In other words, what all these thinkers try to say is that the pre-modern still has much to offer in the debate over postmodernity. It was an age when people lived a natural life without attempting to construct a rational system of ethics. And what we find in the postmodern condition is a rejection of all forms of rationalistic certainties. It is the individual and the local which assume significance in the postmodern world. That is exactly what Hardy believed and espoused in his novels.
Eustacia's violent death in *The Return of the Native* suggests the tragedy of resistance to age old forms of living. It illustrates the invincibility of cultural wisdom. It is a triumph of nature over culture; it is a triumph of the traditional over the modern. But at the same time, her death points to the fatally discordant elements that exist even in a natural being. She is Hardy's first victim of modernist cravings. She is a precursor of Grace Melbury, Tess and Sue. What goes wrong with her is her egoism and vanity which do not correlate with the community ethics or with her inner self. That she remains defiant to the influences of the ethos of the heath, and refuses to share the communal perception of life is an expression of her inner rigidity. She is so much divorced from the community that no moral exoneration is permissible for her. What she does not realize is that 'society not only limits aspirations, it also creates opportunities for them...'

At one level Eustacia demonstrates the tragedy of the romantic ideal. All her romantic ideals are potentially self defeating because she is searching for purpose and meaning outside herself, outside her natural world. She does not respect her cultural specificity. She fails to define herself in relation to her cultural identity. She wants to leave her native,
cultural environment for a world elsewhere. But as we have already seen Hardy does not believe in the supremacy of any centre over the other. But as an artist 'Hardy, though possessing the old romantic feeling for personality, shared the Victorian burden of society.' Like Conrad he knew that though society is corrupting, it is inevitable. What Eustacia fails to realize is the futility of rebelling against the universal forces over which man has no control. Hardy seems 'to prefer the contentment of limiting aspirations to the strain of defiant greatness.' Eustacia's flirtation with a precarious Prometheanism is not informed by an awareness of what damage it can cause. In her proud, intransigent rebellion she is a romantic, and 'emblematic of the feeling and infinite desire which rebel against inevitable limitation, and thus is the supremely tragic figure of the novel.' She tries to undo the almost immutable, incalculable circumstances of her limited existence, and becomes frustrated. The flaw in her is the 'discrepancy between personality and environment, sensibility and circumstances.'

One self-defeating trait of Eustacia is her inability to own up to the responsibility of her actions. It is a blatant violation of the basic principle of morality. It is, in fact, the fundamental component of morality. The chapter, 'The Closed Door' demonstrates this weakness in Eustacia's
character. When Mrs. Yeobright knocks at the door, Eustacia peeps through the window and sees her mother-in-law. But an inexplicable sense of pride and arrogance prevents her from opening the door, shutting out the old woman who imagines even Clym’s contrivance in it. It is the turning point in the novel after which tragedy would visit all the major characters in this human drama. Mrs. Yeobright, a true representative of traditional wisdom and insight, is killed by the callousness of her daughter-in-law. Eustacia neither lets Clym know the peculiar circumstances of her crude behaviour nor accepts responsibility on her own: “Yet instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal prince of the world, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot.”(p.304) Hardy does not exonerate the individual of his personal and social responsibilities. It is central to his cultural imagination. Even in Eustacia’s romantic relationship with Wildeve and Clym, there is a perverse, if not repugnant, tone of selfishness, intensified by jealousy and feminine capriciousness. Her renewed passion for Wildeve after his cruel desertion of her in pursuit of Thomasin is prompted more by a bruised ego than any genuine love for him. She is well aware of her incompatibility with Wildeve: “Damon, you are not worthy of me: I see it, and yet I love you.”(p.70) Even Hardy is aware of this incongruity in her puzzling personality: “She seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love
more than for any particular lover.”(p.77) And later on she confesses to Diggory Venn: “I should have cared nothing for him had there been a better person near.”(p.110) These shattered reflections are only an anticipation of her final estimate of Wildeve. As she is contemplating a possible elopement with him, Hardy captures her inner mood:

“Can I go, can I go?” she moaned. “He is not great enough for me to give myself to – he does not suffice my desire!.....If he had been a Saul or Bonaparte- ah! But to break my marriage vow for him- it is too poor a luxury!”(p.360)

In spite of her knowledge that her relationship with Wildeve will be disastrous, Eustacia decides to go ahead with it. It is an instance of Bad Faith. It is a conscious betrayal of her own self. She slips into inauthenticity and destroys herself in the process.

Clym Yeobright, the hero of The Return of the Native, is an epitome of moderation in social life. He represents Hardy’s deep faith in the wisdom of a traditional community. His fundamental values are derived from the cultural heritage of the heath. He is scarcely distinguishable from the natural forms of life on the heath:

If any one knew the heath it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. (p.180)
In Clym’s return to the heath Hardy seems to prophesy the ultimate triumph of the traditional over the modern, of the native over the alien. Noorul Hasan has rightly perceived the character of Clym: “The history of Clym’s character is the history of the triumph of the Dorset peasant over the Darwinian philosopher.”

About the peasant heart of Clym Hardy observes: “Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. (p.180) His taking up the job of a furze cutter, after his blindness, is a convincing display of his capacity to submerge himself in the vibrant life of the heath. It would be going against the felt particularities of the novel if we view Clym’s philanthropic effort on the heath as an attempt to modernize the inhabitants of this rigidly primitive community. It may be viewed as a selfless effort at the amelioration of the condition of the natives within their limited socio-cultural context.

