A Return to Nature

A Critique of the Pastoral in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne avhandlingen er en økokritisk studie av hvordan Thomas Hardys verk *The Return of the Native* (1878) fungerer som en kritikk av den pastorale sjangeren. Analysen baserer seg på en tolkning der *Return* er skrevet innenfor den pastorale sjangerens rammeverk, og der Hardys kritikk er skjult i selve sjangeren den kritiserer. Min påstand er at denne kritikken retter seg mot romantiseringen av den kultiverende bonden, som utnytter naturen til sin egen fordel, heller enn mot den oftere kritiserte mangelfulle evnen til å erkjenne den hardtarbeidende bondens evinnelige slit.

Tilnærmingen til analysen baserer seg på en retning innenfor økokritikken kalt dypøkologi (*deep ecology*), slik den ble introdusert av Arne Næss. Næss vektlegger spesielt at ”[t]he flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value”, og ”that the value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes” (Naess, 1989). Som et annet element i analysen tar jeg utgangspunkt i at Hardys landskap Egdon Heath er en egen karakter og aktør, som gis aktørrettigheter til å handle for både seg selv og på vegne av sine menneskelige motstykker. Forholdene og sammenhengen mellom landskapet og Hardys menneskelige karakterer er videre analysert i detalj, der karakterene Clym Yeobright, Diggory Venn og Eustacia Vye vies ekstra oppmerksomhet. Til slutt ser jeg på enkelte aspekter av forfatteren Hardys eget liv. Her drøfter jeg også endringer i overgangene mellom de ulike manuskriptene av romanen og hvordan disse endringene var produkter av sensur fra Hardys utgivere.

Med dette som bakteppe, er problemstillingen i avhandlingen som følger: Hvordan fungerer Hardys konstruksjon av landskapet, og dets makt til å påvirke hans menneskelige karakterer, til å styrke og validere en økokritisk lesing av *Return*? Hvorfor kan man argumentere for at Hardy skrev romanen som kritikk mot de romantiserte elementene i den pastorale diktingen i viktoriatiden?

I en tid da landsbyen og den omliggende naturen ble betraktet som en fluktmulighet fra de stadig voksende byene, ble naturen likevel bare verdsatt for måtene den kunne utnyttes til fordel for mennesker. Mens økokritikk som fagområde i dag fremdeles vurderes til å være i sin tidlige barndom, skrev Hardy et fiktivt bidrag til idégrunnlaget i dypøkologi så tidlig som i 1878, og fremmet med det en kjærlighet til naturen – for naturens egen skyld.

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Contents

Introduction

Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) sixth novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878)[1] opens with an entire chapter providing detailed description of a fictional natural landscape called Egdon Heath. Immediately we are made aware that Hardy's rural landscape, with its ponies, snakes, butterflies, flowers and furze are as important as the human characters that inhabit it. Although many critics acknowledge the heath's role within the loosely defined pastoral genre, its importance is rarely recognized as more than a wild natural setting in which the drama of the human characters is played out. What is the role of Egdon Heath in this novel? And how can Hardy's treatment of nature be understood in relation to the tradition of the pastoral genre? This thesis will explore how Thomas Hardy's construction of Egdon Heath as a character, equipped with agency sufficient to act for and upon both itself and its human counterparts, leads to the argument that Hardy wrote *Return* as critique against the romanticizing elements within the pastoral genre of Victorian literature.

The thesis relies firstly on the acknowledgement that *Return* is indeed itself a pastoral novel. It is my claim that Hardy's critique is constructed within a mirroring of the pastoral genre, a point to which I will return in the later discussion of the history of the genre. Secondly, I rely on the argument that the treatment of the relationships between landscape and human characters in *Return* is distinctly different from that in Hardy's other pastoral novels. With works such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Woodlanders* (1887) Hardy established himself as a great constructor of rustic rural life set in fictional "Wessex". However, in *Return* Hardy's pastoral focus moved away from the country folk, and on to nature. This is not to say that landscape is not prominent in Hardy's other pastoral novels, but with Egdon Heath it is provided with agency, and thus made into a character in its own right. It is important here to specify that I do not make the

[1] From here on simply referred to as *Return*.

claim that Hardy's critique is against a wrongfully romanticized portrayal of the hardships of the countryside. Rather, it is my argument that he promotes a love of nature for nature's own sake, and that his critique is against the exploitation of nature by humans. It is this claim that reflects my choice of theoretical method, a strand of ecocriticism called deep ecology, which I will clarify below.

With these elements in mind my question will be as follows: How does Hardy's construction of the heath, and its power to affect his human characters, work to strengthen and validate an ecocritical reading of *Return*, leading to the argument that Hardy wrote the novel as critique against the romanticizing elements within the pastoral? And, how is a critique of the pastoral's idealization of cultivation strengthened by the ideas of deep ecology? In order to address these questions, and the arguments posed, I will explore the relationships between Egdon Heath and several of its human inhabitants. In my first chapter, my intent is to establish the heath as a character, to prove its agency and its powers; in short, to establish the heath as Hardy's agent in his critique against the pastoral. My second chapter brings the human characters Diggory Venn and Clym Yeobright into the discussion, where I claim that they love and understand the heath, and because of this are placed in its favour. The third chapter is about Eustacia Vye, and how because she hates the heath, I argue, she is killed by it. Through the creation of Egdon Heath, and its relationships with its human counterparts, Hardy constructs a critique against the romanticizing of cultivation, and human exploration of nature, within the pastoral genre, in order to promote an appreciation of nature's intrinsic value – a love of nature for nature's own sake.

First of all, I wish to introduce Hardy's biographical connection to Egdon Heath, how his upbringing might have influenced his choice of landscape, and how he developed an ambivalence towards his own choice as he gradually became more influenced by life in London.

Biographical context

To understand the relevance of Egdon Heath in *Return* it is important firstly to understand its importance to Thomas Hardy. Through the creation of "Wessex", the fictional setting for many of Hardy's novels, short stories and poems, he constructed a powerful link to the past. Raymond Williams comments: "There can be no doubt at all of Hardy's commitment to his own country, and in a natural way to its past, as we can see in his naming of Wessex",[2] because until Hardy started making use of the word again it was "a purely historical term defining the south-western region of the island of Britain that had been ruled by the West Saxons in the early Middle Ages".[3] Egdon Heath is a central part of "Wessex", and "Wessex" is constructed out of Hardy's native rural home in Dorset.[4] Hardy grew up in this area, later the fictional home of so many of his famous characters, and was familiar with its landscape even from childhood: "To Hardy it was the familiar scene of his boyhood, and it retained a powerful atmosphere of hostility to civilization, as a refuge for the outcast and the rejected".[5] This hostility towards civilization explains why the heath provided Hardy with the perfect landscape in which to set his critique against the forces of cultivation.

Also, the description of Egdon provided by the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy* further establishes the heath as the wild nature necessary for Hardy to support his critique: "Historically this was unproductive waste land, with thin acid sandy soil overlying a so-called 'iron pan' that defied traditional forms of plough".[6] The plough being one of the central symbols of the farmer, a landscape resisting its forces would also be more powerful in resisting other attempts of human exploitation. Through providing Egdon Heath with agency, thus making it far more powerful than the pathetic fallacy could have, Hardy created a

[2] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 197.
[3] Simon Gatrell, "Wessex," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy, ed.* Dale Kramer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19.
[4] However, "Hardy came to the conclusion that Dorset was only part of a larger cultural and social region which ought more properly to be called Wessex": Gatrell, "Wessex," 27.
[5] Norman Page, ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 123.
[6] Page, *Oxford*, 123.

character strong enough to either collaborate with, or destroy, its human inhabitants. Hardy has given his native landscape intrinsic value, independent of its human counterparts.

However, Hardy's critique is not always explicitly expressed, but shows signs of ambivalence through the portrayal of both the heath and his human characters. This ambivalence, I argue, can be traced in the developments in Hardy's own life and career. In as much as Hardy's link to his native Dorset is clear, he also spent vital years of his adult life in London, after his move there in 1862. Hardy "went to theatres and dances, operas and oratorios", he "heard Dickens read at the Hanover Square Rooms, and was present at [former Prime Minister] Palmerston's funeral in Westminster Abbey".[7] Hardy submerged himself into the cultural explorations the city had to offer, and "had moved away from Dorset in more than a merely physical sense".[8] Hardy spent five years in London, during which none of his greater novels were produced.[9] And yet, his link to the metropolitan never disappeared. As Hardy started writing novels, his struggle against the publishing houses and their editors began, connecting him to the city, and its mentality, until he finally gave up writing prose after *The Well-Beloved* in 1897.

Lastly, Hardy's connection to London was heavily influenced by his relationships to the various editors and publishing houses whose censorship led to sizable revisions in his work. In *Return* these re-writings turned the novel, through several editions up to as late as 1912, into an almost completely different novel than what it had been in the first manuscript (or the Ur-version).[10] One of the most notable changes relevant to my thesis question is the widening of the old fashioned rural world of "Wessex". John Paterson writes:

> The principals of the Ur-novel–the Yeobrights, the Vyes, and Diggory Venn–hardly suggested, then, the world of Greek tragedy they were eventually to enter. They

[7] Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy* (London, Henley & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 7-8.
[8] Page, *Thomas Hardy*, 8.
[9] He also divided his time in his later years between London and his home at Max Gate in Dorset.
[10] For a detailed description of the publishing history of *Return* see: John Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 1-7.

> suggested, rather, the more limited and more rudimentary world of *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Woodlanders*.[11]

The combination of worlds turning *Return* into a melting pot of rurality and civilization, both ancient and contemporary, is all the more interesting when we take into consideration that it does not mark a permanent change in Hardy's authorship; *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) was written before *Return* and *The Woodlanders* (1887) after. Both of these novels were acknowledged by the Victorian audience as portrayals of rustic rural life – in other words, as pastoral novels. After an attempt at a deviation from the genre with "an indifferent comedy of society" in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), Hardy's publishers urged him to return to the pastoral genre of the financial success *Far From the Madding Crowd*.[12] Thus, Hardy's critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral might stem from his struggles against the censorship of his publishers. In order to earn a living Hardy was forced to produce yet another pastoral novel to satisfy the Victorian audience. *Return* is indeed a portrayal of rustic rural life in fictional "Wessex", but within this pastoral novel Hardy made landscape into a character of equal value to its human dwellers. *Return* is a critique of the pastoral hidden within a pastoral novel. Making use of the pastoral in order to criticise it empowers the critique. By masking *Return* as just another pastoral novel, Hardy's critique of mankind's exploitation of nature was provided with a setting in which nature's intrinsic value could most clearly be seen. In this way the critique itself was strengthened through a promotion of a love of nature for nature's own sake that would have been much more difficult to accomplish within any other genre.

With Hardy's biographical context in mind, I will now move on to clarify the historical and literary background within which *Return* as a pastoral novel should be seen.

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[11] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 40.
[12] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 4.

Historical context of the Pastoral

The term "pastoral" contains many connotations and various interpretations, most frequently in connection with genre. Greg Gerrard begins his chapter on the pastoral by claiming that "no other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for environmentalism", and that it "must and will remain a key concern for ecocritics".[13] In this he establishes the pastoral as a trope both widely discussed and yet problematic, something Robin Magowan agrees with as he writes that "In fact, one might claim that there are as many definitions as there are critics of pastoral".[14] With this in mind, it is not my intention to attempt yet another definition, but rather to trace the pastoral genre, and through the work of some of its critics determine Hardy's (as well as my own) position within the already established field of criticism.

Historically, the literary form of the pastoral "originates in the *Idylls* of Theocritus (*c.*316–260)",[15] who is considered to be "[t]he first pastoral poet of whom we have historical record".[16] The pastoral genre can thus be traced back as far as to Roman and Greek poetry describing the lives of shepherds, from which stems Leo Marx's definition "No shepherd, no pastoral".[17] This definition points to a genre that was successful due to the sharp contrast between the shepherd and the court, and that the former could be romanticized for the entertainment of the latter:

> From the beginning of its long history the pastoral was written for an urban audience and therefore exploited a tension between the town by the sea and the mountain country of the shepherd, between the life of the court and the life of the shepherd, between people and nature, between retreat and return.[18]

[13] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 37.
[14] Robin Magowan, "Fromentin and Jewett: Pastoral Narrative in the Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Literature* 16.4 (1964): 331.
[15] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London & New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001), 15.
[16] Martha Hale Shackford, "A Definition of the Pastoral Idyll," *PMLA*, 19.4 (1904): 584.
[17] Gifford, *Pastoral*, 1-2.
[18] Gifford, *Pastoral*, 15.

The pastoral of Theocritus is, according to Martha Hale Shackford, the idyll: "It is the only sort of writing whose end is to make us enamored of life. In it we have always a charmed atmosphere, some suggestion of satisfying happiness".[19] Although Terry Gifford traces the pastoral of Theocritus as nothing more than a historic form of the genre, Shackford claims it is without temporal borders as the audience will always seek refuge in this idealized world: "It has an immortality that does not need justification nor persuasive exposition, for it catches at some eternal yearning in the heart of man, and gives him for a moment the picture of content".[20] It is this "picture of content" that Hardy acknowledges as Clym Yeobright returns from urban Paris to his native heath, the return to the countryside as an escape from the city. At the same time he also directs his critique against this view of nature as something only to be exploited for human purposes. Hardy seeks a value in nature for its own sake.

However, Magowan, although he agrees that the pastoral has its roots in ancient Greece, claims that its importance to modern critics is to be found in the Renaissance: "While as a form pastoral reaches back to classical antecedents in Theocritus and Virgil, yet it seems more profitable to see it as a primarily Renaissance development".[21] Readings of Renaissance pastoral literature have brought out two quite different views on underlying themes and motifs, both discussed by Ken Hiltner in his 2011 publication *What Else is Pastoral?:Renaissance Literature and the Environment.* [22] In this book Hiltner discusses how some critics argue that much of the Renaissance pastoral pushed landscape to the background to promote political interests. However, his own, more recent analysis shows not a diminishing of the importance of landscape, but rather that "by moving landscapes out of the margins of current critical debate, to demonstrate the validity of an ecocritical reading of

[19] Shackford, "Pastoral Idyll," 587.
[20] Shackford, "Pastoral Idyll," 592.
[21] Magowan, "Pastoral Narrative," 333.
[22] Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Renaissance pastoral".[23] Hiltner does not deny that separating landscape from politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a difficult task, of which he calls Spenser's *Collin Clout Comes Home Again* (1595) "[a]n obvious example".[24] However, he looks beyond the political struggles and claims that the powers of the pastoral lay in its foundation in the problem of London's expansion, and that the growth of the metropolis led to a desire to retreat to the countryside:

> True, idealized landscapes often stood in opposition to courtly power in Renaissance pastoral, but the idealized – and increasingly realistic – landscapes of pastoral art in the seventeenth century often also literally stood in opposition to London's unprecedented urban expansion.[25]

It is with this need for a retreat to the romanticized landscaped of the pastoral countryside in mind I move on to clarify what the genre entailed for Hardy's contemporaries, the Victorians.

Victorian Pastoral

In a world constantly changing, booming with innovations that brought the ever-expanding borders of the city closer and closer to the rustic countryside, the need for a retreat to the romantic pastoral landscape of the past grew. Thus, "Victorian literature and art and architecture rely on retrospection to look back at that earlier world of nature".[26] The Victorians searched for an escape to the past, a past which the pastoral novelist could fictionally recreate. As I have already established, nature and landscape are essential parts of the pastoral genre: "every pastoral text, from the earliest on, depended on the construction of a "green world" which was set up in contrast to urban culture".[27] But the farmer or the shepherd, the human that interacts with the landscape, is equally important. However, for the

[23] Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 68.
[24] Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 68.
[25] Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 70.
[26] U.C Knoepflmacher & G.B Tennyson, "Introduction," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C Knoepflmacher & G.B Tennyson (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1977), xxi.
[27] Claire Lawrence, "A Possible Site for Contested Manliness Landscape and the Pastoral in the Victorian Era," *ISLE* 4.2 (1997): 18.

Victorians this human was even more important that the actual landscape into which he could retreat. Landscape was only there to fulfil the urban Victorian's need of escape to a rural past: "Nature as such, in the Wordsworthian sense of trees, mountains, and daffodils (…) does not count for much in nineteenth-century novels as a primary source of meaning".[28] Nevertheless, as the need for a fictional retreat to the countryside grew, so too did the amount of novels and novelist providing such an escape for the Victorian audience.

But how was this escape to be facilitated through fictional representations? Moving from Charles Dickens' London-based novels (that might fit into Empson's idea of the pastoral being visible in the portrayals of the urban working class), to Jane Austen's mansions and meadows of the more affluent English countryside, to Emily Brontë's gloomy moors in *Wuthering Heights*, Victorian pastoral writers are as widely spread throughout the genre as are its critics. And yet, some works, by some authors, are arguably closer to the more traditional focus of the pastoral genre, namely the contrast between urban and rural, and the need for a return to the romanticized countryside at the expense of the civilized city. Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880), writing under the pseudonym George Eliot,[29] was the most influential of the Victorian pastoral authors. With works like *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72) she established herself within the pastoral genre, and was by both reviewers and audience alike considered to be Hardy's forerunner in fictional landscape writing.

George Eliot was not only a prominent pastoral writer herself, but when Hardy established himself within the pastoral genre, especially in connection with the publication of *Far From the Madding Crowd*: "rumors and the early reviews of *Far from the Madding*

[28] J. Hillis Miller, "Nature and the Linguistic Moment," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C Knoepflmacher & G.B Tennyson (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1977), 441.

[29] From here on referred to by her pen name, George Eliot.

Crowd raise the question of the influence of Eliot on that novel".[30] Many critics have discussed Eliot's influences on Hardy's work and how he had emulated her narrative style.[31] However, as Jones Lawrence writes: "in retrospect, we can see that the most important effect George Eliot had (…) was on the nature and structure of its fictional world".[32] Thus, as *Far From the Madding Crowd* was compared by the audience to the work of Eliot, as the most prominent authors of pastoral novels in the nineteenth century, it became clear that Hardy's own work was also considered well within the pastoral design.

Hardy's use of motifs, symbolic references, and chapter titles in several of his novels show an insight into both the pastoral as a contemporary genre, as well as its historical foundation. One obvious example is chapter five in *Far From the Madding Crowd*: "Departure of Bathsheba: A pastoral tragedy". Hardy not only uses the word pastoral, but he does so as the title of the chapter about Farmer Oak's loss of most of his sheep; in other words: one shepherd, one pastoral.[33]

George H. Ford seems to have arrived at a similar conclusion as he discusses several of Hardy's novels and writes that "The changeless world of the homes and occupations of Hardy's Wessex rustics is pervasively pastoral".[34] However, also in line with my own argument, Ford claims that Hardy's pastoral is not as simple as it would appear at first glance and "too many readers miss the note of irony that undercuts Hardy's pastoralism".[35] Ford sees that Hardy is undermining the genre at the same time as he is writing within it. And yet, Ford stops short of analysing how deeply Hardy undercuts the genre, or how the heath stands out in

[30] Jones Lawrence, "George Eliot and Pastoral Tragicomedy in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*," *Studies in Philology* 77:4 (1980): 403.
[31] Michael Squires also compares several of Hardy's novels to several of George Elliot's: Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974).
[32] Lawrence, "Pastoral Tragicomedy," 403. Parenthesis my own.
[33] Ironically this creates a paradox, because as Oak loses his sheep he is no longer a shepherd (until he regains the position when he is hired by Bathsheba).
[34] George H. Ford, "The cottage Controversy," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C Knoepflmacher & G.B Tennyson (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1977), 39.
[35] Ford, "The cottage Controversy," 39.

comparison to other of Hardy's landscapes. This is a point to which I will return throughout the three chapters of this thesis. Nonetheless, *Return* is a pastoral novel also in perfect accordance with the expectations of the Victorian audience. It had to be in order to be published.

