

The Concept of ‘Poetic Justice’ in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Novel *The Scarlet Letter* and Thomas Hardy’s Novel *The Return of The Native*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 29 Mar 2024; Received in revised form: 23 Apr 2024; Accepted: 27 Apr 2024; Available online: 02 May 2024</p> <p>©2024 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Justice, Morality, Poetic, Puritans, Fate, Nature, Protagonist, evil.</p>	<p><i>This paper explores the concept of poetic justice as manifested in Thomas Hardy’s The Return of the Native and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. Poetic justice, a term that encompasses aesthetic pleasure in the balance of justice and judgment, serves as a narrative mechanism through which both authors address principal themes of fate, morality, and human suffering. Hardy’s depiction of Egdon Heath as an active participant in his narrative reveals the indifference of nature and societal norms towards individual aspirations. Eustacia Vye’s tragic descent, underpinned by her intrinsic desires and social alienation, exemplifies Hardy’s critical lens on the complexities of justice and the limitations of human agency. On the other hand, Hawthorne’s narrative offers a condemnation of Puritanical justice through Hester Prynne’s experiences, wherein personal sin and Puritan incrimination join, leading to profound moral issues. Both authors present the themes of retribution and redemption against the harsh realities of their characters’ existences, ultimately reflecting on the inadequacies of both natural and human-imposed orders. The paper presents a historical overview about the term ‘Poetic Justice’ in literature and two main sections one for each novel and finally, the conclusion summing up the finding of the paper.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

In literature, poetic justice is an obsolete form of justice, where the good and virtuous characters are rewarded and villains are punished, through the use of fate. This shows the urge to give literary works moral dimensions. Thus, writers use poetic justice to fit in the common moral standards of a certain time and place. According to Britanica poetic justice can be defined as “a result or occurrence that seems

proper because someone who has done bad things to other people is being harmed or punished”

Plato long ago laid down the foundations of social or what might be called in literature as poetic justice. His ideas published in the poetics. To trace back the ancient theories of criticism and to find the real aim of literature whether to amuse or to teach. The concept of poetic justice flows within the same stream. Having to be true to morality and values that the readers are very well acquainted and familiar

with, evil characters are punished and protagonists are rewarded.

So, in modern conception poetic justice is a kind of moral notion to separate between what is good and what is evil and between what is moral and immoral and basically between protagonist and antagonists. The writer should submit to the moral and social code of the period, since readers tempt to have empathy with the protagonist of the novels. In this way good should be triumphant over evil to establish and assure the values of morality. Poetic Justice play a vital role in the development of characters. Characters tend to learn from their own mistakes to reach to a form of catharsis where readers might feel deserved according to their own codes of moral and social laws.

Since poetic justice has become a commonly used technique in the novel. There are other undeniable existing techniques where there is no definite tribute for either good or evil. The ending is open for the readers to decide. Another technique where the writer never distinguishes between good and bad characters, there is no dividing line between good and evil.

II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The term 'poetic justice' is a term invented by Thomas Rymers, it is a coinage used in 1677. This term came in use to fulfil the notion of didactic literature, so literature must be ethical, and instructive. This contradicts those who call for aesthetic qualities in literature. Salman Rushdie believes in the aesthetic purpose of literature. He explained his views about novels saying:

The good can lose, and fables can have anti-heroes instead of heroes. In the Indian animal fables of the Panchatantra, the two jackals at the heart of the stories are anything but good. One of them is devious, even Machiavellian, and the other, much more devious. Right does not always triumph. In fact, in these stories, it rarely does. [...] The story's amorality makes it

more attractive to us than a clear moral message would. (Rushdie)

Poetic justice might also refer to giving justice or any practice related to it. There are voices in literary criticism that vote against poetic justice in favour of aesthetic. Martha Nussbaum, conversely, does not consider drama at all in her study and regards the novel as the most apt paradigm of ethical reflection because of its "interest in the ordinary". Accordingly, literary texts are supposed to expose and present moral concepts in a manner that enables the reader to engage with the events presented.