When we speak of Hardy’s cultural imagination, what we mean is a form of thinking that values primitive way of living and feeling. It simply points to a natural form of life without rationalistic interventions. Clym’s educational efforts on the heath are nothing but a more humanizing attempt whereby the natives can enjoy a fuller existence within their instinctual
way of life. His sole motive is only an enlightening mission, "to do some
worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it- a
schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else
will."(p.182) The co-existence of double consciousness in Clym - the
ancient and the modern- makes him better equipped to approach life,
judging the strengths and weaknesses of both the cultures to educate the
native citizens into a life of social progress. The native returned is not one
who transports ideas indiscreetly from a civilization he himself has been
tired of. His mission is one of an exclusively humanistic one, for he has
learnt that "thought is a disease of the flesh..." (p.195) The heath is even
physically salubrious for Clym:

On the young man's part, the paleness of face which he had brought
with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were
less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful and energetic
sturdiness which was his by nature having particularly recovered its
original proportions.(p.214)

This is not to contend that Clym is totally immune to the influence of his
modern consciousness "In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the
typical countenance of the future", and an "observer's eye was arrested, not
by what it was, but by what it recorded."(p.174) Nevertheless, what is
remarkable is that Clym remains unperturbed by the factious claims of two
opposing modes of consciousness which co-exist in him. Whatever
idealism he is believed to have assimilated is safely crafted on his
incorruptible cultural personality. He has known both the cultures and he respects the particular merit of each. In his outburst to Eustacia, Hardy’s own postmodern tendencies are revealed with particular clarity:

Now, don’t you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against gods and fate as well as you? I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more I do perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore, nothing particularly small in mine of furze cutting. (p.261)

Clym’s attempt to educate the natives must not be viewed as an inconsistency in Hardy’s cultural vision. Rather, it shows his awareness of what is happening in the world. That Clym does not succeed in his mission is itself proof of Hardy’s reservation about modern values. With all the alleged modernity of Clym’s ideals, he remains firmly committed to his cultural inheritance. It is in his native resourcefulness that his identity is articulated, and not in his scholarship or supposed modernist tendencies which hardly have any discernible effect on the traditional Egdon community. In Clym’s final return to the heath, we can find Hardy looking for some value that is beyond all the chaos, among all fragmentation, and amidst everything falling apart. Clym’s tragedy is that he is totally misunderstood by the community in his humanist enterprises. In the end ‘he is a lovely and misunderstood preacher—perhaps like Hardy himself.’ Clym may be said to have an affinity with Simon in Golding’s Lord of the
Flies, utterly misunderstood or ‘ununderstood.’ He is a refined pagan unlike Eustacia. Hence he survives all as a social hero, though pathetically. His tragic realization at the end is an ironic pointer to the deficiency of his acquired modern consciousness:

I who was going to teach people the higher secrets of happiness did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid.(p.318)

Perhaps, the chief error of Clym is that he “wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than the individuals at the expense of the class.”(p.179)

The marriage of Clym and Eustacia is from the very outset fated to be catastrophic because they inhabit totally opposing psychic worlds. One prefers the extinction of the self whereas the other asserts it forcefully. Neither can achieve any meaningful selfhood in the secluded world of the other. Clym’s identification with the heath is ‘antithetical to Eustacia’s distaste for Egdon Heath.’ There is a radical polarity in their world views and it is the fundamental dialectic of the novel. Whereas Eustacia sees the heath as her cross, her shame and her death, Clym finds in it the source of sustenance. She is irrevocably trapped in a web of romantic illusions. Neither Clym nor Eustacia is able to comprehend and tolerate the otherness of the other. That is the tragedy of their life.
It is the humble characters, patient and unquestioning, who are excluded from unhappiness on the heath. Only those who succeed in forming the right relationship with the heath survive and enjoy their share of bliss. Merryn Williams observes that 'the heath can be humanized by those who respond to it fully; the eventual survivors are those who have been slighted and yet have the strength to endure.'

Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright are the truest citizens of the heath. The likes of Venn are the supporting pillars of a communal society. He reminds us of Gabriel Oak in his selfless love: “I would sooner have married her myself”, he said in a low voice. “But what I feel is that if she cannot be happy without him I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought.” (p.159) And Eustacia is startled to discover the absolute lack of selfishness in Venn’s love which is alien to her world. Venn’s astuteness, fortitude, honesty, and above all, patience win him his old sweetheart, Thomasin. He is understanding and selfless in his relation to the heath and the people on it. His union with Thomasin is a great moral victory of the novel. They are not victims of modern alienation and fragmentation as Eustacia is. In her rebellion we can trace the crumbling of many values in the wake of modernism:
Traditional ties of family, kin and neighborhood, torn by new mobility and lack of conventional regulation, were replaced only by a sense of uncertainty, loss of direction and a feeling that the individuals were somehow on their own.

Like Venn, Thomasin is also a real product of the heath. Her total personality and perspective of life stand in sharp contrast with that of Eustacia. Thomasin has inherited the virtues of humility, forbearance, patience and stoicism. “To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough.”(p.369) Both Venn and Thomasin are representatives of a particular cultural rhythm. They remind us of Giles Winterborne and Marty South of *The Woodlanders*. The central moral hypothesis of the novel is the achieving of self mastery through the repression of communally discordant natural appetites. Venn and Thomasin embody this communal virtue.

Hardy’s ultimate moral vision is given expression in the Venn-Thomasin union as well as in Clym’s eventual self awareness:

He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men. (p.412)

In a subtle manner *The Return of the Native* reasserts Hardy’s consistently held belief in the urgency of controlling communally disruptive behaviour.
His allegiance to the ancient forms of living never falters in this exquisitely wrought novel. And it is only appropriate to end this discussion by quoting the observation of John Holloway:

In *The Return of the Native* the stress falls on the revitalizing power of rural life, and how its vitality is intrinsically greater than that of modernity.  

And in *The Return of the Native* Hardy retrieves the ancient wisdom as a constructive means for human living.
References


24. Ibid. p.225.


27. Ibid. p.218.