Audience and editors both valued Hardy's descriptions of rustic rural life, with their church choirs, May poles and dances. Paterson also claims that Hardy's own recognition of his skill as a pastoral writer is part of what led him to write *Return*: "Certainly, he could hardly have missed the point that his one serious deviation from the pastoral norm had been a disastrous one".[36] This reference to the failure of *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) shows that, in Paterson's opinion, Hardy's next novel, namely *Return*, was a return to his previously successful path of pastoral writing. I will argue that it is also a critique of the romanticizing elements within the genre, and that this critique is hidden within the framework of the genre in order to withstand the censorship of the publishing houses.

Further, that Hardy's novels were not unique to his century, as far as pastoral design goes, is evident in the criticism of, among others, Magowan as he traces the genre in two nineteenth century novels,[37] bringing out generic traits interesting in connection to *Return* as well. Magowan argues that the "pastoral as a form involves a recognition of limits – of space and time – within which that ideal of limited contentment which pastoral knows as the happy mean can be practically realized".[38] In his opening paragraph Hardy's narrator does just that; he establishes limits in place and time in which the rest of the narrative is contained, and within these limits Hardy's critique is constructed. And yet, several of his human characters, particularly Eustacia, do not respect these limits and seek to leave the heath if an opportunity

[36] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 4.
[37] Eugene Fromentin's novel, *Dominique* (1862), and the volume of Maine sketches that Sarah Orne Jewett collected as *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896): Magowan, "Pastoral Narrative," 331-337. Even though Fromentin was French, and Jewett American, the article by Magowan is important in that it discusses central elements of the pastoral genre that are not only relevant in relation to these two authors, but also in connection to Hardy and English Victorian pastoral.
[38] Magowan, "Pastoral Narrative," 333.

presents itself. Eustacia struggles against the limitations in time and space set up for her by Hardy, and for this she pays with her life.

Finally, Magowan goes on to discuss how the perfect pastoral image is created inside these boundaries and claims that if this fictional space is properly described the "details form the image of a world rich and satisfying, the perfect complement in space to the lives of the pastoral characters".[39] Hardy's characters, however, are not all pastoral. Jonathan Bate argues that Hardy "placed mobile new men and advanced ideas in opposition to rooted types and traditional ways. The irreconcilable clash between the forces of tradition and of innovation is at the core of his tragic vision".[40] This "irreconcilable clash'" supports my claim that Hardy has created a conflict between nature and civilization that can only lead to the destruction of those characters that do not recognize nature's intrinsic value. I do not agree with Bate, however, in his reference to the characters that represent tradition as mere "types".[41] Rather, the friction that arises when tradition is contrasted with civilization does not necessarily involve a "tragic vision", but a promotion of the values of those characters that relate more closely to nature than civilization. That this leads to the death of those that represent civilization is not tragic in Hardy's work; it is essential if uncultivated nature is to keep its intrinsic value.

Before I move on to examine the strand of ecocriticism most valuable to my analysis of *Return*, I will provide a short account of modern criticism of the pastoral genre in order to clarify my own position within it.

[39] Magowan, "Pastoral Narrative," 334.
[40] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London, Basingstoke & Oxford: Picador, 2000), 14.
[41] The reddleman, Diggory Venn, is an example of a character that represents traditional ways, and whose role has been diminished by critics. In chapter two I will argue that he has a much more central role in the novel than critics have credited him with.

Modern criticism of the Pastoral

Several modern critics of the pastoral have attempted to pin down the genre and make sense of it both within its historical context, but also as it would apply to the literature of today. For some of these critics the rural is not the only setting in which the pastoral can occur. As perhaps the most prominent twentieth century writer on the English pastoral, William Empson compares the pastoral to proletarian writing.[42] He compares the shepherd of the old pastoral to the factory worker and argues that the idealization of the hardships suffered in the countryside is comparable to the hardships suffered by the large working classes in the cities, the proletariat. In this way Empson loosens the boundaries of the pastoral genre and allows for the inclusion into the genre of texts that would not have fit the criteria established historically.

However, some critics have begun to question the generalized definitions of the pastoral genre put forth by both Empson and other critics writing as late as the 1970s. Magowan claims that Empson's analysis of the genre is too general and that the above mentioned inclusion of texts not normally to be found within the pastoral weakens the power of the genre. James Gindin makes a similar point about critic Michael Squires. He argues that Squires, in an attempt to loosely define the pastoral genre in order to make it applicable to novels that do not fit the old pastoral tradition of Theocritus, has instead eliminated the criteria that have historically defined the pastoral: "it becomes increasingly difficult to think of novels to which this definition, in one version or another, would not apply".[43] Since Empson's ground-breaking work there seems to be a trend among critics to move back to the more narrow definitions of the traditional pastoral genre. This does not mean that the pastoral of Theocritus is necessary for a text to fit the criteria of the genre, but rather that the traditions from the Renaissance and up through the Victorian period, the need for retreat from the city to the country side, are important.

[42] See William Empson, "Proletarian Literature," in *Some Versions of the Pastoral*, (London: Chatto &Windus, 1950), 3-23.
[43] James Gindin, "Tripartite Themes" *Studies in the Novel* 7:4 (1975): 585.

In relation to this thesis the question then becomes where to position my own work and thus establish some base on which to develop my analysis. Far from thinking it necessary for a shepherd to be present in order for the generic traits of the pastoral to be met, I am equally sceptical to Empson's position, which in my view is too inclusive. Rather, I would argue that for a novel, or any other literary work, to be a pastoral, there needs to be a clear presence not only of nature or a rural community, but of a connection or relationship between the two. For the genre to be applicable as a tool for literary analysis some meaningful affiliation, be that of an erotic, hostile, exploitative, or any other sort, between landscape and human characters, is necessary. This generally aligns with the Victorian conception of the pastoral in that rural landscape was portrayed as something those living in urban areas could reconnect with in order to escape the civilization of the city.

Finally, an understanding of the pastoral genre, both historically, in connection to Hardy, as well as the most recent trend within the pastoral criticism, is essential in order to grasp *Return* as a pastoral novel. However, establishing a foundation from which the analysis can be made is equally important to understand *Return* as a critique of the romanticizing elements of the genre. Thus, before ending with a brief overview of the chapters and arguments to come, I will now introduce ecocriticism and discuss how Arne Naess' deep ecology can provide an insight into a view on nature as something with independent and intrinsic value, and how this view can help elucidate Hardy's creation of landscape as a character in its own right.

Method

In order to support my thesis statement that *Return* was written as a promotion of a love of nature for nature's own sake, an ecocritical approach is useful. Though, as a critical field,

ecocriticism is considered to be very young,[44] ecologically conscious movements have existed for centuries. As a nature-conscious field, ecocriticism has developed to spread its focus within a range of different topics from literary analysis to the fight for animal rights. For the purpose of this thesis though, I will concern myself only with the term as it is applied to the field of literary criticism. So what is ecocriticism? What does an ecocritic do? And, what is nature to an ecocritic? It is important now to keep in mind that my study is of a novel published in 1878, and that many of the approaches that are useful in today's debates on pollution and human influences on the natural world, will be less relevant to support my reading of *Return*. Thus, as I answer the questions above my focus will be on ecocriticism as it is applicable to the relationship between human and non-human life in Hardy's own time.

First of all, what is ecocriticism? As a term, ecocriticism can be traced back to the late 1970s used mainly by a group interested in the literature of the American West. It was not until Cheryll Glotfelty "urged its adoption to refer to the diffuse critical field that had previously been known as 'the study of nature writing'" in 1989 that the term became more commonly used.[45] Whereas the American branch takes its literary bearings from writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry Davis Thoreau (1817-1862), the UK branch focuses on the British Romanticism of the 1790s.[46] Ecocriticism is difficult to define, but rests on the general assumption that nature is something specific, and unique in contrast to humanity, and that it is worth applying this belief to literary studies. Thus, in a critical field that "still does not have a widely-known set of assumptions, doctrines, or procedures",[47] maybe the more useful question is: what does an ecocritic do? To answer this question I have

[44] Critics vary in their dating of the critical field, but most agree that it is between 25 and 35 years old.
[45] Ecocriticism is a mainly American term, with "Green Studies" as its British equivalent: Peter Barry, "Ecocriticism," in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory,* ed. Peter Barry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 239.
[46] Barry, "Ecocriticism," 240-242.
[47] Barry, "Ecocriticism," 239.

made use of the several important points listed by Peter Barry, and looked at how my analysis complies with these points and makes this project an ecocritical reading. [48]

First of all, giving special attention to a writer who foregrounds nature as a major part of his subject matter is important in order to conduct an ecocritical reading. I have chosen one of Hardy's major novels, an important contribution to the Victorian pastoral genre, and a novel in which landscape plays a crucial role. Secondly, an ecocritic turns away from criticism focusing on "social constructivism" and "linguistic determinism". Many critics of Hardy's novels focus on the way his language creates a deterministic setting for his human characters, and on how social differences are constructed and influence the human character's lives. I, however, focus on landscape and how Hardy seeks to promote a love of nature for nature's own sake. When I do focus on Hardy's human characters this is only in relation to how they interact with the heath and how their relationships with nature affect their fates. And thirdly, ecocritics reread novels from an ecocentric perspective, with particular attention to its non-human characters. I am doing exactly that with my focus on Egdon Heath as opposed to its human counterparts. With nature as the focus of my analysis, what is nature to an ecocritic? As within any other field of criticism, nature means different things to different critics. For me it is what it was to Hardy, namely a natural landscape full of animals, insects, flowers and furze. What connects ecocritics, though, is the belief that "nature really exits, out there beyond ourselves, not needing to be ironised as a concept by enclosure within inverted commas, but actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it".[49] In relation to *Return* this definition needs the addition that nature can also fatally affect humans.

Hence, within the vast field of ecocriticism I had to search for the strand most useful to my analysis of *Return*. As ecocritics vary in where their focus lies, there were many options

[48] Barry, "Ecocriticism," 254-255.
[49] Barry, "Ecocriticism," 243.

available. What seems to connect most ecocritics though is that they analyse landscape, and the way authors write about landscape, as something either affecting mankind or being affected by mankind. While I too focus on landscape, for my reading of *Return* I needed an approach more focused on nature itself, as something independent of humans and with an intrinsic value not reliant upon how it can be useful for us. I found this approach in deep ecology.

As a philosophy, Norwegian Arne Naess developed one of the most influential strands within the field of ecocriticism, deep ecology. In his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1989) the "philosophical guru"[50] behind this position argues for a separation of deep ecology from what he calls shallow ecology. He makes a list of points on how the relationship between human and non-human life should be, of which he claims only the true and deep ecologist will be in agreement. Deep ecology is at its core a belief in a "shift from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values".[51] Naess argues that the vast majority of ecologists are only concerned with preservation of the environment as far as it is beneficial to humans. This movement is what he calls the shallow ecology movement. The deep ecologists, however, are more concerned with what Naess calls nature's intrinsic value, and that human life should thus not be valued above that of non-human life. [52] Importantly though, Naess specifically allows that "'vital' human need may take priority over the good of any other thing",[53] in this way removing some of the more problematic issues of his philosophy as they appear to his critics. In collaboration with George Sessions, Naess has developed a list of eight key points of deep ecology, one of which is particularly relevant in relation to *Return*: namely that "The flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth has intrinsic value. The

[50] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 23.
[51] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*. 24.
[52] Jonathan Bate also discusses the differences between shallow and deep ecologists (although he uses the terms light and dark green) and pinpoints some of the problems with the deep ecologists desire to "return to nature": Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 36-37.
[53] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 25.

value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes".[54] This belief in the value of nature is, what I will argue, the foundation for reading *Return* as Hardy's critique of romanticizing human exploitation of nature through cultivation.

Finally, what binds the philosophy of Arne Naess and the dominating role Hardy constructed for Egdon Heath together is the underlying element of the natural relationships between human and non-human life. That is, in nature there will always be a struggle between the various components of the food chain, and the strongest will survive. Whether the strongest is mankind when destroying a bacterial disease or killing a predator, or nature killing a human trying to tame it, the belief that these struggles are natural and that no one winner is more valuable than the other is essential in understanding Naess' deep ecology. In order to promote a love of nature for nature's own sake, Hardy created Egdon Heath – a character provided with enough agency to act on equal terms with its human inhabitants. This does not mean that the heath is more valuable than its human counterparts, but rather that Hardy gave nature agency, and thus opportunity, to level the playing field.

How does Hardy's construction of the heath, and its agency to affect his human characters, work to strengthen and validate an ecocritical reading of *Return*, leading to the argument that Hardy wrote the novel as critique against the romanticizing elements within the pastoral? How is Hardy's use of the pastoral genre, as a base for his critique, evident through the relationships he establishes between Egdon Heath and its human inhabitants? And, how does Hardy, by way of these relationships, bring his characters and readers closer to a love of nature, later identifiable in the philosophy of Arne Naess? The answers lie in Hardy's construction of characters, of which Egdon Heath is one, that represent such contrasting

[54] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Translated by David Rothenberg. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 29. Accessed April 1, 2015, http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780511525599

values as civilization and the rustic rural countryside to which the pastoral genre is a retreat. Through these representations Hardy's own ideal of the countryside becomes apparent. I now need to bring the formerly mentioned elements into an analysis of the relationships between Egdon Heath and Hardy's principle human characters.

My first chapter is about Egdon Heath. In this chapter I look at how Hardy has not only used personifications and the pathetic fallacy in order to give the heath some human characteristics, but that he has provided it with agency, establishing the heath as a character able to act for and upon itself and its human counterparts. I also make the argument that Hardy has at the same time created a landscape that in many ways bears resemblance to scenery in other pastoral novels, and made the heath into a closed-off space from which escape is impossible for its human inhabitants – it is with this mirroring his critique is constructed. In this analysis I depend mainly on close readings of Hardy's description of the heath to establish the connection between Egdon and some of its human inhabitants.

In chapter two Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn are the focus of the analysis. I will explore how these two characters are connected to the heath and how their true affection for nature leads to these characters working as Hardy's heroes. I also make the argument that the relationships between the heath, Clym, and Venn, leads to beneficial outcomes for the two characters in a variety of situations throughout the novel. Lastly, close attention will be given to the way the characters develop, as Clym moves from having a plan of civilizing his fellow heath-folk to a reconnection with nature, and Venn moves in the opposite direction ending as a rich dairy farmer.

With chapter three, the argument is introduced that the character that does not love the heath, Eustacia Vye, is punished because of it. Eustacia, as opposed to Clym and Venn, is not a native of Egdon. Though closely connected with the landscape she resides in, Eustacia hates the heath and wishes nothing more than to return to the civilization from which she came.

However, when she at last attempts to escape the rural world Hardy has created for her, she is killed. With Eustacia, Hardy created a character that views herself as more valuable than the heath, that values civilization above nature. When Hardy then denies Eustacia the possibility of escape to the city he denies a romanticized ending for the character that only values nature as far as it can be exploited.

Finally, in the words of Jonathan Bate, "Our instinct about Hardy is this: he values a world – for him vanishing, for us long vanished – in which people *live in rhythm with nature.*[55] In *Return* however, this rhythm has changed from being the farmer's ability to read the signs of a coming storm (as Farmer Oak does in *Far From the Madding Crowd*) to the need for a genuine love of nature for its own sake in order to survive in it. In *Return* it is not enough for the country folk to appreciate nature for its ability to provide food or income, as it normally is within the pastoral tradition. The dwellers of the heath have to adapt to nature's own rhythm and appreciate its intrinsic value; when its inhabitants lose sight of nature's importance the heath reminds them by way of punishment, as when Clym takes on extensive studies, a value belonging to civilization, and is punished by the loss of his eye sight. Clym only achieves true happiness when not only his body, but his heart, fully returns to his native heath. Thus, in *Return* a rustic portrayal of life in the countryside is no longer enough: from people *living in rhythm with nature Return* moves to people *succumbing to nature's rhythm*. Egdon Heath is in control from the very first sentence of the novel.

[55] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 3.

Egdon Heath

Already in the opening passage of *The Return of the Native*, Hardy immediately creates, through his narrator, an anchoring in time and place essential for the rest of the novel.

> A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.[56]

"A Saturday afternoon in November" is not only the subject in this first sentence, but also a very specific time frame that is only slightly disrupted by that afternoon's "approaching the time of twilight".[57] And yet, where time is clearly framed, Hardy's formation of place is quite vague; a "vast tract of unenclosed wild" denotes a feeling of something never-ending, something without limits. There are no physical borders to the heath thus far in Hardy's description. This strengthens his use of the word "wild", suggesting an entity too powerful for man-made fences. In his reading of the opening J. Hillis Miller supports this claim as he indicates that "man had not yet evolved to become conscious of the scene and so bring suffering to the world".[58] Thus Egdon Heath is established as capable of existing independent of humanity. And yet, although the heath might work independently at this point, it is nonetheless watched, its presence is felt and commented on by the ever-present narrator.

Although "A Saturday afternoon in November" is the first grammatical subject of the sentence, Egdon Heath is the first thematic subject of the novel, and is capable of embrowning "itself moment by moment" – it has agency, and due to this ability to act, the heath seems to function as a character. This reading disputes Miller's argument that using

[56] Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9. All the subsequent references to *Return* will be made from the same addition and will therefore be marked in the text only by pagination.
[57] J. Hillis Miller wrote his book *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* based on, among other things, the assumption that for Hardy "time is an illusion" and that "any event is a repetition of similar events which have already occurred over and over in history and will occur innumerable times again". It is therefore interesting that Hardy anchors time so specifically in his opening paragraph of *Return* as the time of day and year should not, at least by Miller's definition, be at all influential to the events to come: J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), xi.
[58] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 88.

personification to claim that the heath is a character is the "wrong way to put it".[59] Although I do agree that not all personifications make landscape into a character, in the case of Egdon this argument has merit. Through the wording in the opening paragraph the heath is made into an agent, and as such it has the ability to act both for and upon itself. That an area of "unenclosed wild" is capable of doing anything to itself not only makes it an agent, but it also establishes a form of autonomy that Hardy makes use of in various scenes throughout the novel.[60] However, making the heath an agent, and thereby an active character in the novel, is not the only important foundation laid in this sentence.

