

**B.A. Second Year**  
**Return of the Native Essay Questions**

**1**

**Analyse the evidence which suggests that Eustacia had supernatural qualities. What impact do these suggestions have on her as a character?**

**There is considerable evidence to support the implication that Eustacia has a supernatural association. Susan Nunsuch believes Eustacia to be a witch, as her attack in church testifies. Mrs. Yeobright also voices the speculation that Eustacia is a witch when describing her to Clym. Other locals find her equally bewitching.**

**Though Hardy played down these references in a later draft to ensure the novel's publication, Eustacia does remain a singular character. Her use of fire to attract Wildeve, her death by drowning, and her sexual allure all give her a sense of otherworldliness. One could argue that her sexual allure is meant to explain the accusations leveled at Eustacia, though Hardy could never have been so explicit in his own time. Regardless of how natural or supernatural she is, Eustacia is defined less by who she is in the novel than by what she is not: a local on the heath who is willing to accept her place.**

**2**

**Select evidence to support the assertion that the heath is a character within the novel.**

**As the whole of the novel's first chapter is devoted to the heath, its centrality to the story is inarguable. The heath often serves as a catalyst to events, such as the death of Mrs. Yeobright and the death of Eustacia. Further, the characters are often defined by their relationship to the heath. Thomasin, Diggory, and the locals have a symbiotic relationship with it, so that the changes in seasons help to understand their own personal changes. For instance, Thomasin becomes ready for new love when May comes around. Eustacia, on the other hand, is defined by her antagonism to the heath. Because she rages so terribly against it, she engineers her own demise at its hands. Though Hardy does not give the heath an explicit supernatural power, he does frequently personify it to help explain how it both informs and affects the lives around it, much like an actual character would.**

3

**What purpose do the heath dwellers serve in the text?**

The lower class residents parallel the chorus from Greek tragedies, and the commoners in Shakespeare's plays. Often, they impart information – such as Cattle relating the birth of Thomasin's baby. They also provide deeper perspective on the events of the story than the main characters could. In particular, some of the novel's themes - like education, modernity, and religion - are emphasized because the outside perspective allows the reader new ways to interpret the story. The heath dwellers are also catalysts to the wider action: Christian Cattle's gambling prompts the Yeobright rift, and Johnny Nunsuch facilitates the meeting of Eustacia and Wildeve with his fire.

4

**"Clym's true analogy would appear to have been less with Oedipus and Prometheus than with Hamlet." - John Paterson**

**Consider the novel in the light of this statement.**

Clym certainly has qualities reminiscent of all three characters mentioned in Paterson's statement. His anxiety to please his mother is arguably excessive, and accounts for the large emotions that facilitate the tragic end. By seeing his relationship with Mrs. Yeobright as equal to that with Eustacia, Clym disappoints both women. In this way, his situation is certainly a manifestation of the Oedipus complex.

His connection to Prometheus lies in the way he brings home tales of Paris that captivate Eustacia and expedite her desire to leave Egdon. However, this information has a deadly side as well, since it creates an expectation in her that he cannot fulfill, thus facilitating the tragic end.

However, what are most directly responsible for the tragic end are Clym's self-absorption and procrastination, both qualities that tie him to Hamlet. Because he can only see the world through his own perspective, he does not realize how much unhappiness Eustacia feels, and hence unwittingly treats her cruelly. Further, he procrastinates both in forming a school in Budmouth, as he initially plans, and in reuniting with his mother and later with Eustacia. More agency in any of these situations would have changed the course of events, but he is too defined by his brooding and self-obsession to take swifter action, as someone like Diggory might.