The novel is a paradigm of moral activity... It gives us the uniquely privileged position from which we can explore situations deeply, but from afar. It allows us to be emotionally involved while also maintaining neutrality. In this sense, we inhabit a place that is 'both like and unlike the position we occupy in life,' perfect for awakening ourselves to moral perceptions. Much like a rehearsal before the live show, novels give their readers the opportunity to explore ethically demanding situations from a place of safety. (Nussbaum)

Reviewing the history of the term 'poetical justice' it is traced back to ancient Greek reflections, Plato in his Republic commented:

that what the poets and prose-writers [orators] tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones are wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales. (392b)

Plato, is an ideal philosopher, he is distant from man, and reality he didn't comprehend the difference

between the reality of man's life and the perfect world in the third eternity. Plato criticized the works that are unjust to good characters in literature indorsing the narrator to give the audience just examples. Aristotle in the "Poetics" states that a tragic action should not reveal "the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity" (1452b), because this would evoke neither pity nor fear in the audience. To concentrate on the term 'virtue', it is a close manifestation to the term 'justice': "a virtuous man should be rewarded accordingly, as much as "a bad man [should not be] passing from adversity to prosperity". Rymer came up with the term 'poetic justice' considering the relationship between 'history' and 'tragedy': in his view, literary texts are different from 'history' in that they are supposed to bring about the justice whose realization in reality is impossible. Since in history there might be righteous and virtue oppressed while wickedness on the Throne.

The question of what is just and what should be regarded as just? The answer is actually related to aesthetics and ethical standards. Justice but be set according to legal issues or it might be defined according to social justice. The topic of poetic justice is an old and controversial idea in literature the reflection of legal, ethical, aesthetic points of view to literature. Literature being an imitation of life is called mimesis where a golden life is presented in literature. How is the aesthetic achieved within the ethical and legal standards. Poetic justice can be part of the aesthetic value in the sense that it could round up the events and provide an ending to the novel where the good prevails and evil is punished. This paper depends on the poetic justice in analyzing two Victorian master pieces by Hawthorn and Hardy. The two novels are analyzed according to the criteria of moral, ethical, legal values recognized at the period and the code of laws identified by a certain community.

III. NATHANIAL HAWTHORN'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Nathaniel Hawthorne is originally from Salem, Massachusetts, he was born in 1804. He descends from the first settlers in Massachusetts Bay Colony; John Hathorne, a judge at the 1692 Salem for witch trials, is his great grandfather and Hawthorne

changed the written form of his name by adding "w" when he began to write. Hawthorne proved throughout his works to be both captivated and distressed by his legacy especially his relation with John Hathorne. Hawthorne graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine, where he met Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, an acknowledged poet, and Franklin Pierce, who became president of the United States both of which influenced his life and carrier.

The Scarlet Letter, is a 1850 classic novel the plot takes place in the 17th-century Salem in the first Puritan Settlements. The plot traces the story of Hester Prynne, a victim of the ridged puritan laws, destined to a shameful punishment that is stamping her with a scarlet letter "A" on her dress to stand for her sin. Hester willingly accepts the Puritan punishment and bares the humiliation of the Puritan community. She marches into a journey of self-discovery and redemption. The story examines issues of sin, shame, and society expectations, providing a profound investigation of human nature and morality. The realistic depiction of the austere Puritan society provides a setting for the intricate people and their internal conflicts. *The Scarlet Letter* historically embodies the ideas and attitudes of 19th-century America while offering permanent insights on the human condition.

The Scarlet Letter presents certain values of a definite religious group the same values would seem irrelevant and meaningless measured by modern standards. This leads to the realization that moralities are relevant. According to Hawthorn the concept is blurry since both of the protagonists Hester Prynne and Dimmesdale both are accused of being sinners and condemned by the Puritan's code of laws. To apply the concept of 'poetic justice' on Nathaniel Hawthorn's work is very challenging and confusing at the same time. *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel that includes moral judgements social and religious abnormalities, since the higher rank of religious hierarchy suffers from duality and hypocrisy. Hawthorn emphasizes that that Dimmesdale's real sin is his being a coward and unable to take responsibility for his deeds. He has betrayed his own beliefs because of his desires.

He shared a propensity for examining the shadowy corners of the human psyche with his

contemporaries Thomas Hardy and Edgar Allan Poe. The Scarlet Letter emphasizes human fallibility and how mistakes in judgment can cause even good people to fall into vice and self-destruction. (Sharma, 2022)

“Hawthorne realized his duty and obligation to expose how the Puritans had suppressed and destroyed human nature” (Lanlan, 2011). Nathaniel Hawthorne demonstrates the conflict between the power of the Puritan code of laws and the individuals. *The Scarlet Letter* is formulated upon two struggles—that between natural instincts and conscience, and that between characters and the restraints of puritan community. From the perspective of puritans all people are sinners and the smallest and severest mistake is punished with the same brutality. Hawthorn’s contemporary puritans felt confused to consider a sinner as a protagonist of the novel. As a heroine Hester proved her ability to challenge her society and show inner strength. She appeared as the first true heroine of American fiction.