The heath "embrowned itself moment by moment", and thus literally makes itself browner and browner. In the northern parts of the world, trees, grass and other greenery become brown every autumn. In this way there is nothing particular about the heath turning brown. What does make it peculiar though is that the process Hardy describes can be read as the heath making itself darker and ready for nightfall – making itself ready for all the scenes to come in which the heath lies in darkness as the human characters seduce each other, gamble and die on it. Although "approaching the time of twilight" happens gradually and might be said to involve several moments, it is still only a matter of hours. That the act of turning brown happens "moment by moment" provides the reader with a specific time of both season and hour. It brings him into that darkening afternoon, and in this way reinforces the sense of being in the specific moment set in the opening sentence. Eithne Henson also claims that the heath has "power over apparent time",[61] and that it uses this power, among other things, to play with light in order to instil various feelings in its human inhabitants. In Henson's description of this power lies what I call agency: "The emotions the heath can generate presuppose a human who feels them, and by implication, some will to act on sentient

[59] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 87.
[60] References to specific passages will be made throughout both this and the two subsequent chapters.
[61] Eithne Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series: Landscape and Gender in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy: The Body of Nature*, (Farnham, Surrey, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011), 146.

humans".[62] Already in the first sentence of the novel, Hardy has, through the narrator, constructed a setting in which the heath is at its most powerful, the heath is established as an agent with the ability to act on and for itself – the heath is in control.

In the second sentence the place within which the human characters are bound is fixed. After having established time and place, Hardy moves on to provide a more specific description: "the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky" gives the reader the feeling that the sky is out of reach for those that inhabit Egdon Heath. The clouds are, however, hollow and provide the feeling that they might at some point be penetrable. But, as the clouds that are "shutting out the sky", make a roof compared to that of a tent, this ambition is hindered. This design is further elaborated on as "the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor". Through the use of the simile "as a tent" Hardy makes Egdon Heath into an enclosed place from which there can be no escape for his human characters. Or, in Leonard W. Deen's words "[t]he human involvement in the round of existence is inexorable, and all visions of freedom or of paradise are denied".[63] Egdon Heath has been changed from something endless, denoting freedom, into a very specific place within the walls of a kind of tent. The function of Egdon Heath, both as an agent for Hardy's critique of the pastoral and as a limiting setting for the human characters, is determined. After centuries of lying dormant, as a result of the industrial revolution and mankind's response to it, the heath is waking up. Within just a few pages Hardy has created a starting point from which the role of Egdon Heath throughout the novel is established. This is not to say that the first chapter is sufficient to base a reading of the entire novel on, but merely that it sets the tone and introduces the heath as a powerful presence. Hardy suggests to the reader the possibility that this stretch of land might be more than mere setting, more than a mere backdrop for the human characters to come.

[62] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 146.
[63] Leonard W. Deen, "Heroism and Pathos in Hardy's *Return of the Native*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 15: 3 (1960): 209-210.

With this in mind I will now follow up, and explore whether there is evidence to support my reading that the heath works as an agent in Hardy's critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral genre. In order to do that I will investigate the ways in which personification and agency are used to make the heath into a character, as well as how this character functions in relation to the human characters of the novel. I argue that the novel contains features of the genre it is meant to criticise, and that this, as well as Hardy's choice to place many of the most important scenes of the plot at night, strengthen his critique.

The critical field on *Return* is not in agreement as to whether or not Hardy has made Egdon Heath a character in the novel. Since the 1970s J. Hillis Miller has been one of the most prominent Hardy critics, writing extensively on Hardy's use of language, his construction of characters, as well as his treatment of nature. Miller does not agree that the heath is a character, but rather that Hardy's language is ridden with descriptions such as personification.[64] In my reading, however, Hardy has given the heath agency to act both for and upon itself. It is this trait, and not only the elaborate use of personification, that I will claim establishes the heath as a character and makes it Hardy's most important tool in his critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral. Many novelists writing in the pastoral tradition have created landscapes packed with personifications, allusions to gender, as well as relationships with the human characters that inhabit them. Hardy, as I will argue, has written a protest against the pastoral treatment of nature: that is, it is a protest against romanticizing human exploitation of non-human nature, which should be valued equally and independent of human interests. How, then, does the way Hardy writes Egdon break with the pastoral? In what way is the heath, with all the personifications and relationships with its inhabitants, different from the typical pastoral landscape that thrives under cultivation?

[64] Miller, *Thomas Hardy,* and "Topography".

Decades before Hardy wrote, the industrial revolution had gradually enabled humans to control nature in a way not previously possible, changing both the general population's, as well as authors', attitudes towards it. Henson writes:

> [T]he increasing industrialization of England, the railways, the mechanization of agriculture, changes in aesthetic and scientific approaches to countryside, as well as the wider issues of empire, and definitions of Englishness, mean that the realist nineteenth-century novel reflects attitudes to landscape that differ, while developing from, those of their predecessors.[65]

With this change, and increasing control, fear of wild nature diminished, creating instead an appreciation for nature as a refuge from the busy and dirty cities. Or, in the words of Keith Thomas: "[t]he growth in towns had led to a new longing for the countryside. The progress of cultivation had fostered a taste for weeds, mountains and unsubdued nature".[66] The human conquest of nature generated a longing for the past, for untouched nature. In the pastoral genre this past is idealised, and a setting is created in which the farmer is romanticized at nature's expense.

In this chapter I will discuss the role of Egdon Heath in Hardy's critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral genre. My argument is that Hardy's critique is directed against a naïve romantic view on cultivation. I do not make the claim that he protested the genre as such, but rather that he used certain elements of the genre in order to prove his point that nature should be valued for its own sake, as opposed to for what can be done with it through human development. First of all, a discussion on Hardy's choice of making the heath a character is important. Is it a character? If so, how? And, why is the role of Egdon Heath relevant to Hardy's critique of the pastoral? I will begin by providing a theoretical framework for "nature as character" which I will then go on to discuss in relation to the heath.

[65] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 4.
[66] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 301.

Nature as Character

Through the creation of a landscape that not only serves as setting, but is given human-like character traits, Hardy has given nature a voice of its own. Essential to Hardy's protest against the idealization of the pastoral is the way in which Egdon Heath functions as a character. Although I claim that the agency Hardy provided the heath with is just as important as personification, Tylor E.B argues that personification is a response to a belief that all nature is animate: "the belief in the animation of all nature, [rises] at its highest pitch to personification".[67] Though Tylor makes this point concerning the novel as such, it is nonetheless an interesting point in relation to *Return* in particular. The first chapter of the novel is a three and a half page long description of Egdon Heath ridden with personification such as "The storm was its lover; and the wind was its friend" (11), thus providing the heath with characteristics normally reserved for human characters. Also, personification is a common trait of the pastoral, and Hardy has made his critique of it all the more powerful through establishing this link to the genre.

And yet, personification is not the only way to create a character. The heath has agency to act for and upon itself and it is this quality, more than any other, that makes it unique in terms of independence, and that separates it from the landscapes of the pastoral. Henson makes a similar claim towards the heath's independence:

> No other landscape in the novels I am considering[68] exists so independently or is so insistently and in such varied ways seen to have a life of its own, quite apart from the physical and psychological effects it has on its inhabitants.[69]

With this comment Henson establishes the uniqueness of Egdon Heath in comparison with landscapes in several other pastoral novels, a list that also includes Hardy's own *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a point to which I will return. However, although the heath might work

[67] E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (New York: Henry Holt, 1871. vol.1), 258.
[68] As the title of her book indicates the novels she compares are, among others, *Jane Eyre*, *The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch*, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*.
[69] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 147.

independently of the human characters, they are not always independent of it. The human characters are closely linked to the heath and are influenced by it both in their lives and their deaths: "The characters in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (…) cannot be dissociated from the personification of nature".[70] In this way Hardy has turned the pastoral tables and made landscape more independent and able to assert more power than its human counterparts.

In order to get a better understanding of how these various personifications work they need to be discussed in terms of how they establish the heath as a character, and how this supports Hardy's critique of the pastoral. I will now discuss the heath's connection to the "nature as character" theory as well as have a look at how other Hardy critics view this particular element in *Return*.

Establishing Egdon Heath as a character in *Return* is vital to reading the novel as a critique against the pastoral. The personifications of Egdon throughout *Return* provide evidence to this reading, and support my argument that the heath is given agency as well as the role of a character. The heath is not mere setting – it is the novel's most important character. J. Hillis Miller, however, argues in a slightly different direction as he claims that the personification of Egdon Heath at the opening of the novel "seems to be the reflex of the narrator's personality, projected on the landscape".[71] I would agree that the narrator is indeed very much present in the novel's first chapter, and that as it is through his eyes that we first encounter the heath, it is a logical conclusion to draw that some of the narrator's sentiments will be projected in the way the heath is described. And yet, the narrator is not the authority here, Hardy is. I contend that the personifications of Egdon throughout the first chapter, as well as the rest of the novel, should be regarded as Hardy's work, however important the voice of the narrator may be. Hardy's narrator then continues his description of the heath in vivid detail throughout the first chapter, thus further elaborating on his "personal views" of

[70] Satoshi Nishimura, "Thomas Hardy and the Language of the Inanimate," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 43:4 (2003): 910.
[71] J. Hillis Miller, "Topography in *The Return of the Native*," *ELWIU* 8:2 (1981): 126.

the heath. It is not until the second chapter that human characters are introduced, "hand in hand with trouble" (13). In this way the narrator has established not only his views of the heath, but also of those human characters that enter it. Thus, within the first few pages of the novel Hardy's foundation for his further critique is laid.

Further, that the personifications of Egdon are, in the words of Miller, "projected into nature by man's presence in the world"[72] does not disqualify the heath as a character. Hardy's critique of the pastoral is not a critique of the existence of humanity. Rather, I would agree with Miller in his interpretation that in the interplay between a detached spectator and the heath "man becomes conscious for nature rather than imposing one of his own patterns on it".[73] I further agree that this does to a certain degree make the heath mute were it not for the presence of mankind, but it does not make it any less of a character as Miller would claim. The human characters of *Return*, as well as any other novel, also need something or someone observing them in order to be brought to life. Neither Clym, Eustacia nor any other inhabitant of the heath would be heard or watched if Hardy had not created a narrator as well as other characters to observe them. That the heath depends upon the human characters in order to be observed does not make it passive. The heath is an active entity. It is an agent, and as such it acts not only for and upon itself; it acts upon the human characters. The landscape Eustacia walks through is itself active: "[a] bramble caught hold of her skirt, and checked her progress. Instead of putting it off and hastening along she yielded herself up to the pull" (57). Thus the heath is not only given life through descriptions such as personifications. Hardy has given it the power to physically hinder Eustacia's progress, which begs the question whether it should not then be considered active enough to also facilitate other physical circumstances?

What is more, the language Hardy uses in certain passages further establishes the heath's agency. The heath is not mere setting given human qualities in order to assert more

[72] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 89-90.
[73] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 90.

relevance to its role in the novel, it is described in accordance with humanity itself: "It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame" (11). Although the heath is old beyond centuries, at present it is like humankind itself. It is not given characteristics for either good or bad. It is equated with humanity and is as such complex.

Also in accordance with humanity, the heath has a voice. This is a shift in Hardy's focus from his human characters in previous novels, to landscape in *Return*, illustrated clearly with the change of focal point between his descriptions of sound in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Return*. As the wind sweeps across the landscape in *Far from the Madding Crowd* new notes are struck, notes that "had a clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature. They were the notes of Farmer Oak's flute".[74] In *Return*, however, it is not the farmer's, or any other human character's, sound that is important: Following a detailed description of the sounds of the wind moving across the heath, another sound – "far more impressive than either" chimes in; "[i]n it lay what may be called the linguistic peculiarity of the heath"(55). The wind, however, also has a voice: "Treble, tenor and bass notes were to be found therein"(55). But this voice is not as impressive as that of the heath itself and is not given the same relevance in terms of the impact it makes on the human on the scene, namely Eustacia: to her "that note bore a great resemblance to the ruins of human song"(55). Thus, this is not only personification, but it gives the heath a voice, a language – something that in turn makes it even more like a character than both the wind, and even the heath itself in earlier passages of a similar kind.

[74] Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (London: Penguin group, 2003), 9.

Hardy's Landscape in Context

In terms of my discussion on the role of Egdon in Hardy's critique of the pastoral a more elaborate discussion of *Return* in context, both in Hardy's authorship and within the pastoral genre, is important. Hardy has established the heath as a character, and with the creation of Egdon he constructed a landscape much less predictable than the nature we see both in former novels and his short stories set in Wessex.[75] Richard Benvenuto compares *Return* with Hardy's first major "Wessex" novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when he discusses the difference between the unruly heath in the former and the cultivated, easily interpreted farmland in the latter. He compares two of the characters that are most connected to nature and claims that even though "Clym is just as close to nature and just as responsive to it as Oak was, [but] his heath differs from Weatherbury Farm in the way a blank stone differs from a tablet of hieroglyphs".[76] Also, the ways in which the inhabitants of Egdon respond to the heath are different from this connection in many of Hardy's other works. Although different characters relate to nature in different ways, in *Return* this is taken much further: "It becomes what different people make it – a hostile prison for Eustacia, liberation for Clym".[77] In this way the heath is not merely a character itself, but also a projection against which the human characters are seen more clearly.

Benvenuto further claims that whereas nature in *Far from the Madding Crowd* enables Oak to read "between the lines of nature's message"; in *Return* "nature is illegible".[78] Although there is some merit in the claim that the heath is not readable in the way that Oak reads his surrounding in order to predict the storm, the heath is not simply "illegible". As the heath is a character in its own right the argument can be made that it is readable in the same

[75] Even though Egdon Heath is based on a landscape indigenous to the area Hardy named "Wessex" it is not one particular stretch of land and as such is, if only partly, fictional.
[76] Richard Benvenuto, "*The Return of the Native* as a Tragedy in Six Books," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 26:1 (1971): 85.
[77] Benvenuto, "*Return* as a Tragedy", 86.
[78] Benvenuto, "*Return* as a Tragedy", 86.

ways that its human counterparts are; when the heath wants to be read it can be, and when it wants to hide its intent, it does.

This difference in landscape from stories written both before and after *Return* makes it clear that the heath was not chosen because it is the only type of landscape to be found in the "Wessex" area. Hardy wrote several novels and short stories set in the proximity of the heath that do not contain nature that bears any resemblance to Egdon.[79] It is therefore safe to assume that Egdon was chosen for purposes beyond realistic portrayal of landscape. My argument is that in order to criticise the romanticizing elements of the pastoral, while making use of some of its generic traits, it is vital to also break with it in some ways. Through the use of the heath Hardy has created a landscape both powerful ("The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim"(12)), and yet vulnerable ("Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter"(10)). In this way nature is made into something that at the same time can stand against its enemies but that is also vulnerable to change. The heath will not perish, but its "exclusive reign" is in danger as it might be forced to coexist with the cultivator. Hardy's critique is not against forces of cultivation approaching in the future; it is against a glorification of those already there. In order to make such a critique convincing the heath needs to be vulnerable for the reader to see what is at stake. The most effective way to do that is to make the heath into something almost human, to make it a character.

Although the pastoral genre focuses on landscape, the heath and the traditional pastoral landscapes serve different purposes. Whereas Hardy has created a wild nature that does not accept cultivation, but rather is a crucial part of the deaths of those that represent civilization, the pastoral nature works in the opposite way: it is there to serve the cultivator. Discussing one of the great American pastoral novels, Willa Cather's *O´Pioneers,* Sarah

[79] *The Major of Casterbridge, Far from the Madding Crowd, Under the Greewood Tree,* and *The Distracted Preacher,* to name a few.

Farris argues that the pastoral setting is "a feminized wilderness" that in time succumbs to human efforts of cultivation, changes and becomes "no longer a character but a property".[80] As opposed to this landscape that "yields itself eagerly to the plow"[81] Egdon Heath is a wasteland almost impossible to cultivate beyond the little gardens its inhabitants keep: "Not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil. In the heath's barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration because there had been no tending" (20). The cultivating so vital to the farmer in the pastoral is refused by the heath. But, whereas an absence of "tending" in the pastoral would render the soil, and thereby nature, without value, this is not the case for Hardy's heath. In *Return*'s first chapter the heath's intrinsic value is clearly presented. It is a force more ancient than the sea, it has been there before humanity and it will remain there after humanity is gone. Thus, the value of the heath is, just like all nature for Arne Naess, "independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes".[82] This is what separates it from the landscape we see in the traditional pastoral. In the pastoral, nature is there to provide for the farmer and his family; it is fenced in. It is a property. Egdon, on the other hand, is not property but an agent that can act for and upon itself. It is in no need of a farmer.

Nor is the heath feminized, as Farris argues is of major importance to the land of the American pastoral.[83] But, as Annette Kolodny states, the discussion frequently found with regards to the American pastoral of the land as feminized does not apply to the British version of the genre: "when America finally produced a pastoral literature of her own, that literature hailed the essential femininity of the terrain in a way European pastoral never had".[84] Further, Miller reads Egdon as "neither male nor female but beyond sexual difference" which in turn

[80] Sarah Farris, "American Pastoral in the Twentieth Century: *O Pioneers!*, *A Thousand Acres*, and *Merry Men*." *ISLE* 5.1 (1998): 31.
[81] Willa Cather, *O´Pioneers* (New York: Dover Publications, INC. 1993), 29.
[82] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 29.
[83] Henson claims that "The earth as 'Mother Nature', the source of life and fertility, described in more or less explicit terms, is such a commonplace that it becomes invisible: Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 144.
[84] Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6.

makes it more independent from the cultivator so closely linked to his or her land in the pastoral.[85] But, it also makes it less humanized. The way the American pastoral sometimes treats landscape as something so sexualized that it is read as the farmer's lover establishes a connection to humanity that nature "beyond sexual difference" might not be capable of. However, Eithne Henson offers a different view in her discussion on *Return* where she claims that "this unchanging landscape assumes a life of its own, whose persona is, in the main, masculine".[86] Henson's reading of the heath as masculine helps support my argument that it is a character in the way that it makes it a "persona". This does not mean that I read Egdon as the lover of any of the female characters. In my opinion there is neither merit in the text for such a reading, nor are any of the women on the heath cultivators in any way that would provide them with the same kind of role that the farmers in the American pastoral have.

Although many of the characteristics of the American and English versions of the pastoral genre are similar, some of the differences are vital: The move across the Prairie and the rights to ownership, in accordance with "Manifest Destiny", makes the American farmer's claims to the land fundamentally different from the rights felt by a farmer in a country where all land was owned by the Crown.[87] Care should therefore be made in giving the comparison too much weight. Nonetheless, both the American and the British versions of the pastoral contain cultivation as a trope, and the plough would therefore be a valid symbol for comparison on both sides of the Atlantic. Then, how does the heath relate to symbols of civilization other than the plough?

[85] Miller, "Topography", 125.
[86] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 144.
[87] Partly due to the various Enclosure Acts that benefitted landowners at the expense of the larger poor rural population: Paul Poplawski, ed., *English Literature in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 315.

The Heath and Civilization

The narrator describes the heath as an entity that for centuries has come to life at night when "other things sank brooding to sleep" (9-10). It did not concern itself with the problems of the world, not until civilization made its appearance:

> Every night its Titanic form[88] seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis – the final Overthrow (10).

Through this build-up the narrator informs the reader that the reign of Egdon Heath, of nature, might be coming to an end as "humanity appears upon the scene" (13). The phrase "of so many things" implies that the former crises have not been connected to humanity, something the approaching crisis will. It also creates a distance which indicates that the crises so far have not really concerned the heath as such, a distance which is destroyed by the phrase "the final Overthrow". This wording brings the final crisis to the heath itself. The capitalization of "Overthrow" indicates that the coming crisis is far more dangerous than anything the heath has faced during the centuries, it even hints at its downfall – a downfall the narrator clearly implies when he questions whether the heath's survival "is not approaching its last quarter"(10). Further, the narrator continues his description of Egdon Heath the next two pages until the title of the subsequent chapter, "Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble", introduces the source of the coming crisis as humanity is described as entering the scene "hand in hand with trouble"(13). This title creates an association, as well as a link back to the statement about the heath that "Civilization was its enemy" (11). Thus the narrator immediately establishes a connection between humanity and civilization, in which it is made clear that the narrator is partial to the heath and what it represents.