**5**

**Explore instances of humor in the text, and explain what they contribute to the story.**

**Though this is undoubtedly a tragic novel, there are many humorous situations that reinforce the idea that even great human tragedies are minor in the scheme of time and the heath. The humor is mostly linked to the heath dwellers, whom Hardy uses similarly to the way Shakespeare used his common characters. They both bring a broad humor, and represent the absurdity of human concerns.**

**Christian's Cattle's mournful dialogue on being single provides an excellent example of bathos, and also helps to develop the theme of superstition with in the novel. These people will continue to live the way they do no matter what tragedy happens in the meanwhile.**

**6**

**How does money complicate the relationships within the novel?**

**In exploring the conflict between traditional life and the modern world, Hardy does not explore class as much as he does other situations. However, money provides an interesting lens into the novel, since characters seem happiest when money is not a concern, and when they put relationships before material wealth. Money – or at least the life one can have with it – captivates several of the characters, and causes mostly suffering.**

**Money corrupts the naïve Christian Cattle as he descends swiftly into gambling Mrs. Yeobright's money. Eustacia is swayed by the idea of the life of a Parisian diamond merchant much more than one as the wife of a country schoolteacher. Her passion for the potential which Clym afford wanes quickly, and her desire for Wildeve is rekindled at his vast inheritance. Her unhappiness - caused by a lack of material options on the heath - is a major contributing factor to her tragic end. Even Thomasin trades her girlish innocence for a mature pragmatism when she marries Wildeve over Diggory, since the former can provide more for her. In choosing status over affection, characters tend to sow the seeds of future unhappiness.**

**7**

**Which male character do you consider to be the most – or least - convincing in the novel?**

**This novel is often criticized for a melodramatic tone and larger-than-life characters. Most answers to this question should consider major characters such**

as Damon Wildeve, Diggory Venn or Clym Yeobright. Wildeve is credible in his selfish indecisiveness between the affections of Thomasin and Eustacia. His cruelty is entirely believable. Venn is enigmatic, loyal, honourable and constant, though he often seems to have a heroic power to arrive exactly when needed. Yeobright is arrogant, naïve, and yet apparently educated and worldly. Though the most travelled of the male characters, he is often the most narrow minded. His lack of emotional literacy is astonishing in a man so keen to educate others, suggesting that he is comprised of contradictory personalities that make him difficult to fully believe.

8

How does Hardy depict tradition in the novel? Does he approve of it or condemn it?

Most certainly, Hardy is enamored of tradition and its power. He sets his narrative against a backdrop of traditions, some of which are as timeless as the heath itself. We are told of the dying trade of the reddleman, of the enduring rituals of the mummers, and of the Mayday celebrations, amongst many other examples. With each event and custom, Hardy reflects on how these actions are ingrained within the people and the environment. Mrs. Yeobright casts a shoe at Thomasin for her wedding, not knowing why she makes such a gesture other than that tradition demands it. The bonfires which commemorate Guy Fawkes have been a feature of heath life since Druid times, and their flames still keep human passions kindled. However, Hardy is willing to express skepticism about tradition - he criticizes the mummers for lacking any true passion, and suggests that traditional fear of witches can lead people like Susan Nunsuch to cruelty. The best answer to this question is that Hardy presents tradition with all of its contradictions intact, more interest in honesty than judgment.

9

To what degree does *The Return of the Native* follow the structure of Greek tragedy?

Hardy initially intended to structure the novel in imitation of Greek tragedy, using a five book structure and characters of high social standing. Even though he revised some of these elements to ensure publication, the novel still conforms to Greek tragedy in certain structural ways, and in its depiction of the tragic force. The final version still maintains the use of a chorus that comments on the action, and uses many messengers, as Greek plays did. Further, its sense of tragedy - the forces in life that can destroy men no matter their inner strength - is very much akin to the perspective espoused by many of the most enduring Greek tragedies.

**How does Hardy depict education in the novel?**

Hardy presents a contradictory perspective on education in the novel, by exploring both arguments for it and against it. Education, as equated with wealth and worldliness, is admired by most people, though the locals on the heath are wary of such attitudes compromising their more natural, Earthly lifestyle. In fact, some of them, like Captain Vye, see education as dangerous. Hardy does suggest that education cannot easily coexist with natural qualities through his depiction of Clym's good looks, which are compromised by his intellectual pursuits. Clym's educational philosophy is implicitly criticized when it drives him to blindness and failure. Hardy does not seem to firmly answer the question of education, other than by suggesting that there is no answer that works for everyone.

**Dr Rajdhan**  
**Assistant Professor-English**