However, as Miller discusses Hardy's intentions with *Return* he claims that Hardy "never doubts that it is the presence of man which gives interest and meaning to nature".[89]

[88] This reference to Greek mythology will be commented upon in connection with Eustacia in chapter three.
[89] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 92.

This interpretation of Hardy seems to confirm my claim that he seeks to promote a love of nature for nature's own sake. Although it might not immediately seem so, as Miller's claim is that nature is given no value without the presence of humanity. Yet this is not to say that humanity is given a higher value than nature or that Hardy gives humans precedence for exploitation. On the contrary, that "Hardy's subject is never man alone or nature alone, but always man in nature"[90] strengthens my claim that man and nature are equal for Hardy and that although nature seems less valuable without human presence, humanity is also less valuable without nature. Thus, the Victorian pastoral that is only interested in nature as far as it can serve human needs has no place in *Return*. Nature is not alone, but it has intrinsic value.

Further, the heath is itself not completely without signs of civilization. That civilization is its proclaimed enemy (11) at the very least indicates some kind of contact: "The old Roman road in *The Return of the Native* is traced as a kind of inscription across the timeless countenance of Egdon heath".[91] The fact that a road can cut through Egdon in a way not natural to the heath, but practical for the humans that made it, is significant in that it shows the reader that civilization is indeed capable of overcoming the wild nature of the heath. But the Romans are not still there, the heath is. The road is a sign of an old civilization that has at one time been present in Egdon, but has been overcome and is no longer: the road, and blackbarrow, have been "almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance" (12) indicating that after the Romans left no real civilization has come to keep the road, and it has almost returned to its natural state of heath. Egdon has won against civilization in the past, making it at the same time more ready and more vulnerable for yet another struggle.

Further, the toll is heavy on the inhabitants of the heath in the few cases where they have attempted, and accomplished, cultivation. As Henson puts it "[t]he heath has been the enemy of civilization; 'Wildeve's Patch' has challenged it, and its history has been

[90] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 92.
[91] Miller, *Thomas Hardy*, 266.

disastrous".[92] The heath does not want to be cultivated. Even though in time it gives way to the humans that seek to put it "under the plough", this achievement nonetheless comes at a grave price.

> She first reached Wildeve's Patch, as it was called, a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be broken up died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before (39).

Henson further claims that "[i]n another plot, this could have been the prelude to a successful creation of fruitfulness, but the novel insistently denies the possibility of fecundity to anything but the heath's own animal denizens".[93] In other words, Hardy uses Wildeve's Patch to firmly anchor the heath's position as his agent in his critique against the romanticized success story it could have been in the pastoral. One by one the men that try to cultivate the heath die from the exhausting effort. This is no normal tract of land; it will not succumb to human efforts, not even Wildeve's. That this character ends up owning the patch only further supports Hardy's critique. The heath is not, unlike the land in the pastoral, a property. Thus, Wildeve's ownership of it can only be a temporary condition. The heath will reclaim itself. The descriptions of the fates that have befallen "those who had gone before" Wildeve certainly foreshadows his own ending. Henson offers the similar conclusion that "Wildeve's end could be a fitting punishment, in the tragic economy of the heath, for his hubris in maintaining the enclosure".[94] It is almost inevitable that Wildeve must, like those before him, pay with his life for his part in the attempt to cultivate. Hardy is strengthening his critique of the romanticizing of cultivation within the pastoral genre through punishing those that attempt this cultivation. Nature, be it landscape, animals, birds or insects, should, in the words of Arne Naess be appreciated "independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes".[95]

[92] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 152.
[93] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 152.
[94] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 152.
[95] Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 29

The Power of Darkness

Having discussed Egdon Heath as a character both in *Return* and in a wider context, as well as its connection to civilization, I now turn to a different issue. Many of *Return*'s most important scenes are set at night when the heath is covered in darkness. Why is this? And what does the focus on darkness and night-time have to do with Hardy's critique of the pastoral?

From the onset Hardy, by way of his narrator, implies the importance of the heath's power in the dark as it not only has the ability to make itself dark through "embrowning", but is also described as encompassing a more complete darkness than the night (54). Further, it is "precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time"(9). The heath grows stronger in the dark, something that adds an additional layer to Hardy's critique of the pastoral; in the traditional pastoral the land will be at its most powerful when the sun shines upon it and it is ripe for cultivation. Not so with Egdon. At night the farmer is asleep and there can be no sowing, no harvesting and thus no exploitation of the land.

Towards the end of the novel, however, in book six, Benvenuto claims, "Egdon Heath loses its near relationship to night for a brighter, almost civilized aspect".[96] That the heath turning light is equated with it becoming more civilized supports my claim that the heath is at its strongest when it is in darkness. It is civilization that needs light, whether natural or artificial, to be fully functional. Wild nature, on the other hand, thrives in the dark. Hence, the pastoral farmer that represents cultivation and thereby a form of civilization loses its powers over nature at night. Also, the heath is darker than even the night itself and through embrowning it is able to discourage the furze-cutter from continuing his work: "Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work: looking down, he would

[96] Benvenuto, "*Return* as a Tragedy", 90. The book discussed here, book six, is the book Hardy altered in order to satisfy a larger audience and in terms of analysing the effects of darkness it is less relevant to the larger argument than the previous five books.

have decided to finish his faggot and go home"(9). Now, this furze-cutter is not the focus of Hardy's critique, as he merely cuts wild furze that easily grows back and is thus no cultivator.[97] Nonetheless, there is no reason why the darkness that interrupts the work of a furze-cutter would not have the same effect on a farmer. The agency Hardy gives Egdon to be able to embrown itself thus supports my claim that the heath is in control the way nature can only be if it is a character.

Further, David Sweeney Coombs makes the claim that Hardy focuses on darkness in order to make full use of senses other than vision: "I aim to correct the tendency in much scholarly work on Hardy to ascribe importance to the faculty of vision"[98] he writes, and working through many of Hardy's own notes and comments he arrives at the conclusion that Hardy wanted his readers to work in collaboration with the author when "the author's vision has in fact 'half elude[d] him'".[99] Although Coombs makes no direct references to the scenes in the novel in which the heath itself is dark, his reading is still valuable to my point: When the heath is covered in darkness the other characters' true characteristics are revealed and those that connect with the wild nature of the heath are those that are most at ease in it.[100] One prominent example of this is the scene where Wildeve and Venn play their game of dice. Wildeve grows more uncomfortable as the night grows darker and it becomes obvious that the game is against him. When his lantern goes out he is forced to collect glowworms in order to cast some light on the dice, and once again he has lost. Throughout the game Wildeve is annoyed at the animals and insects that surround the two, and the second time heathcroppers arrive at the scene Wildeve throws a stone at them and exclaims: "What a plague those creatures are – staring so!"(228). Venn wins all the money Wildeve is holding for Clym and

[97] This point and its significance to the relationship between Clym and the heath will be further elaborated on in chapter two.
[98] David Sweeney Coombs, "Reading in the Dark: Sensory Perception and Agency in *The Return of the Native*," *ELH* 78:4 (2011): 946.
[99] Coombs, "Reading in the Dark", 946.
[100] Eustacia Vye is an example to the contrary. She represents civilisation and yet is very comfortable wandering the heath at night. Although a mention of her relationship with darkness will be made here, her character as such will be discussed at greater length in the third chapter.

Thomasin, and Wildeve has no choice but to return home penniless. Wildeve is not comfortable when the animals of the heath come too close, he thinks they are "a plague". The only creatures of the heath he can stand are the glowworms. In this way Wildeve's actions during the game seem to be exactly what Hardy's critique is directed against: the only things in nature Wildeve appreciates are those that can be of use to him, those that can be exploited for his own personal gain. Thus, when it becomes clear that Wildeve has lost the game after all, the reader is informed that this exploitative view on nature is not what Hardy wants. The character that loves the heath, and its creatures, for their own sake wins the game.

What is more, the initial description of the heath speaks directly to the abovementioned awakening of the other senses: "The place became full of a watchful intentness now. When other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen"(9-10). The heath is watchful. One possible interpretation of this is to read it in connection with Sara Malton's argument that "*The Return of the Native* exhibits an obsessive preoccupation with 'constant visibility'".[101] Observation is a major theme in the novel and the most important scenes are either watched by some combination of the heath and the narrator, or built through a focus on a character or the heath as they watch some part of the plot.[102] Although it is not within the scope of my argumentation to discuss observation at length, the way the heath watches, and how this affects its role in the novel, is important to my reading

The heath watches with its senses. It listens. Being comfortable in the dark enables one to feel things one does not feel in the light of day. This characteristic applies several of Hardy's characters. Clym Yeobright, the name itself indicating a connection to light, has his eye-sight destroyed by the bright light he studies in. It is thereby also a contrast to darkness, an Clym loses his eye-sight due to his extensive reading: "At every new attempt to look about

[101] Sara A. Malton, "The Woman Shall Bear her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*," *Studies in the Novel* 32: 2 (2000): 149.
[102] Norman Page agrees that "(t)his method of presenting a scene through an observer's eyes is widespread in the Wessex novels": Page, *Thomas Hardy*, 81.

him the same morbid sensibility to light was manifested" (241). Clym reads at night, when the heath is at its most powerful. This destroys his eye-sight, but not his other senses. In the dark Clym has to put away his books and feel what he could earlier ignore. He stops every attempt at bringing civilization to Egdon, makes the final break with his luxurious wife and takes up furze-cutting. In short, he reconnects with the heath and finds his greatest happiness.[103]

Throughout this chapter I have drawn on the "nature as character" theory in order to shed light on both how Egdon is given its characteristics and why this is important to Hardy's critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral. The heath has then been discussed in connection both to civilization and its connections to other characters in the novel. That Egdon Heath is a character in the novel is important to my overall argument for two important reasons.

First of all, it supports my claim that Hardy was critical of cultivation as he created a leading character of nature and, through his narrator, gives it control of many of the important scenes throughout the novel. Though nature is an important feature in many of Hardy's Wessex stories it is never before *Return* given such power to influence the human characters. Through making use of several of the common traits of the pastoral genre, such as a rural setting that provides a clear contrast to life in the city (Budmouth and Paris), personification of nature, as well as human characters that struggle to cultivate, Hardy has strengthened his critique. Mirroring what he criticises makes the critique simultaneously more discreet and more compelling. In order to criticize how the pastoral romanticizes cultivation, Hardy's own vision of rural life needs to be presented.

Second of all the various tragic events faced by Clym, Eustacia, Wildeve and the others in Egdon are faced with, are in my reading results of their actions towards, and

[103] Chapter two holds a more extensive discussion on Clym, his sudden blindness and his attempts at becoming a school-master.

relationships with, the heath. Margaret R. Higonnet also makes this point that the fates of the characters are in direct connection to their relationships with the heath. In her introduction to *Return* she writes:

> Counterbalancing the many uncertainties of the novel, the heath serves as a touchstone for each of the characters. While the Yeobright cousins are natives who love the heath, their partners Eustacia and Wildeve are both outsiders who hate it and long to leave, at any cost. Relations to the heath thus set one of the terms of conflict to come.[104]

That the heath works as a character in the novel is the foundation for this reading and at the same time it diminishes the elements of both chaos and predetermination from the novel. Were the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve coincidences in a novel where everything was left up to chance, or chaos, their connections with the heath would have been without meaning to that particular event. That same argument would also be valid if an element of determination existed to rule the fates of the human characters. What I claim, on the other hand, is that the outcome of several vital scenes throughout the novel is determined by what kind of relationships the characters have with the heath, with nature. Those that represent civilization and thereby seek to exploit nature to their own advantages perish and those that do not attempt to cultivate but rather love nature for nature's own sake survive.

Having thus established Egdon Heath as a character as well as being an active agent in Hardy's critique, I will move on to discuss Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn – two very different characters with one very important role to play.

[104] Margaret R. Higonett, Introduction to *The Return of the Native* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii.

The Heath's Heroes

> If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product (171).

If Egdon Heath can be said to be a character in its own right,[105] the other principle characters of the novel should now also be incorporated into the discussion on what I argue is Hardy's critique of the romanticized view on cultivation that reoccur in some definitions of the pastoral.[106] To strengthen his critique Hardy has created two characters, in addition to the heath itself, that serve as his heroes and that work together with the heath in order to emphasise a love of wild nature at the expense of modernization through cultivation. Although the characters themselves are rarely in direct contact with each other throughout the plot, it is my argument that Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn are Hardy's heroes and that the synergy between these characters and the heath have fatal consequences for those that oppose their values.[107] And further, that Hardy uses Clym and Venn in order to underline how landscape can influence (and complement) the workings of mankind as well as promoting the values of those that understand it.[108]

The novel's principle human characters, Clym, Venn, Eustacia, Thomasin and Wildeve, all have unique characteristics in which their relationships with the heath lie at the core. However, the connections Hardy has established between Clym, Venn and the heath make the roles of these characters different from that of the rest; it makes them his agents in his critique of the pastoral, it makes them Hardy's heroes. The ways in which these heroes' actions are influenced by their connections to the heath as well as how this affects their interactions with other human characters will be the main focus of this chapter. How then

[105] See my discussion in chapter one.
[106] See my discussion in the introduction.
[107] This is a contrast to, as John Hagan argues, the comparatively slight attention Diggory Venn has been given in the criticism of Hardy: John Hagan, "A Note on the Significance of Diggory Venn," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16:2 (1961): 147.
[108] I will refer to Diggory Venn most frequently by his surname and Clym Yeobright most frequently by his given name. This is the way it is done throughout most of the novel.

does Hardy use Clym and Venn to accentuate an appreciation for wild nature by making them heroes? And, how do their connections to other human characters serve to criticise the promotion of cultivation in the pastoral? I will begin by discussing the heroes' relationships with the heath and how these connections to the character of nature are established in two such very different characters. Although a more theoretical justification for my reading of Clym and Venn as both heroes and Hardy's agents in his critique does not follow until later in the chapter, I will use this terminology also when I discuss their connections to the heath, as these connections are the foundation for my later argument about their roles in the novel.

The Heroes' Bond with the Heath

Clym and Venn both have relationships with the heath that separate them from the other characters. This is not to say that the other inhabitants of Egdon are not connected with it, only that Hardy has created unique relationships between the heroes and the heath in order to support his critique of the pastoral. Whereas Clym represents a struggle between a love of the heath and desire to civilize through education, Venn is used to run interference against the characters that view landscape, and thus the heath, as something only valuable if it can be exploited. Although they are not connected to each other in the plot more than through various other characters, they are both vital pieces in Hardy's protest against the harmonizing traits of the pastoral. In the following I will therefore discuss the various ways in which the two heroes are connected to Egdon Heath, starting with Clym.

Clym Yeobright knows the heath better than anyone –"His eyes had first opened thereon: with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled: his estimate of life had been coloured by it" (171). With this reference to Clym's infancy Hardy both establishes a bond between Clym and the heath and at the same time indicates a set of values deeply embedded in his character. Also, Hardy's ironic twist is striking as he bases Clym's

connection to the heath in the fact that his "eyes had first opened thereon" and then later destroys his eyesight, in order to re-connect him with the heath , when his scheme to educate has developed too far. That Clym's "estimate of life" has been influenced by the heath implies an unbreakable bond, foreshadowing his return to it. Already when Clym returns to Egdon from Paris[109] to open a school, one of the first signs of civilization in an otherwise rural community, the reader has been warned that it will not come to pass. Even before Clym starts his work Hardy tells us that it will not be completed, not in Egdon. The pastoral setting where book learning would be appreciated is not possible on the heath. The heath will not give way to civilization of any kind; "Civilization was its enemy" (11).

It is this paradox, that Clym desires to civilize while at the same time being so tightly connected with the heath, Hardy uses to make Clym an agent in his critique against the pastoral. The work towards achieving civilization through education is the same development that makes Clym's own body turn against him. The powers of the heath, those which Hardy has connected to Clym ever since infancy, do not want him to succeed. Just like the wild ponies roaming it, the heath, and by extension Clym, is not meant to be tamed:

> To many persons this Egdon was a place which had slipped out of its century, generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this. It was an obsolete thing, and few cared to study it. How could this be otherwise in the days of square fields, plashed hedges, and meadows watered on a plan so rectangular that on a fine day they look like silver gridirons? The farmer in his ride, who could smile at artificial grasses, look with solicitude at the coming corn, and sigh with sadness at the fly-eaten turnips, bestowed upon the distant upland of heath nothing better than a frown. But as for Yeobright, when he looked from the heights on his way, he could not help indulging in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves (171-172).

The contrast between looking at the "upland of the heath" with "nothing better that a frown" and Clym's "barbarous satisfaction" creates a confrontation between the farmer's and Clym's feelings towards the same landscape. This might be Hardy's attempt at mimicking the pastoral

[109] Although, John Paterson writes that Hardy did not originally send Clym as far as Paris, instead "Budmouth was to have sufficed". In the Ur-version, then, this contrast, now so sharp, between Egdon and Paris would have been much less significant: Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 36.

of the romantic period where, as Greg Garrard argues, "the [romantic] pastoral graduates from a simple logic of compensation for progress to the possibility of confronting it".[110] The farmer of the present creates a foundation for Hardy's critique of the pastoral as he can "smile at artificial grasses" and not view the landscape of the heath with more than a frown. But Clym is here to correct this view on cultivation. His love of the heath counteracts the farmer's love of the grid. This is not entirely unproblematic though. Through the word "gridiron" Hardy equates cultivation with imprisonment, metaphorically creating an image of iron bars put up in a grid pattern to control an otherwise unruly nature. Throughout the heath we can see, as in the case of Blooms-End, that its inhabitants have done just that: put up fences between themselves and the heath, thus creating small plots where they can cultivate. The "farmer in his ride" is not so different from Mrs. Yeobright, Susan Nunsuch or the other home owners on the heath. What Clym sees in his ride is that the silver gridirons are coming down and that nature will redeem itself. His satisfaction at viewing the wild landscape around him, his pure love of nature, speaks strongly to his sense of companionship with it. Clym is one with the heath and as he dresses in the attire of a furze-cutter he becomes "a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more" (244). Hence his love of nature transforms into a union with it. It is this, I argue, that makes Clym Hardy's hero and an agent against the forces of civilization.

Further, Clym's years in Paris have left a mark. This does not mean that the connection with the landscape of his childhood is broken, but rather that a new and competing relationship has formed. Clym dreams of civilizing Egdon's population through education, of introducing them to the best that civilization has to offer. This, however, is not entirely unproblematic as an element of this very civilization has already entered Egdon in a way unforeseen by Clym, through social awareness. Clym believes that education should be for

[110] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 44.

the sake of wisdom rather than economic gain: "He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort that brings wisdom rather than affluence" (170). This is something he has picked up when he was far removed, both in real distance and in spirit, from the conditions and reality for the inhabitants of the heath. It might also be Hardy's way of indicating that the sort of knowledge Clym wants to introduce is not meant to be used to promote civilization, but rather a humble "wisdom" meant to teach the Egdoners an appreciation for the landscape. This reading would support Clym as Hardy's agent against civilization as he is represented as a character seeking knowledge leading to a deeper connection to nature, rather than the sort that would lead to "affluence". That Clym is disappointed when his fellow Egdoners do not seem to agree further upholds the argument as Clym needs to lose his vision of how education will be used if he is to reconnect with the heath. Although he does not give up his scheme his disappointment makes him, as a character, more useful as an agent in Hardy's critique against human exploitation of nature.

Time after time Clym is disappointed when he learns that his fellow farmers are not as disinterested in personal status as he presupposed. In spite of the fact that he himself has been sent off to Paris as a result of his parents having more money than their neighbours, he still cannot imagine a social awareness on his heath: "In returning to labour in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the chafing of social necessities; yet behold they were here also" (191) and still he is unwilling to abandon his scheme of introducing education to Egdon. In this manner he is pro-progress as education is a step into civilization for the rural class.[111] Is the use of Clym as one of the heroes then Hardy's way of

[111] Building school houses is something that Frederick Jackson Turner argues is the second step of settlement for those who wanted to lead "a plain, frugal, civilized life" and as such it is the final step before the "men of enterprise" start developing urban-like societies: Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in *The Frontier in American History*, ed. Frederick Jackson Turner (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 19-20.

saying that not all aspects of civilization are bad,[112] only those that ruin values without replacing them with something better? I do not make the argument that Hardy criticises all elements of civilization. What I do claim, however, is that his critique is directed at the pastoral's harmonious view upon all kinds and manners of cultivation and exploitation of nature. In this respect he might simply have problematized the process of educating rural societies by ruining Clym's plans of building a school house and rather let him bring his teachings to Egdon on foot. This is a discussion that will be further explored in the section on Clym's development.

Nevertheless, Clym's bond to nature is at its strongest when, out of necessity, he ultimately gives up his dream of educating the masses. Keeping the heath at a distance and making use of artificial lighting for a longer period in order to advance rapidly with his studies, and at the same time improving their way of life for his wife, finally destroys his eyesight and makes him incapable of continuing down his planned path. Ironically, this is when he finds true happiness. When he finally takes to furze-cutting, Clym is one with the heath as "Huge flies, ignorant of larders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man" (244). Not only does Clym love the heath, he is a part of it; he is "its product" (171). As the flies are "ignorant of larders and wire-netting", Clym is not there to build any fences. He is cutting furze, a wild growth not dependent upon mankind's cultivation. When the flies buzz around Clym "without knowing that he was a man", they are "quite in a savage state", much like Clym himself regarded the untamed nature of the heath with a "barbarous" pleasure.

Further, Clym's deeply-rooted connection with the heath is at its clearest when his wife catches him singing to himself as he cuts furze shortly after he has lost his eyesight (245). It is Clym's re-established connection to the heath that makes him sing. His

[112] Hardy was himself a man of education who lived many of his years in the same civilization he seems to criticize. Even after his return to his native Dorset his "study is a dark indoor place a world away from the light and space of his imagined Egdon Heath": Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 20.

relationship with his wife is already over at this point (247) and his singing "wounded her through" (245). Eustacia is hurt because Clym's singing indicates that he takes pleasure in cutting furze, something that for a refined character like her is bitterly disappointing. Thus, if Clym is Hardy's hero and Eustacia's reaction to his happiness is nothing but pessimistic, then her critique of Clym is arguably Hardy's critique of her and, by association, the pastoral.

Still, this interpretation is not without its problems; because of his newfound occupation as a furze-cutter the argument could be made that Clym is a part of the process Hardy criticizes. That he takes pleasure in it and sings further establishes a link to the image of the happy farmer of the romanticized pastoral. However, furze is a wild growth and what Clym is doing is simply harvesting what nature has already provided. This is not an act of cultivation as Clym is neither sowing nor reaping anything planted by humans, nor are his actions as a furze-cutter sufficient to disrupt the landscape of the heath: "even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change" (12). Clym sings because he loves the connection his labour creates between him and the heath. The value Hardy seeks to promote through this scene is not cultivation, but a love of nature for nature's own sake. Before moving to a more in-depth analysis of Clym, how he serves as Hardy's agent against human exploitation of nature, and hero, as well as how Hardy changes and develops him throughout the plot, I will present Hardy's second hero, Diggory Venn, and how his bond to the heath is established.

In a similar way to Clym's "barbarous" satisfaction at viewing the landscape of the heath, Diggory Venn's profession can be said to be his way of connecting to the history of Egdon as "he is a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail" (13). The use of a reddleman as one of his heroes in this way establishes a link between the past and the present. This "nearly perished link" is necessary to keep alive if the values of the past are to be promoted. Venn, as well as other

reddlemen, are "obsolete forms of life", but what are those forms of life "which generally prevail"? Are these words used to hint at the rest of Egdon's population, those that have adapted to a more civilized way of life? If so, that could be Hardy's way of saying that if attention is not paid to values of the past, if the link is severed, something valuable is lost. It is my claim that Hardy's use of anachronistic characters works to strengthen their roles as Hardy's heroes; reddlemen were already at the time the novel was published something ready to be forgotten by history.[113]

Further, Patricia O'Hara connects Venn to the heath when she discusses the several ways in which the heath is narrated, and she claims that "(f)rom the nightmare realm of the subconscious, the intellectually advanced narrative consciousness retrieves visions of 'strange phantoms' that anthropologists attribute to primitive man, superstitious peasants, and children".[114] She goes on to discuss Susan Nunsuch's child, Johnny, and the way the heath scares him. However, my argument is that this "narrator's personification of the sleeping giant, Egdon heath"[115] not only serves the purpose of "regenerat(ing) a lost imaginative vitality",[116] but in this it also creates a connection to Diggory Venn. The link between landscape and Venn is made stronger as he is, through his profession, made into an imaginative figure of the heath as reddlemen, however real the profession was, were part of the collective imagination of the heath folk. Reddlemen were something of an oddity, something used to scare children into obedience: "'The reddleman is coming for you!' had been the formulated threat of Wessex mothers for many generations" (77). In this reference to the "formulated threat" by the "Wessex mothers" Hardy is tapping into, and deepening, the myth of a personification of the untameable landscape of the heath, the reddlemen.

[113] Hardy introduces this kind of old-fashioned customs in several of his Wessex stories, for example the mummers in *Return* and the Mellstock parish *choir* in *Under the Greenwood Tree*.
[114] Patricia O'Hara, "Narrating the native: Victorian anthropology and Hardy's *The Return of the Native*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 20:2 (1997): 150.
[115] O'Hara, "Narrating the native", 150.
[116] O'Hara, "Narrating the native", 150.

Moreover, the reddle that stains every aspect of Venn's outer appearance also links him symbolically to more than just pagan superstition. With his descriptions of the reddleman Hardy establishes a link to the Bible as reddle "stamps unmistakably, as with the mark of Cain, any person who has handled it half-an-hour" (77). Venn not only handles the reddle, but makes "periodical journeys to the pit whence the material [is] dug" (77). Cain, Adam and Eve's first born, was cast out of Eden and marked so that no one would kill him and he would receive his full punishment at the hands of God. Cain was cast out of Eden, the garden given to mankind to cultivate. Man was placed above nature and could use it as he saw fit. That Venn is equated with a Biblical character that was thrown out of this garden symbolically places the character in a landscape out of reach for the cultivator.[117] Further, Cain was also a "tiller of the ground",[118] an expression that can mean simply that he was a farmer, but it could also be compared to Venn's digging for reddle; they are both described as characters in closer contact with wild landscape than those that live within the boundaries of a garden.

Although it could be argued that digging for reddle is a form of cultivation, I do not agree. Rather, I would make the connection to what Clym is doing as a furze-cutter and claim that digging for something already provided by nature does not break Venn's connection to it. Nor does it break with Naess' philosophy that nature can be utilized to satisfy vital human needs as long as its intrinsic value is respected. This could in turn weaken my argument that Clym's former profession as a diamond dealer links him to civilization as diamonds are also dug from the earth. However, in order to be considered truly beautiful a diamond needs to be cut; its natural beauty is insufficient. Diamonds are also symbols of material wealth, and what Clym did was to provide luxury merchandise with no other purpose than to decorate the hands and necks of those that could afford it. Reddle, on the other hand, was used by farmers as a

[117] Though obvious that Cain was not a hero, the comparison in terms of a connection with uncultivated landscape is still valid.
[118] "Genesis 4:2." Last accessed November 11, 2014, http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611_Genesis-4-2/

means to mark their sheep, something that could be labelled as an act of cultivation, but the profession was already outdated at the time Hardy wrote and in this way itself a "victim" to more modern methods. Thus it is my claim that Venn is not a cultivator and that his profession as a reddleman strengthens his position as an agent in Hardy's critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral as well as Hardy's hero.

However, that Venn is a reddleman is not enough to make him a hero. He is not the only reddleman in history and in a conversation with Johnny Nunsuch he makes this clear as he explains to the child that there are "lots of us" (75). Hence Venn's role as a hero, as well as his relationship with the heath, needs to be further established. Throughout most of the novel the reddle stains every aspect of Venn's appearance and yet he is able to hide from sight whenever this is necessary.[119] In his attempt to save Thomasin's money from the greedy hands of her husband Venn tracks Wildeve and Christian through the heath and sits quietly by as Wildeve tricks Christian into playing with both Thomasin's and Clym's money. When the time is right he takes Wildeve by surprise: "a figure slowly rose from behind a neighbouring bush, and came forward into the lantern light. It was the tall crimson form of the reddleman" (223). Venn is thus described as both "tall" and "crimson", and yet he is able to hide from view as close to the two men as behind the "neighbouring bush". Although kneeling down, the colour of his skin and attire should have made him visible among the green and brown of the heath. In this way the heath aids him in his ploys to vanquish his opponents.[120] It is this quality, more than the reddle on his skin, which makes him a hero. That he is fully covered in reddle, a clean and natural product of the earth, strengthens his bond with nature. Together these two elements make him a hero, a character that nature willingly aids and provides with shelter from possible adversaries, as well as an agent for Hardy in his critique of the pastoral.

[119] This function of landscape can also be seen in for example James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie,* the last of the five novels of *The Leatherstocking Tales,* where the hero Natty Bumppo frequently finds himself aided by the landscape when in need of assistance.
[120] Bal, Narratology, 133

Through this use of his ability to employ nature to his advantage, Venn has come upon Wildeve, in what Paterson call his "magical appearance",[121] and sits down to continue Christian's game of dice, but with his own money. As early as in Hardy's choice of chapter title the outcome of the game is hinted at: "A New Force Disturbs the Current" (224). It is my interpretation that Venn is this "new force" and that Hardy with this wording indicates collaboration between Venn and the heath. It is a quiet night and "the incongruity between the men's deeds and their environment was striking" (227). The environment that is noted here is "The soft juicy vegetation of the hollow in which they sat, gently rustling in the warm air, the uninhabited solitude" (227) that is contrasted against "the rattle of the dice" (227) and "the exclamations of the players" (227). The game of dice does not belong on the heath as it is an invention of civilization. The dice are thrown again and again until they at last are thrown almost singularly in Venn's favour. In this scene it is clear that the reddleman is much more comfortable in his surroundings than his opponent. Paterson makes a similar point as he claims that "the animals and insects of the heath constantly intrude, as the agents of a profound indifference or of an offended innocence in Nature, to confound the purposes of the participants and, in particular, the purposes of Wildeve".[122] As a wild herd of ponies appear on the scene Wildeve rages against them, and when a death's-head moth flies into their lantern and extinguishes their light Wildeve once again reacts in anger. He seems to think that he has won the round and that now they will be unable to see it. However, as Wildeve fetches glowworms in "that season of the year at which glowworms put forth their greatest brilliancy" (227) to cast light on his victory, it appears that he has lost again. Throughout the scene Wildeve shows nothing but contempt for the nature that surrounds him. It would appear that the natural light of the worms of the heath works against him.

[121] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 51.
[122] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 156.

As a juxtaposition to Wildeve's reaction to what for him is purely setting, Venn looks comfortably upon both ponies and worms and only "vented a low humourous laugh" (227) at Wildeve's obsession with both the dice and the animals that surround them. Venn is in nature's favour. He is in peace in it and can simply sit back and let his opponent's discontents with the heath work against him. According to Terry Eagleton this obvious comfort with nature is something that stems from Venn's likeness of character to that of the heath itself: "Egdon can appear, like Venn, as an inscrutably uncommunicative presence, or it can enter into responsive dialogue with those familiar with its physiognomy".[123] Wildeve's resistance to Venn and the nature of the heath are thus one and the same. To those that oppose him Venn is mysterious, he is the reddleman. To those that he loves he is simply a dairy farmer trying to make a better living. In short, he is human.

Many of the things Venn has been able to do because of his advantages as a hero have had catastrophic consequences for some of the other characters, particularly Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright and Wildeve. And yet, these advantages do not automatically mean that Venn is in control of the outcome of his actions. Venn, as well as all the other characters, are merely Hardy's constructions, and as he uses the heath to protect his heroes he also employs it to destroy those that in some way represent civilization. If Clym and Venn are both the heath's collaborators, and Eustacia and Wildeve are both negative influences in their relationships with nature, then Venn's failures, as his actions have negative outcomes for other characters, are not Hardy's failures; they are intended events created to strengthen the critique of the pastoral. Eustacia and Wildeve are after all killed at the hands of the heath.

I will now establish Clym and Venn as heroes, as well as clarify the idea that they are Hardy's human agents in his critique of the pastoral, before I move on to discuss the

[123] Terry Eagleton, "Thomas Hardy: Nature as Language" *Critical Quarterly* 13 (1971): 157.

characters' developments throughout the plot and how this affects their roles as agents against the forces of civilization in Hardy's critique.

Agents of Pastoral Critique

Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn are Hardy's heroes. In accordance with a list made by Mieke Bal of the traits necessary to make a hero/inne they both fulfil what she calls the "qualification" trait concerning "comprehensive information about appearance, psychology, motivation, past" as well as her "distribution" trait, namely that "the hero occurs often in the story, [and] his or her presence is felt at important moments in the fabula".[124] Yet, on the surface these traits only serve to make the characters heroes in a general literary sense. In my reading Clym and Venn more than just heroic characters – they are Hardy's agents in his critique of the pastoral. Leonard W. Deen, however, concludes in the opposite direction, namely that Clym's (and his cousin's) relationships with the heath, as well as a lack of an antagonistic force, make them incapable of being heroes: "They have chosen the safer and more reasonable part, and thus, in the logic of the novel, they can be neither heroic nor tragic".[125] Although Deen's argument is certainly interesting, it stems from a reading of the novel exclusively concerned with the relationships between the human characters. My reading, however, is that the most important relationship any of the human characters have is that which they have with the heath. Equally valid, thus, is my claim that Hardy has developed, in addition to Egdon, two human characters whose relationships with the heath serve to critique the romanticized countryside so common in the pastoral. In the course of the narrative a relationship between the heroes and the heath forms that makes Clym and Venn inseparable from the landscape in which they reside. It is this relationship that ultimately leads to my reading them as Hardy's human agents against human exploitation of nature, his

[124] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 133.
[125] Deen, "Heroism and Pathos," 209.

heroes – a character type which Hardy describes as the very "product" of the heath. Though in textual reference this applies to Clym alone, it is arguably equally valid in connection with Venn. Not only does Venn working as a reddleman, and Clym taking to furze-cutting, strengthen the feeling of a connection to the values of the past, but the ways in which the landscape of the heath works to their ultimate advantages also promotes a simple love of nature – an element of equal importance to Hardy's critique as the promotion of rural values.

Within their roles as heroes, however, the two characters serve different purposes. Whereas Clym has outspoken relationships, as well as long histories, with almost all of the other characters (and thus fulfils Bal's "relations" trait), and plays the part of a protagonist, Venn lurks almost always in the background, vanquishing opponents wherever he moves (thus fulfilling Bal's "function" trait).[126] Bal further includes in her argument an anti-hero: a character that fulfils all traits but the "function" trait and thus becomes only a hero-like, but passive character.[127] In his dealings with the other human characters Clym would appear to fit this description, but through his relationship with the heath he battles an opponent more dangerous to Egdon that any of the others: cultivation. As a hero serving Hardy's critique of the pastoral Clym undergoes changes throughout the plot that lead him to a renewed love of his native soil (as I will explore at length in the next section). In this process he vanquishes the civilizing elements in his character, developed during the years he spent in Paris, and ultimately abandons his plans of civilizing the inhabitants of Egdon by way of organized education. It is this ultimate surrender to nature that more than anything makes Clym Hardy's hero.[128]

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[126] The hero/inne is any one character that distinguishes itself from the other characters in the following ways:
qualification: comprehensive information about appearance, psychology, motivation, past
distribution: the hero occurs often in the story, his or her presence is felt at important moments in the fabula
independence: the hero can occur alone or hold monologues
function: certain actions are those of the hero alone: s/he makes agreements, vanquishes opponents, unmasks traitors, etc. relations: s/he maintains relations with the largest number of characters: Bal, Narratology, 133.

[127] Bal, Narratology, 133.

[128] Paterson also refers to Clym as Hardy's intended hero several time throughout his tracing of the character: Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 59-65.

However, although on the surface Clym might be the character with the most obvious connections to the heath, due to the several references to his unique and nostalgic feelings towards it, Venn's role, though different, is equally important. This is in contrast to what John Hagan claims is a popular interpretation, namely that "Venn is to be regarded chiefly as a foil to the more tempestuous characters of Clym, Eustacia, and Wildeve – an image, as it were, of the calmness and the spirit of renunciation characteristic of one who has accepted his place in both nature and society".[129] Venn is a far more complicated character than this interpretation allows for. That he can be seen to keep a level head does not justify him being reduced to mere setting. The heroes of many novels are apprised particularly for that quality, and this is only one of many similarities that connect Venn to other heroes in fiction.[130] Hagan further argues that as a character Diggory Venn has been read *either* in terms of symbolic and imaginary value *or* in terms of his role in the plot and that this creates something of a simplification of his qualities as a whole:[131]

> Now, it is obvious that neither of these two interpretations of the reddleman –as a symbol of the past and as a personification of the virtues of settled, deeply-rooted communal life – can be rejected. Quite the contrary; that Venn is to a large extent the exemplary figure that these readings imply is indisputable. But it would seem equally indisputable that both views are strikingly incomplete.[132]

Though he does not make any particular claim as to how he would interpret Venn's characteristics, Hagan does state that this failure to analyse a character as a whole is why Venn has not been given his proper due.[133] My reading, however, credits Venn with a much more central role in the novel than critics have generally allowed for.

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[129] Hagan, "the Significance of Diggory Venn," 148.
[130] G.D. Klingopulos compares Venn to the heroes of cowboy stories due to his combination of skills (handy with a dice, a good shot, good at self-containment and camouflage etc.): quoted in Hagan, "the Significance of Diggory Venn," 154-155.
[131] This was a failure in much of literary criticism at the time Hagan wrote this article and is therefore not necessarily a valid argument in general today. However, there is still a lack of criticism on Diggory Venn and in this respect his critique is still legitimate.
[132] Hagan, "the Significance of Diggory Venn," 149.
[133] Hagan, "the Significance of Diggory Venn," 149.

I have thus far argued that Clym and Venn's relationships with the heath stem from quite different connections, that they at the same time both promote a love of nature for nature's own sake, and they both work as agents in Hardy's critique of the pastoral. How then, does the progress of Hardy's plot affect the heroes? And how do they in turn affect it? At the core of these questions lies the development of the heroes, as well as the development of Hardy's nature-based critique.

Heroic Trajectories

Clym's and Venn's connections to the heath having been thus established, a closer look at Hardy's development of the characters is important. The reddleman is the first human character to be introduced in the novel whereas Clym only enters Egdon in the second book. The two heroes are almost never in direct contact with each other throughout the plot. However, they both have strong connections to the heath, a connection that not only makes them heroes, but also agents in Hardy's critique of the pastoral. In what follows it is the developments of two heroes in their relationship with the heath that will be further explored. I will, this time also, begin with Clym.

Clym is first introduced by word of mouth, as a character of the great city of Paris expected to return to Egdon only to visit his mother for a couple of weeks. Upon his return Clym aims to settle down and open a school on the heath. Then he meets Eustacia. His future wife is a character so in conflict with Clym that it creates a climax where she has to die in order for him to give himself completely to the heath and be reconciled with his "barbarous" (172) nature. Eustacia represents civilization. This is a simplification and Eustacia will be discussed in length in chapter three. The relationship between her and Clym is accordingly never meant to last. Even before they are married Clym comments on a fundamental difference in their characteristics: "You are ambitious Eustacia – no, not exactly ambitious,

luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein to make you happy, I suppose" (195). Clym knows that Eustacia is not a good match for him, but he marries her despite this knowledge.

Clym seems to always be drawn between two forces. First it is between Eustacia and his mother, and for this to resolve itself his mother has to die. Secondly he is drawn between Eustacia and the heath, and Eustacia has to die. For Clym to return completely to his "native state" the forces of civilization have to be eliminated. It is thus the development of his character after his marriage to Eustacia that is essential for his role as Hardy's agent against the forces of civilization. Hardy illuminates the conflict between the characters by making Clym realize that Eustacia is a personification of the reasons why he left Paris. Using the word "luxurious" to describe his wife establishes a link to Clym's past as a diamond dealer. By creating this realisation in Clym between the profession he opted out of and the wife he has chosen lays a foundation from which Hardy can start to re-built his hero into an agent in his critique. However, in the second chapter of the fourth book Clym and Eustacia both make the same important discovery as Clym realises that "The humblest walk of life would satisfy him" (242) and it becomes "bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure" (245). Although on the surface a conflict about choices of a social manner, this is a turning point in Clym's rediscovery of his love for the heath.

Clym has brought with him ideas of how to bring the inhabitants of Egdon up to the intellectual level of the city, namely education. However, as his efforts increase to reach his goal, nature itself brings it to an abrupt end. Paradoxically, it is Clym's own body that creates this force to bring him back to the nature of the heath. Working day and night by artificial lighting, his eyes shut down and stop him from further progress. Clym is nearly blinded by his efforts to become a schoolmaster. Through Hardy's description of Egdon as something that "could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen" (9) the loss of Clym's sight would only strengthens his connection to the heath. As a consequence of his blindness he takes to cutting

furze, an occupation used by Hardy to reconnect his hero to the "scenes", the "substance" and the "odours" of the heath (171). Arguably then, this is the return of Clym, a native of the heath, to his native environment: this is the return of the native:

> A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambiguous man whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded (245).

As Clym is lead closer to the heath, and away from the path created and wished for by the socially ambitious women in his life, as the loss of his eyesight justifies "homely courses", a symbiotic relationship forms. Clym is a product of the heath and its forces are slowly pulling him back in. The uneducated man that left the heath is finding his way back. The "powers" he has gained through education are no longer "unimpeded", and Clym can now resume a life in "obscurity" on the heath in good "conscience". What Paris, and civilization, broke is recovering as "the healthful and energetic sturdiness which was his by nature having partially recovered its original proportions" (202). Clym is slowly but surely returning back to his native state, the state when he can look upon the recovery of wild landscape with a "barbarous" pleasure. Yet this is not entirely unproblematic, as Clym cannot completely forget his plans of civilizing the inhabitants of Egdon.

The mark made upon him in Paris prevails. Clym does not forget his scheme of building a school, and yet by the end of the novel it becomes clear that it will never be done. The forces of civilization cannot be killed, or even completely overcome, by nature. But they can be limited. Clym takes to preaching. In a way this does provide him with a teaching role, albeit not within the confines of a school building. Thus the reader is left with several choices of how to interpret Clym's ultimate way in life. He might have turned away from the heath and towards civilization as he not only speaks at Blackbarrow and on the heath itself, but also "in a more cultivated strain elsewhere" (389). He becomes a teacher, and teaching is a civilized profession. However, his teachings are not of an authoritarian manner as they are

"sometimes secular, and sometimes religious, but never dogmatic" (389). Wandering the heath he speaks to the inhabitants of Wessex. The choice of wording here indicates that Clym has not created the distance to the heath that it would seem like on the surface. He might speak religiously, but this phrasing does not connect him to organised religion as dogmatic speaking would. Where his speeches linked to (for example) organized Christianity this would have created a problem concerning his relationship with the heath:

> Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.[134]

This exploitation of nature is a trait found in characters like Wildeve and Eustacia, but not in Clym. The reader is never informed about the topics of Clym's preaching and the final role Hardy created for Clym thus remains open for analysis, but provides no definite conclusion. However, I would argue that as Clym's preaching happen on the heath and not in a schoolhouse, an institution of civilization, Clym is in harmony with the heath at the end. Interestingly, this development of Clym, as his return from Paris brings about an ever-closer relationship with his native heath, seems to go in the opposite direction of Hardy's second hero, Venn.

Inasmuch as Venn appears closely connected to the heath on the surface, the development of his character seems to suggest a setback in the relationship. First of all, he is only a reddleman because Thomasin has refused to marry him because of his lack of income and low social status. The very idea that an agent in a critique promoting nature's intrinsic value should use reddle, a product of the earth, (77) only to rise in stature is problematic. This does not imply a love of nature for nature's own sake, but rather puts him in the same category as Eustacia and Wildeve. And yet, the relationship does not take the form of exploitation (as in the case of Wildeve) and is thus still open for further exploration.

[134] Lynn White Jr., "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis [sic.]," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 10.

Secondly, although Venn develops as close a connection to the heath as any of the other characters, maybe with the exception of Clym, he still breaks it off at the end of the novel when his real love, Thomasin, finally agrees to marry him. His love of Thomasin is stronger than his love of the heath. Out of his two close relationships he chooses the human. But even this choice is not as straightforward as it might seem. Thomasin is also very much connected to the heath as she is compared to several kinds of birds, and with the sunlight at her back "her presence illuminated the heath" like the sun had illuminated her" (207). How then, do these factors effect Venn's stature as Hardy's agent against human exploitation of nature?

Connecting the two problems, his profession and his marriage to Thomasin, is the manner in which he leaves the reddle trade to become a dairy farmer. After the death of Thomasin's husband, Wildeve, Venn disappears for some months. When he returns he has changed his profession and thus his social position to a level where he can now ask Thomasin for her hand in marriage. Though only a farmer, the argument could be made that he has entered civilization. Is this a superficial change? And does this change in profession actually ruin his connection with the heath? When Venn again enters Egdon after some months' absence it is with these words that he returns to Thomasin:

> "I gave up dealing in reddle last Christmas", said Venn. "It was a profitable trade, and I found that by that time I had made enough to take the large dairy of eighty cows that my father had in his lifetime. I always thought of getting to that place again, if I changed at all; and now I am there." (368).

This wording by Hardy offers various interpretations. First of all it is possible to argue that Venn has given up his relationship with the heath in order to apply himself to a more profitable trade than the dealing of reddle to be able to properly support Thomasin should she agree to marry him. Secondly, theres is the possibility that he is returning to the business his father built because he is now able to maintain it at its former level. And, it could also be a combination of both. The second reading would, instead of creating a distance to the heath, bring Venn closer to it. The place he always thought of getting back to is arguably the past,

the point in history when his father kept a profitable dairy farm. The words "if I changed at all; and now I am there" (368) might indicate that the relationship with the heath has changed Venn and that now he is ready to return home and rebuild his father's heritage. Further, this return to his native state is in the company of Thomasin that is, as already argued, very much in contact with nature. It is therefore possible that Venn's final development in the plot is Hardy's way of maintaining the relationship between the heath and the character whose final moments he unwillingly had to change.[135]

However, the ending in the published version of the novel makes this reconnection with wild nature a problematic argument in my claim to Diggory Venn's position as a hero, but it would have been valid had Hardy been allowed to publish the novel the way it was originally intended. Due to what Hardy calls "certain circumstances of serial publication" he changed what he would have liked to be Venn's continuation as "an isolated and weird character" to the ending where he reasserts himself as a dairy-farmer and marries Thomasin.[136] This change in Venn is also discussed by John Paterson, who claims that Venn "was to have retained his isolated and weird character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously from the heath, nobody knowing wither – Thomasin remaining a widow".[137] In this way the endings for both of Hardy's heroes seem a bit ambivalent as one might argue that neither one of them develop clearly either towards a stronger relationship with the heath, or a weaker one.

Our two heroes have thus developed in very different ways. Clym has returned from the modern city, never to go back, connecting closer and closer to his native soil. Venn, on the other hand, assumes a civilized life as he leaves his profession as a reddleman and settles

[135] For Hardy's full comment on the ending for Diggory Venn see: Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 440, note 380: 11.
[136] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 440, note 380: 11.
[137] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 49.

down as a rich dairy-farmer. Clym's affair with the heath appears to change him fundamentally as he starts working in unison with the heath to break down the civilized parts of himself, re-connecting himself with his roots, and re-building himself in the heath's own image, so to speak. The problem is that civilization, Paris, has changed a part of Clym which the heath cannot reclaim. Clym never quits his idea of educating the masses. I return then to the question briefly discussed above: is education the part of civilization tolerable even in Egdon? In my opinion the answer is yes. This is the struggle against the pastoral which Hardy voluntarily loses because he acknowledges its value. Whereas Clym's connection to the heath brings out this ambivalence in Hardy through the struggle between a love of the heath and a love of education, Venn's tie to the landscape weakens when he marries. However, this development in Venn is in itself problematic for reasons arguably connected to the very civilization the character moves closer to as an established tradesman. The "certain circumstances of publication" that forced Hardy to change Venn's endgame is an ironic twist in a novel protesting against that very society. Thus both the heroes in some respect or other have to leave the heath to a certain degree in order to follow their new paths. Yet Clym does not break his connection to it, and Venn only leaves because a marriage is a happier ending for the Victorian public than a reddleman whose end is left to the reader's imagination.

Further, there is also a significant similarity between Clym's ending and Venn's beginning in the novel. The last pages describing the final development of Clym have him wandering both the heath and the towns and villages surrounding it, preaching to those that will listen. This is not very different from the role of the reddleman that, even though he does not preach, wanders around Egdon like a "peregrination among farms" (77). I would argue that the ending for Clym is indeed like a pilgrimage; he has lost both his sight and his wife, and is moving from place to place in order to make sense of his circumstances. The final statement of the novel that "everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had

become generally known" (390) supports the reading that he has not become a preacher as such, but is more on the search for something, for what I would argue is a further reconnection to the heath. In the end Clym is left where Venn started, wandering the heath.

The presence of a hero is a protection for the heath against cultivation – a claim that might support the reading of *Return* as a protest against the romanticizing of human exploitation of nature within the pastoral, as the heroes are those that do not cultivate. Throughout the novel there is little doubt that both Clym and Venn perform the duties of the hero according to Bal's definition – but do they both work as agents in Hardy's critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral? If what they are both searching for is a relationship to their one true love, and if what they find are Thomasin and the heath, is not the only possible agent then Clym? Book Six, where Clym wanders the heath and Venn goes off to be a husband and a dairy farmer, the final plotline Hardy created for his heroes, has to be taken into account. However, in terms of the roles for Clym and Venn throughout Hardy's critique, I argue that it is their relationships to the heath in the first five books that are the most important. The final moments for the heroes (especially Venn) were written to satisfy Hardy's publishers as well as the Victorian audience. Thus, my reading remains that both of Hardy's heroes are also both effective agents in his critique against the pastoral.

The discussion above has shown the interconnections between the developments of Clym and Venn and their relationships to the heath. The next chapter will explore the antagonistic connection between Egdon and Eustacia, as well as discuss how this relationship is essential to Hardy's critique.

The Ambiguous Queen

Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath? (68).

As perhaps the most ambiguous character in *Return*, Eustacia Vye is crucial to my endeavour to map out Hardy's critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral genre. As opposed to the previously discussed characters, Clym and Venn, Eustacia does not love the heath. Eustacia is not a native of Egdon, nor does she wish to end her days there.[138] And yet, she is closely connected with the landscape, and she possesses many of the same hero-traits as do Clym and Venn; according to Bal's mapping of hero-traits discussed in relation to Clym and Venn, Eustacia might also be called a heroine – but she is not Hardy's hero. Bruce K. Martin even goes as far as to claim that Eustacia's death in the fifth book of the novel was necessary for Hardy as a tactical move to re-establish Clym as the novel's protagonist at the expense of Eustacia.[139] Why then, as Hardy himself was compelled to ask, "did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?" (68). How does Eustacia function in his critique of the pastoral? Hardy's critique is against romanticizing the exploitation of nature in the pastoral genre, it is a promotion of a love of nature for nature's own sake. Eustacia does not love the heath, but she is also not a cultivator, she does not even wish to remain on Egdon. Why then, is Eustacia so important for Hardy's critique to be complete?

On the surface Eustacia has, like Clym and Venn, a close relationship with the heath. Through various symbolisms, the ways in which she moves on the heath, as well as the narrator's descriptions of her features, Eustacia is not only connected with, but is described in a similar manner to, the heath. And yet, as I will argue, this connection does not stem from either love, or understanding. It is one that I will argue ultimately brings about Eustacia's

[138] John Paterson, however, claims that she was represented as a native of the heath in the Ur-version of the novel: "both she and her grandfather were discussed in terms which did not distinguish them from the ordinary population of the heath": Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*. 36.
[139] Bruce K. Martin, "Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?," *Studies in the Novel* 4: 4 (1972): 622-624.

death. In many ways, Eustacia represents civilization, or at least the view that nature is something for mankind to exploit as they see fit. Serving a very different purpose from Clym and Venn, Eustacia is thus linked both to nature, and civilization. Neither link, however, is without ambiguity.

Eustacia's desires to get her husband to bring her to Paris, and to return to Budmouth, are not enough to support an interpretation that Eustacia is hostile towards the heath. Through references connecting Eustacia to Greek mythology, and thereby one of the world's oldest civilizations, a link to civilization is alluded to. This link is essential in establishing Eustacia's more problematic connection to Victorian civilization, and thereby her usefulness within Hardy's critique. Eustacia is on the heath because circumstances forced her to move there. Contrary to the Victorians, Eustacia is not seeking an escape to the past, or to rural romantic landscape. And yet, like the Victorians, she is portrayed as, although closely connected to the heath, a character that is only interested in nature as far as it can serve her needs. The only times she is really comfortable on the heath is at night when it can conceal her agenda. Important, too, is an analysis of Eustacia's relationship with the other characters on the heath, and how these relationships are used in order to illuminate her problematic relationship with the heath. By preserving the ambiguity surrounding Eustacia, her close connection and resemblance to a character in landscape she openly professes to hate, Hardy shows his own ambivalent views on the relationship between man and nature. He shows reluctance towards any definitive conclusion. In turn this ambiguity allows him to criticize the elements of the pastoral that romanticizing human exploitation of nature without leaving either humanity, or nature, in complete power of their fates. Through discussions on the similarities between the descriptions of Eustacia and the heath, her connections to civilizations both ancient and modern, as well as her powers in the dark, her death and her relationships with other human characters, I aim to prove Eustacia's purpose.

Eustacia's and the Heath – an Ambiguous Connection

Much like with Clym and Venn, Hardy has given Eustacia a chapter in the novel that is almost exclusively written about her. [140] He thus provides the reader with a sense of her characteristics without much interference from other characters. Eustacia's chapter, "Queen of Night", portrays her in a way that closely connects her to the heath. As such it is essential as it bears a much closer resemblance to the first chapter on the heath, "A face on which Time Makes but Little Impression", than to any of the other chapters. The images constructed through the various descriptions of Egdon echo throughout "Queen of Night": the heath is described as being closely connected to darkness as "The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half-an-hour to eve" (9). In a similar manner, the narrator's description of Eustacia's hair gives the reader a sense of everlasting darkness as "[i]t closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow" (66). Eustacia, and the heath alike, thrive at night. This symbolism offers different possible interpretations.

The similarities between the heath and Eustacia might be a foreshadowing for Eustacia's death. In "Queen of Night" Hardy portrays the beauty of Eustacia in a way that alludes back to his wording on the beauties of the heath. Here too, darkness is essential; not only does it gives both Eustacia and the heath power, it makes them more beautiful. As Eustacia is compared to Greek goddesses, the heath is described as majestic, and, like the deities of Greek mythology, it has a "Titanic form" (10). The charms of both are boosted in the fading light. In "Queen of Night" Eustacia is described: "In a dim light, and with a slight rearrangement of her hair, her general figure might have stood for that of either of the higher female deities" (67). In "A face on which Time Makes but Little Impression" "Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity" (10).

[140] For Clym these are chapters one and two of book three. For Venn it is chapter two of book one.

Neither character is portrayed as just a simple beauty. They are rare, and while Eustacia resembles the classic beauties of Greek mythology as she strikes "the note of Artemis, Athena or Hera" (67), the heath is "orthodox" (10). And yet, the kinds of beauties they are compared to do not exist anymore. The Greek goddesses are no longer worshipped and the way Hardy describes the orthodox beauty of Egdon hints that it is an ancient beauty out of place in a modern world. The close links Hardy establishes between Eustacia and the heath makes me question if his hinting towards the end of the reign of Egdon foreshadows the death of Eustacia? As the "reign of this orthodox beauty" (10), Egdon, might be coming to its end, so too is the reign of the "Queen of Night"?

Further, the qualities of Eustacia's eyes make her capable of the same "watchful intentness" (9) when "other things sank brooding to sleep" (9-10) as the heath. Like an animal, Eustacia has "pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries" (66) and "she might have been believed capable of sleeping without closing them up" (66). Ironically then, Eustacia seems most comfortable when only she and nature are awake, without the gaze of civilization upon them. And yet, the description of Eustacia's feeling concerning her move from civilization to Egdon, leads to the opposite conclusion: "She hated the change; she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide" (68). The heath is like "a tent" (9) in which Eustacia is now forced to abide. When she tries to escape it, to leave the heath, I will argue it kills her. As Eustacia moves around the heath at night, it watches her, and when she tries to leave it, it kills her. In the same manner, Eustacia might be said to be the only character that returns the heath's watchfulness at night. When all else are asleep, Eustacia observes the heath. The heath is no longer the only force awake at night.

Eustacia's hair is also a comparison to the darkness of the heath: "To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow" (67). Henson also comments on this comparison. She writes that "[h]er dark hair does indeed

connect her to the heath, and the description gives it the sublime scale and power of the dark landscape.[141] These connections speak more to the physical portrayals of both Eustacia and the heath, than to any psychological connection, or love, as with Clym and Venn. However, though physical resemblances, and this aspect of the connection is palpable, are strong, they do not necessarily lead to understanding. Henson supports this argument and claims that Eustacia has no real understanding of the landscape she resides in: "It is, I think, significant in evaluating Eustacia that, though she can find her way around the heath, she has failed to understand it.[142] Eustacia does not love the heath, but just as she does with Clym and Wildeve, she tries to use it to fit her own purposes. While Eustacia undoubtedly can be said to have a relationship with the heath, it can also be argued that she does not really understand it. As the narrator notes, "[t]o 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 vapours" (70). Eustacia knows how to move on the heath at night, and maybe it is precisely because her eyes are so used to darkness that the beauties only visible in daylight are lost to her.

Hardy builds the ambiguity of Eustacia's character in yet another link between her chapter "Queen of Night" (66) and the chapter on the heath, "A face on which Time Makes but Little Impression" (9). This time, the connection alludes to Eustacia's understanding of the heath, more than to mere physical traits. As a contrast to the quote about Eustacia only catching the heath's "vapours" (70), is Hardy's description of her as a "Queen" of the night. Through comparing her to darkness Hardy provides a link back to what he claims are the very conditions for understanding the heath: "In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody

[141] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 154.
[142] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 156.

could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time" (9). Eustacia has not only been there at such a time, it is the time of day she prefers.

The way Eustacia moves further shows an understanding of the heath or, more specifically, of how to best use the heath to make her own comings and goings easy.[143] And yet, the heath is not a passive carpet on which Eustacia can tread unnoticed. As Henson comments "[t]he landscape Eustacia walks through is itself active".[144] This comment is related to a scene in which Eustacia walks across the heath and is caught by one of its brambles: "A bramble caught hold of her skirt, and checked her progress. Instead of putting it off and hastening along she yielded herself up to the pull" (57). This passage shows Eustacia's movements yielding to the pull of the heath. She lets it touch her, lets it affect her. Again Hardy's ambivalence comes into play. The character that professes to hate the heath gives way to its pull. Eustacia acknowledges the heath's grasp on her movements and in her willingness to let it check her progress she shows an understanding, and a connection with, the movements of nature.

Further, there are other strong textual, and symbolical, similarities between Eustacia and the heath also before "Queen of Night". The first time Eustacia is in Clym's vicinity it is as if she can see him with her ears: "Such was her intentness, however, that it seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing" (114). This manner of observation strikes a very similar note to that of the heath: "The place became full of a watchful intentness now. When other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen" (9-10). Not only are they both able to almost substitute eyesight for hearing, but they are intent in a way none of the other characters can be said to be.[145]

[143] In his discussion of a passage describing Eustacia's lineage, Paterson shows evidence that her connection to the heath was even closer, such as she was presented in earlier manuscripts: "The aristocratic girl of the novel in its final form would appear, then, to have had genesis in the primitive child of nature": Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 40.
[144] Henson, *Nineteenth Century Series*, 153-154.
[145] Maybe with the exception of Diggory Venn.

Like the heath Eustacia is at her most active at night. Just as Clym's reconnection with the heath happens when he loses his eyesight, and becomes dependent upon his other senses, Eustacia's connection to the heath at night resembles a figurative blindness. Eustacia is not physically blinded, but she still has the capacity to move in darkness as if she was. As Eustacia moves across the heath she makes no use of her sight. She senses where to step: "The whole secret of following these incipient paths, when there was not light enough in the atmosphere to show a turnpike-road, lay in the development of the sense of touch in the feet, which comes with years of night-rambling in little-trodden spots "(57). Eustacia relies upon other senses than her vision, and so too, does the heath: "When other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen" (9-10). The heath listens and Eustacia senses. In darkness when eyesight is deceptive, these two characters reveal their powers. Eustacia is no stranger to the heath and more than any of the other characters, maybe with the exception of Diggory Venn, she wanders it at night.

Thus, through what appears to be a carefully constructed link between Eustacia and the heath, Hardy has strengthened the foundation for his critique of the pastoral. The pastoral genre idealises the farmer's exploitation of nature through cultivation. Though she is no farmer, Eustacia represents mankind's need to build civilization, even at the expense of nature. Eustacia, though she might bear close resemblance to the heath, does not fully understand it, nor does she love it. Eustacia would thus fail to fulfil what I claim is Hardy's condition for coexisting with the heath – a love of nature for nature's own sake. Whereas Clym grows to rediscover his love for the heath, Eustacia does nothing of the sort. Although she might be said to be just as much a product of the heath as Clym is, she does not love it, and is thus doomed to perish in it. As much connected to Egdon as any of its natives, she longs to leave it. She longs for an escape to civilization, to which her connection is just as strong as her connection to the heath. Herein lays her ambiguity.

Lastly, as Eustacia does not believe in nature's intrinsic value, her connection to the heath can never be more than a tool used to strengthen Clym and Venn's positions as agents promoting a love of nature. Eustacia's connection's to civilization however, establishes her purpose as being more than just Clym's and Venn's opposition in Hardy's critique. Her link to civilization at the same time supports and undermines Hardy's critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral, it shows his ambivalence.

Eustacia and Civilization

Central to my reading of Hardy's ambivalence in his portrayal of Eustacia, is her duality in being connected both to the heath and to civilization. Nowhere is this ambiguity more directly traceable than where both connections are visible through one object: Blackbarrow. Eustacia makes her first entry in the novel as Venn, by way of the narrator, views her as she stands on top of Blackbarrow.[146] Venn observes the landscape surrounding him as he becomes aware that blackbarrow's "summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher" (17). What he sees is Eustacia as she is portrayed as an extension of the landscape: "What the barrow was to the hill supporting it, the object was to the barrow" (17). She could, almost like Clym, be said to be its product: "Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification for their outline" (17). Eustacia is a part of the landscape she stands upon, she is "so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon" (17). Standing on top of Blackbarrow, Eustacia brings no doubt to her observer's mind about her justification to be there. Leonard W. Deen arrives at a similar conclusion as he writes that "[s]ilhouetted against

[146] Some critics refer to "Blackbarrow" as "Rainbarrow". I will, however, keep to its name in the edition of the novel used for my analysis.

the sky, Eustacia seems almost to have risen from the earth on which she stands".[147] It is night time and Eustacia is on the lookout for Wildeve. The way she seems to melt into her surroundings shows her powers at such a time. Eustacia is a part of the landscape in which she stands; she is a part of the heath. And yet, there seems to be something more than a connection to the heath at this moment. She is "(s)ilhouetted against the sky", something indicative of a greater power of the heavens, but she is not quite there, she is only silhouetted against it. In this way both her power, and its limitations, are visible at the same time. Further, Eustacia is not placed directly on top of the heath. She is standing on one of the only signs of past civilizations that are still present on Egdon, but a relic from the past is not what Eustacia seeks.

Blackbarrow is the only place on Egdon that provides a view that reaches outside the limitations of the heath. When Eustacia descends from the barrow, a company of locals gather round it to light their fifth of November bonfire. Their reason for climbing to Blackbarrow for their celebration might not stem from the same motivation as Eustacia had as she climbed it, but the reason is nonetheless similar: "In the valleys of the heath nothing save its own wild face was visible at any time of day; but this spot commanded a horizon enclosing a tract of far extent, and in many cases lying beyond the heath country" (19). The heath might be Hardy's "tent", but although ascent in itself is impossible, dreaming about it is not. Eustacia dreams of returning to civilization. The view from Blackbarrow would not reach as far as the cities in Eustacia's dreams, so is this why she chooses night time for her climb?: "None of its features could be seen now, but the whole made itself felt as a vague stretch of remoteness" (19). From the top of Blackbarrow Eustacia can at least imagine seeing as far as Budmouth, or even Paris. Is this further evidence of Hardy's ambivalence? In the novel's first paragraph Hardy sets up Egdon as a stage from which there can be no escape, and still he allows Eustacia to

[147] Deen, "Heroism and Pathos," 209.

imagine the cities of her dreams. Within this symbol of civilizations lost, long ago succumbed to the powers of nature, Hardy has constructed a pulpit from where his Queen can dream about her future, a future in civilization. Thus, Blackbarrow provides, through Eustacia, a link between civilizations past and present.

However, as a link to ancient civilization, Blackbarrow's symbolic value is ambiguous; it is both a sign of civilizations past, and, at the same time, completely covered with the Egdon's own undergrowth, making Blackbarrow almost a part of the heath. Together with the old Roman road on "the lower levels of the heath" (12), Blackbarrow is described as "almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance" (12). Civilization has succumbed to nature's forces. This would then be evidence of the way Hardy chooses to empower his criticism of the pastoral, by making nature capable of reasserting itself at civilization's expense. However, as Blackbarrow is also used to strengthen Eustacia's connection to the heath, even this argument becomes ambiguous. Eustacia's characterization shows connections to both the heath and to civilization, and both are established first through Blackbarrow.

Further, with the description of Eustacia on top of the barrow, Hardy creates allusions to the divine: "Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe" (17). Above Eustacia there is nothing but heaven. Although this would not necessarily link her to anything more than the physical space above her head, the later references that compare her to Greek goddesses would support my reading of the "celestial globe" as the home of the Greek gods:[148] "The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera" (67). Arguably then, connotations are made to what would be next for Eustacia. There is nothing else above her than the gods of Greek

[148] So too, would the fact that Hardy chose the same word, celestial, when he discusses how her powers on the heath, as opposed to what they would have been on Olympus, are limited.

mythology (66). As these gods were deities of nature, one could thereby conclude that the only things set above Eustacia are those that rule nature. She is thus placed in a position between the nature of the heath, upon which she stands, and beneath those that control its forces. Again it would seem that we see evidence of Hardy's own ambivalence towards Eustacia. Once again she is connected both to the heath, and to the gods, that not only control nature, but that also represent ancient civilization. However, Eustacia is not standing directly on top of the heath, but on an ancient burial ground, a foreshadowing of Eustacia's later connection to Hades is made.

Lastly, it is not only on the top of Blackbarrow that Eustacia's dreams of civilization are evident. However, much like the way the view from Blackbarrow is obscured by darkness, her desire of escaping the heath is obscured by her lack of insight into her own character. In a conversation with Clym Eustacia clearly supresses her desire to leave Egdon for what the narrator claims is a stronger desire, namely "(t)o be loved to madness" (69). Eustacia tells Clym that although she would have liked to live in Paris she "would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all" (196). At this point Eustacia does not know that this is not true. Or she simply thinks that her powers to manipulate circumstances will extend to Clym as well. Either way, she changes her mind: "I don't mind how humbly we live at first, if it can only be Paris, and not Egdon Heath" (240). This is Eustacia's prayer to her husband after her fight with her mother-in-law. Eustacia also seems to lack understanding about her, at this time, future husband: "You will never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be alright for me; so I promise to be yours for ever and ever" (196-197). The first time Eustacia hears talk of Clym she reacts in a fashion much more true to a representative of civilization than the lovesick statements, in which she ignores her desires of leaving the heath, she utters later when she is acquainted with him. "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" (108). When Eustacia has already married Clym, her hatred of the heath resurfaces. As an answer to a quote about Clym being satisfied as a furze-cutter, Eustacia reacts as if he is hurting her: "to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation which, however satisfactory to himself, was degrading to her as an educated lady-wife, wounded her through" (245). Is this the same way the sound of the heath hurts her?

Eustacia is thus connected to civilizations both modern and ancient. Whereas the Victorians sought an escape from the urban cities in the pastoral landscape, Eustacia's wishes are quite the opposite. She wants to leave the heath and live in a civilized city. To maintain his critique of the pastoral Hardy cannot let Eustacia escape, he cannot let her cross the borders of the heath. And yet, Hardy connects Eustacia to one of the oldest civilizations in history, the Greek, thereby showing signs of his own ambivalence.

From the connections to civilization and the ancient ruin of Blackbarrow, another, somewhat similar, connection is made as Eustacia is linked to Greek mythology.[149] As already mentioned, Hardy named the chapter on Eustacia "Queen of Night", this is a name with several possible interpretations. One possibility is the one already discussed, that it is a wording chosen because night time is the time when Eustacia is the most active, when she is in her right element. Another interpretation, though, is that through calling Eustacia a Queen Hardy provided a foreshadowing to the comparisons between Eustacia and the Greek goddesses. The first sentence of the chapter supports this reading: "Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity" (66). Through numerous descriptions throughout the chapter Eustacia is compared to Artemis, Athena and Hera: "her general figure might have stood for that of either of the higher female deities". But her power is "limited" here on the heath as "Egdon

[149] For a tracking of Eustacia's link to Greek Mythology through the various editions of the novel see Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 107-113.

was her Hades"(67).[150] Hades is the name most commonly used for Greek mythology's Underworld, its death realm, and its ruler.[151] However, it is not Hades himself that Eustacia is symbolically linked to through Hardy's wording here. Persephone, Hades' wife, was the one that unwillingly was placed in his realms; much like Eustacia was unwillingly moved to Egdon.

Persephone was the daughter of Demeter, Hades' sister and goddess of corn and agriculture. Hades abducted Persephone to the Underworld when she reached down and plucked a flower Hades had placed within her field of vision. When Demeter later learned of her daughter's disappearance she left the god's realm at Olympus and went into mourning, and "the earth was infertile and famine-stricken, for without her influence nothing could grow or reach maturity".[152] After about a year, when humanity was in danger of dying of hunger, the Gods of Olympus arranged for a compromise between Demeter and Hades, stating that Persephone would divide her time between her mother and Hades.[153] However, there are various interpretations explaining how growth and harvest on earth correlates to the ways Persephone split her year between earth and the Underworld, and it remains unclear whether she was with Hades when it was winter on earth, or whether she was with him during summer, when the Greeks stored their grain underground.[154] Since Hades had to share Persephone with her mother her position as goddess became ambivalent: "being at once the awesome queen of the dead and a goddess of the fertility of the earth".[155] This ambivalence is something Hardy has recreated in Eustacia and her relationship to the heath. That she is at

[150] Paterson comments that this connection to Hades would have been Hardy's intention even in the Ur-version of the novel: "Eustacia may well have suggested at this point the image of the restless and ominously unhappy ghost at large in the regions of hell and night: Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 19.
[151] In what follows, I will use the word *Hades* with reference to the god, and not the realm itself.
[152] Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 128.
[153] Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 128.
[154] Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 130.
[155] Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 125.

once deeply connected with it, and hates it, could be read as a resemblance, or even rendition, of Persephone's split role as goddess of both dead humans and living nature.

Further, it is also interesting that whereas Eustacia could be said to represent civilization and thereby be Hardy's agent in his critique as she dies on the heath, Persephone would strengthen a romantic view of cultivation as the goddess who aids the farmer in his quest to exploit the earth.[156] But this is not the only way to read Hardy's use of Persephone. She, together with her mother, is the goddess of agriculture and, as the myth of Persephone clearly states, humanity was not able to make any use of nature in terms of cultivation for food as long as Demeter did not facilitate it. Without the help of the goddesses mankind was not able to exploit nature. Thus, in a struggle for power between mankind and nature, Greek Mythology dictates that nature would win. Without interference from the deities, to whom mankind made sacrifices in order to gain goodwill, men were helpless to the powers of nature. This reading would strengthen Hardy's critique of the pastoral as Persephone is a symbol of nature's divine power.

An Ambivalent End

"While they both hung thus in hesitation a dull sound became audible above the storm and the wind. Its origin was unmistakable – it was the fall of a body into the stream adjoining, apparently at a point near the weir" (355). This is how Clym and Wildeve first learn that someone has fallen into the stream nearby. They both instantly, and correctly, assume that this "somebody" is Eustacia. Whether an actual fall, or a jump, is not evident in the text. What is evident, however, is the removal of the observer. But the heath is there; when no narrator is able to comment, when no character is made to observe, in its silence, the heath is there. Has Hardy fashioned the perfect murder?

[156] Although Demeter is the original goddess of corn and agriculture Hard discusses Persephone as having inherited these powers from her mother. Persephone can thereby be referred to as a goddess in the same respect as Demeter: Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 125-130.

Hardy himself asks the question "Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?" (68). And if it is unclear why she should live on Egdon, it is equally ambiguous why she must die there – or at least the manner in which she meets that death. Why does Hardy choose to kill Eustacia instead of letting her escape to the civilization from whence she came? And how does she die? There are many possible answers to these questions. First of all, a brief look at how critics in general view this crucial scene provides a backdrop for my own analysis.

The death of Eustacia is widely discussed among critics. However, as Martin writes, "a glance at critical comments on one of the novel's most crucial incidents, the death of Eustacia Vye, reveals a sharp but tactic clash of opinions as to precisely what happens to that unfortunate heroine".[157] Martin goes on to discuss that although a majority of these critics seem to argue that Eustacia commits suicide, this is not the only possible outcome: "While such "suicidal" readings have received agreement among the majority of critics, they have certainly not received unanimous agreement. At least a few readers have seen Eustacia's death as an accident".[158] I, however, neither view her death as a suicide, nor do I think it an accident. My interpretation would then fall into what Martin claims is a third category of readings, namely those who "have taken issue with the purely suicidal interpretation while insisting with equal fervor that her death cannot be taken as an accident".[159] Before I move on to discuss why and how my reading fits into this third category, I will take a brief look at Martin's own analysis of Eustacia's death.

In his discussion Martin reveals interpretations that support my discussion of Clym as Hardy's protagonist in chapter two, and my reading of Eustacia's death as vital to Hardy's overall intention with the novel. However, the reasons he discusses as important in connection with her death, and the manner in which she meets it, do not meet my own. Martin views the

[157] Martin, "Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?," 619.
[158] Martin, "Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?," 619.
[159] Martin, "Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?," 620.

ambivalence surrounding Eustacia's death as Hardy's structural manoeuvre to reinsert Clym as the novel's protagonist. [160] He writes:

> (T)he inconclusiveness of what he does tell us suggests his avoidance of the most dramatic possibilities of the action involving Eustacia, the climax which it implies, to focus instead on the aftermath of her death, an aftermath featuring Clym Yeobright.[161]

While I agree with certain elements of this reading, I do not understand Hardy's intentions as so narrowly focused on Clym. However important Clym is in terms of his connections to the heath, Eustacia as a contrast is just as vital to Hardy's critique of the pastoral, perhaps even more important.

As the only character that is both closely linked to, and professes hatred towards, the heath, Eustacia adds an important layer to the novel – a layer that in many ways is crucial to my reading of it as a critique of the romanticizing elements of the pastoral. That Eustacia dies before she is given the chance to even attempt at her getaway to Budmouth could be read as a link back to the novel's first paragraph where Hardy establishes the impossibility of ascent, of escape:[162] "Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor" (9). Eustacia does not know it herself, but at the time of her death she is well on her way to be escorted to the city along with a substantial amount of money, an amount large enough that when it is found on Wildeve's body, Venn concludes that "he was not coming back again for some time?"(360). Wildeve does not intend to keep this money, but to give it to Eustacia. Had she kept her appointment that night, had she fled to Budmouth with Wildeve's money, she would have reached her goal of returning to civilization. It is my argument that Eustacia Vye has to die in order for the heath to keep the forces of civilization in check. Had she been allowed to flee Egdon she would have left

[160] Kellogg W. Hunt also views Eustacia's death as a structural move, although his focus is on the temporal aspect. Connecting once more to the novel's opening paragraph where Hardy provides a clear time frame, Hunt links the first night of the novel to Eustacia's last; he writes: "Finally, again on the dread night of November fifth, with Eustacia's fire calling to Wildeve as it did the night the novel opened, the catastrophic cycle of planet and seasons and life comes to rest": Kellogg W. Hunt, "*Lord Jim* and *The Return of the Native*: A Contrast," *The English Journal* 49: 7 (1960): 447.
[161] Martin, "Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye?," 624.
[162] See my discussion in chapter one.

Hardy's "tent", outside which, neither Hardy nor the heath are in control. Kellogg W. Hunt, although not in precise terms, discusses a similar conclusion when he claims that Hardy kills Eustacia in order to show how nature can seize mankind in its grip. He argues that while Eustacia "may not be blameless, no civilized code would declare her faults sufficient to justify the death penalty".[163] But the heath does. Eustacia is killed by nature, she drowns in a weir at the end of a stream running through the heath, and not by the civilization she seeks to be a part of. However connected to the heath, Eustacia hates it and represents those that would seek to utilize nature in order to build civilization. For Hardy's critique against romanticizing exploitation of nature within the pastoral to be complete, Eustacia has to die. Although she is not a cultivating farmer she represents similar values; it is thereby impossible within my line of argumentation to conclude that her death was accidental.

Nor do I support those who claim that her death is a voluntary act by Eustacia. In her article on death as social discipline, Sara Malton discusses Eustacia's death as a suicide committed as a form of self-punishment.[164] However, even though this interpretation is supported by the scene where Eustacia admits having wished to shoot herself, as well as other hints, there is no textual evidence in the novel that confirms reading her drowning as a suicide. This is a point backed by Deen, who, even though he deducts that "suicide is the inevitable explanation",[165] also makes the point that "Hardy never tells us whether Eustacia's drowning is accident or suicide".[166] No one, including the narrator, actually observes how Eustacia comes to end up in the stream. Is this Hardy's way of making the reader conclude on his own?

This question brings me to the many occasions in which Eustacia's death is foreshadowed, scenes that make it all the more difficult to prove either accident or, perhaps

[163] Hunt, "*Lord Jim* and *The Return of the Native*, 452.
[164] Malton, "Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*," 147.
[165] Deen, "Heroism and Pathos," 208.
[166] Deen, "Heroism and Pathos," 208.

even more problematic, suicide. In the course of the love affair between Eustacia and Wildeve the most prominent signal the two characters use to communicate is the throwing of stones into a pond close to Eustacia's home. The sound of a stone falling into a pond is not far from the sound a human makes when falling into a weir. Hardy has, from the outset, provided the reader with clues about a forthcoming event. Also, the dream Eustacia has before she officially meets Clym, but after she has overheard him in conversation, predicts the manner of Eustacia's death. In a dream which Eustacia "hardly ever forgot" (116) she dreams about a man in silver armour dancing with her and whispering in her ear. Suddenly the dance is over for Eustacia and her mystery man and together they "wheeled out from the mass of dancers, [and] dived into one of the pools of the heath" (116). Deen interprets the scene in a similar manner and he argues that "[t]he dream, of course, is a prevision of Eustacia's drowning at the weir; what she interprets as a promise of ideally romantic love is instead a promise of death".[167] This foreshadowing could then be said to work against Martin's reading that Hardy had somewhat lost control over the novel's plot and needed to kill Eustacia in order to redirect the focus to Clym. However, yet another possible reading is that Eustacia does die in order to strengthen Clym, but not for the reasons discussed by Martin. If Clym is the heath's companion, and one of Hardy's agents in a critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral, killing Eustacia (and Wildeve with her) would rid the heath of all its opponents. Thereby, from an ecocritical point of view, another possible solution to the much discussed death could be that the heath itself killed Eustacia. And yet, as Hardy deliberately removed all textual evidence to any definitive conclusion, this too can only be left as one possible hypothesis. In what seems to be a well-planned, and well-constructed, ending for Eustacia, and not a countermove to make up for a weakness in his portrayal of Clym, Hardy has created an ambivalence that makes any reader incapable of a certain conclusion.

[167] Deen, "Heroism and Pathos," 211.

Further, Ken Zellefrow presents yet another interpretation as he claims that "Hardy certainly establishes foreshadowings of suicide throughout the novel".[168] His conclusion is that Eustacia's discontent with living on the heath brings her to commit suicide, and that the incident with her grandfather's guns is the proof of this. Zellefrow also argues that it is precisely this act of choosing to die that "saves Eustacia as the leading character and ultimately makes *The Return of the Native* a memorable work".[169] However, in my reading, Eustacia's relationship with the heath does not necessarily drive her to suicide; it could just as well lead to her being murdered by the heath itself. Throughout both this chapter, and the two preceding it, I have put forth evidence that suggests that Hardy has given the heath agency to act for and upon both itself and other characters. From this point of view I would agree with Zellefrow that Eustacia's relationship with, and feeling towards, the heath, is vital in understanding the circumstances surrounding her death. However, Zellefrow's inclusion of the scene with her grandfather's gun in the equation would bring his reading of Eustacia's death far closer to an analysis of the social conditions on Egdon than to an ecocritical approach. Rather, I would suggest that if Eustacia had not died, however her death came about, Hardy's critique against the pastoral would have been weakened; the ambivalence surrounding her death makes *Return* far stronger from as a critique of the pastoral than any other ending for the character could have. Had Hardy allowed Eustacia to live, he would have had to orchestrate a different ending for her. With her death the only character that openly professes to hate the heath, a character whose "characteristic mode of relationship to others (and in this I include the heath) is to treat them as objects", is eliminated.[170]

Hardy constructed the circumstances surrounding Eustacia's death so that no critic can textually prove it either as an accident or a suicide. Nor can I prove that the heath killed her.

[168] Ken Zellefrow, "*The Return of the Native*: Hardy's Map and Eustacia's Suicide," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 28: 2 (1973): 215.
[169] Zellefrow, "Hardy's Map and Eustacia's Suicide," 215.
[170] Eagleton, "Thomas Hardy," 158. Parenthesis my own.

The only conclusion I find possible to draw with regards to Eustacia's death, is that it might be said to show Hardy's own ambivalence with regards to the relationship between nature and mankind. Hardy made the death of Eustacia as ambivalent as her life. Whether or not she committed suicide, whether or not her death was accidental, or, whether or not the heath finally took her life, is something Hardy chose to keep unresolved. As difficult as drawing a conclusion about Eustacia is drawing one about Hardy's motives concerning the ending he chose for his "Queen". Did Hardy remove the observer specifically to leave Eustacia alone in the hands of the heath? Might it be because Hardy himself did not know what he wanted her death to mean? The move from his upbringing in rural Dorset, to civilized London, might well have made a singular perspective on nature's value difficult. Or, maybe, it is simply that an outright suicide, like the more explicit love scenes, would have been considered too much for the Victorian reader. Paterson comments upon the refusal by the Cornhill editor to publish *Return*: "Though he [the editor] liked the opening, (…) he feared that the relations between Eustacia, Wildeve, and Thomasin might develop into something "dangerous for a family magazine, and he refused to have anything to do with it unless he could see the whole". [171] Even though these comments seem to have been on the danger of sexual relationships developing between the human characters, a suicide would certainly not be deemed any less "dangerous for a family magazine". But neither would a young female character's death at the hands of the pastoral landscape the publishing houses wanted to sell. Other questions then arise: is the removal of the observer really a sign of Hardy's ambivalence? Or, is it yet another way of disguising his critique by preserving the innocence of the pastoral landscape? There seems to be no obvious answer to these questions. The only thing clear is the ambiguity that led Hardy himself to question Eustacia's existence on the heath.

[171] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 3-4. Parenthesis my own.

Hardy, by way of his narrator, moves from describing Eustacia in a very similar way to that of the heath, she seems in many ways to be the heath personified, to ask the question: "Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?" (68). From an ecocritical point of view, the answer is that Hardy created a character to strengthen his critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral through a beautifully constructed ambiguity. Eustacia is both closely connected with the heath, and she hates it. She is compared to goddesses of agriculture in Greek mythology, and she is a representation of civilization. The way Hardy kills her could have eliminated this ambivalence, and thus provided the reader with a solution as to how the author himself understood Eustacia. Had she killed herself the reader might have deducted that social discipline forced her over the edge, and that she was killed by elements of the very civilization to which she attempted escape. Had the heath killed her it would have been the ultimate victory by nature over the civilizing forces within her. However, as Paterson discusses, in the changes throughout the manuscripts for *Return*, Hardy's own feelings towards Eustacia changed:

> As the spokesman of a province whose roots were deeply imbedded in a traditional past, he was on the side of the Thomasin Yeobrights and Diggory Venns, who accepted the injustice of the cosmic administration without a murmur, but as the man who had gone to London and discovered the century of Shelley and Swinburne, he was also on the side of those who refused, like Eustacia Vye, to come to terms with it.[172]

How to finally read Eustacia is thus left in the hands of the individual reader. In my opinion, the character of Eustacia seems to lead towards no decisive conclusion, but rather towards Hardy's ambivalence to the struggle between nature and civilization. Throughout descriptions that connect Eustacia both to nature and civilization, the dual function of Blackbarrow makes Hardy's Queen complete in her ambiguity – Eustacia has served her purpose.

[172] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 29.

Conclusion

In order to publish his critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral, Hardy was forced by the censorship of the publishing houses to keep it hidden within the frames of the same genre towards which his critique was directed. After the failure of the "indifferent comedy of society" in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), the message from both audience and editors was clear: they wanted yet another portrayal of rustic rural life.[173] And with *Return* Hardy gave his readers just that. However, to simultaneously construct a critique from which to promote genuine love of untouched nature, Hardy created a character out of landscape, independent of its human counterparts – he created Egdon Heath.

Nevertheless, in as much as the heath works as an independent character, Hardy's critique is still reliant upon the relationships established between the heath and its human inhabitants. The heath's independence lies in the manner in which it is able to control certain circumstances to the advantage of the human characters in its favour. It is through interactions with Clym, Venn and Eustacia that the heath's powers become clear. Hardy's characters, however, are not all of the conventional pastoral sort. In order to connect with an independent character of landscape, a set of human characters quite different, and yet similar enough to interest his readers, as in his previous pastoral successes was necessary. Whereas Hardy's more traditional pastoral protagonists, Gabriel Oak (*Far from the Madding Crowd*), Dick Dewy (*Under the Greenwood Tree*) and Giles Winterborne (*The Woodlanders*) are all workers in traditional rural occupations, Clym Yeobright had been a jeweller in Paris and returns home with a dream of becoming a school master and educating the poor rural masses. It is not until his eyesight is destroyed, and Clym turns to furze-cutting, that he symbolically returns completely to his native heath.

[173] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 4.

And yet, the sixth book of *Return* brings the novel to a conclusion where Clym wanders the heath and its surrounding areas in an attempt to educate the poor, and Venn marries Thomasin and goes off to be a dairy farmer. According to John Paterson's *The Making of The Return of the Native* (1963), in the original manuscript of *Return* Venn was supposed to "have retained his isolated and weird character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously from the heath, nobody knowing whither".[174] Paterson makes no such references to changes in Clym's final moments, which leads me to assume that Hardy's intentions with Clym were only altered in other sections of the novel, and not book six. Nevertheless, the ending constructed with the addition of the sixth book is much more in line with the historical pastoral criteria than evident in the first five books, even with Clym's reconnection with the heath. Further, when Eustacia dies her dream of returning to the city is destroyed and the forces of civilization are somewhat diminished. The powers of cultivation arguably survive with Venn as he becomes the perfect pastoral shepherd (albeit of cattle) in the end: an ending forced upon Hardy by his publishers. Also, one possible reading of Clym is that he is a reinvention of the shepherd. Is his scheme to educate the poor rural masses a desire to lead them in the right direction, to herd them towards a better life? Is *Return*'s ending an attempt at a reinvention of the pastoral as it was in Theocritus' time? If that is the case, then where is Hardy's critique? Is it against the civilization that Clym brings with him in his education scheme? Or, is this yet another example of Hardy's ambivalence? As an educated man, is this the aspect of civilization tolerable to Hardy? The fact that Hardy chose a hero that is both deeply connected to the heath, and a man of education, is a way of saying that it is possible to respect the intrinsic value of nature, in line with Arne Naess' deep ecology, without having to forego book learning.

[174] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 49.

Further, as discussed in chapters two and three, Hardy changed both characterization and outcome for several of *Return*'s most important characters throughout the novel. Paterson tracks these alternations, and comments on Hardy's preparation for the serial publication.[175] Hardy submitted a provisional form of *Return* sometime in 1877 to Cornhill publishers, but after disagreements with Editor Leslie Stephen he backed out of his dealing with Cornhill, and reached instead an agreement with Chatto and Windus.[176] What followed was a serial publication in their magazine, *Belgravia, An Illustrated London Magazine,* in early 1878 and a three-volume first edition by Smith, Elder and Company.[177] However, before reaching Hardy's final edition of the novel as late as 1912 "the text was subjected, at three widely-separated dates after its serial publication, to reappraisals whose cumulative effect was altogether to transform the novel".[178] With regards to Diggory Venn, as well as Eustacia Vye, Clym, and Thomasin Yeobright, Hardy altered their characteristics several times, making them almost completely different characters in his first manuscript, the so-called Ur-version, than in the completed novel.

Moreover, with an ecocritical point of view in mind, Hardy's heath was also subject to relevant revisions.[179] Simon Gatrell makes the point that descriptions of the heath changed as Hardy revised the novel, making its borders in the last editions much easier to find than in the early editions. Originally "(t)he heath is a vast tract of unenclosed wild merely, and as such representing Hardy's instinctive idea of Wessex more vividly than the carefully researched and plotted place that, as the result of revisions, we now read of".[180] Thus, by looking at these examples of Hardy's various editions and revisions, with his personal connection to "Wessex"

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[175] For a complete tracing of the development of characters and plot in *Return*, see Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*.
[176] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 4.
[177] For a more detailed description on the publishing history of *Return*, see Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 1-7.
[178] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 6.
[179] For a more complete tracking of the revisions made concerning the heath, see Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 120-124.
[180] Gatrell, "Wessex", 23.

in mind, an image of the author's ambivalence appears. Also, from the Ur-version set exclusively in the small and closed-off world of "Wessex" where all of his characters were natives of Egdon, and Clym had only been away to Budmouth, Hardy introduced in the completed novel references both to the world of Greek mythology and the splendours of Paris where Clym had now lived during his absence from the heath.[181] In this way it seems that Hardy himself, and not only his characters, was more influenced by civilization with each new edition of his manuscript. In the Ur-version "Wessex" was the only world available to his characters. In the 1912 edition however, the heath might be a closed off space, but Clym has been as far as metropolitan Paris, and Eustacia is symbolically compared to the gods on Olympus. Hardy has widened the world of "Wessex", making it more vulnerable to the influences of civilization. Much like he himself was exposed to the influences of London. By way of a distinction, not always clear cut, between characters that represent the rural and characters that represent civilization, Hardy constructed his critique of the pastoral. In the end Hardy himself was tamed by "certain circumstances of serial publication",[182] but not before he had written a powerful critique against the romanticizing elements of the pastoral, and promoted genuine love of nature for nature's own sake.

Hardy, and *Return*, had to yield to the pressures of sales figures, as well as the demands and restrictions placed upon him by the publishing houses; a fact still evident nearly a hundred years after his death. The modern publishing houses do not differ much in their priorities from their counterparts in Hardy's own time. Even the competing publishing houses of today seem to struggle with which elements of *Return* to highlight in order to attract the audience. The 2008 cover material of the Oxford edition, edited by Simon Gatrell, used for the purposes of this thesis, clearly focuses on the conflicts and desires of Hardy's human characters. The cover illustration, *The Flower Picker* by John William Waterhouse (1849-

[181] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 30, 62.
[182] For Hardy's full comment see: Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 440, note 380: 11.

1917), is of a girl picking a flower. She is the focus of the illustration and her natural surroundings are merely a backdrop. Further, the quotation chosen as the epigraph of the edition's back cover "To be loved to madness – such was her great desire" hints to the potential reader that the novel is a love story, something further established in the text that covers the rest of the Oxford edition's back cover. The packaging of the Penguin edition, edited by Tony Slade, directs the reader's attention towards other elements in the novel. This cover illustration, *Sunset Over a Forest* by Andrew MacCallum (1821–1902), clearly marks nature's importance, those who have already read the novel would immediately recognize the illustration as the heath. The quotation on the back cover chosen by the Penguin publishers "You are ambitious Eustacia–no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein to make you happy, I suppose" hints more at a conflict between rural and urban values than the sexual desires highlighted in the Oxford edition. It speaks to the conflict between Clym and Eustacia where Clym wants to live in a cottage on the heath, whereas Eustacia wants to move to metropolitan Paris. And yet, both editions share their focus on Eustacia, as the representation of a tragic heroine is what they seem to think would most likely increase the novel's attraction to a modern audience. Just as much as in 1878, the choices made by editors and publishing houses are vital to the potential reader's impression of a novel.

The majority of Hardy critics focus on the same aspects of *Return*, and his other novels, as editors searching for an audience: they focus either on the numerous love triangles that entangle Hardy's characters, or on their social statuses and the consequences the hierarchies of his various "Wessex" communities have on the developments and outcome for these characters. In short, critics focus on the relationships between Hardy's human characters. My reading of *Return*, however, is fundamentally different from the already well-established field of Hardy criticism. Due to my ecocritical approach, I have had the opportunity to read Egdon Heath as a character in its own right, a character with agency (and

thereby power) to act for and upon both itself and its human counterparts. This shift in the power structure between the characters, as a consequence of the addition of the heath to the character list, can lead to revisions of how to approach not only the new reading based in deep ecology, but also the more established areas of research. As far as my claim that Clym is Hardy's hero goes, for example, Paterson discusses at length the several ways in which Hardy fails in making Clym a believable hero.[183] However, he does not analyse Clym's relationship with the heath, an angle that might have changed his conclusion – it was certainly a vital influence on my own conclusion.

Despite the attempts by the publishing houses to undermine Hardy's innovative treatment of nature, and stifle his creative liberties in criticising civilization, *Return* does just that by embedding this critique within the confines of the pastoral genre, but without embracing its romanticizing of human exploitation of nature through cultivation.

In *The Return of the Native* Hardy constructed unique relationships between his character of nature and his human characters. These relationships enabled him to publish a novel that was both well within the confines of the highly popular pastoral genre of the Victorian era, and simultaneously a critique against that genre's romanticizing of the human exploitation of nature. However, as references to ancient civilization, schemes of education, and true love of landscape blend together, traces of the author's ambivalence between civilization and a love of uncultivated nature become visible. Even in death Hardy's ambivalence lingers on: "His ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey and his heart at Stinsford in Dorset".[184] Nothing could be more fitting for an author whose life and works had been torn between the demands of the metropolitan and his love of the rural. Hardy's body and mind lie now in the company of prime ministers, royalty, and Charles Dickens, in the

[183] Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native*, 59-65.
[184] Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), first page, no pagination.

middle of busy London. Hardy's heart, however, returned to his native rural Dorset in the centre of his fictional world of "Wessex".

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