Arthur Dimmesdale represents as a classic character of a self-divided man, imprisoned by an inner conflict of piety and desires. The narrative revolves and centered an affair between a clergy man and a new settler in the colony. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s apprehensions regarding the dichotomy between societal expectations and individual identity. *The Scarlet Letter* pivots around two profound and intrinsic conflicts—namely, the tension between innate desires and moral conscience, as well as the struggle between individual independence and societal constraints. Within the rigid confines of Puritanism, individuals were perceived as irreparably tainted, and transgressions against the social code were met with severe and often brutal retributions. Individuals inhabiting that Puritanical milieu frequently found themselves ensnared in ethical dilemmas when established laws were violated. Socially marginalized and ostracized, Arthur Dimmesdale serves as an exemplary case study of a psychologically fragmented individual, ensnared by the stringent dictates of societal norms.

Hawthorne combines serious moral content with excellent artistic expressions, giving The

Scarlet Letter its powerful vitality and enduring charm. It is also through the construction of space that the theme and meaning of the novel about the human spiritual ecological crisis is better manifested, and shows Hawthorne's contemplation and transcendence of the real world. (Mei, 2019)

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne transforms the symbol of her societal condemnation, the scarlet letter, into an emblem of personal strength, esteem, and renown by steadfastly maintaining her identity. The novel explores the fundamental conflict between the individual and the rigid Puritan society that judges her. It serves as a powerful critique of Puritan hypocrisy, vividly portraying how the community's leaders fail to live by the very standards they impose. While condemning Hester for adultery, they readily utilize her skills despite officially branding her a sinner:

Vanity, it may be, chose to mortify itself, by putting on, for ceremonials of pomp and state, the garments that had been wrought by her sinful hands. Her needlework was seen on the ruff of the governor; military men wore it on their scarf, and the minister on his band; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up, to be mildewed and moulder away, in the coffins of the dead. But it is not recorded that, in a single instance, her skill was called in aid to embroider the white veil which was to cover the pure blushes of a bride. (Hawthorne, 75)

We can even see the hypocrisy of Puritan society in the description of the Governor’s dwellings. It has been described as “Aladin’s Palace” by Hawthorne himself:

This was a large wooden house, built in a fashion of which there are specimens still extant in the streets of our elder towns; now

moss-grown, crumbling of decay, and melancholy at heart with the many sorrowful or joyful occurrences, remembered or forgotten, that have happened, and passed away, within their dusky chambers. (Hawthorn, 91)

The use of the expression "moss-grown," Hawthorne aims at conveying a message that moss and darkness covers the humanity of the puritans. Puritans think that luxury and entertainment are all evil and the society must reject them. The decorated and luxurious palaces of the puritans are an obvious proof of their hypocrisy and vain religious laws.

Everyone in *The Scarlet Letter* has something to maintain inside, except for Pearl and they don't expose to public. The puritan fathers can only see the sins of others and are blind to their own. The character of Dimmesdale is, among other things, a portrayal of the spiritual lack of the Puritan system. And whilst he is consciously twisting on his guilt, attending the church rituals and preaching vehemently: "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which is the face he wears" (Hawthorn, 270). However, it can also be inferred that the guilt of Dimmesdale springs from his unscathed soul and conscience instead of his Christian and Puritan education and this is another layer to the overall negative tone of the novel against Puritanism.

Hester's features are characterised by a "haughty smile and a burning blush" (Hawthorne, 50) as she stands on the scaffold in the midst of the multitudes of citizens. The haughty smile demonstrates her defiance of Puritan's strict moral and religious moral codes, while the burning blush reveals the sense of shame caused by the public exposure. She symbolises romantic individualism, which rejects the notion of a supernatural ethical absolute. Hester, in violation of piety and decorum, pursued a life of nature and endeavoured to rationalise her romantic self-indulgence. Despite the fact that her devotion to Dimmesdale is the sole genuine passion of her life, she follows it without question, despite the fact that a traditional Puritan perspective would have condemned her to be defying the moral code. The

futility of Puritan society's judgement is particularly illustrated by Hawthorne:

How strange, indeed! Man has marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her, save it were sinful like herself. God as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven. (Hawthorne, 80)

In Puritan society, religion and law were nearly identical, and defying the prevailing opinion meant violating the Bible. Adultery is a severe offence that is punishable by death, as per Biblical law. Hester has been sentenced by society for the rest of her life by being required to wear a scarlet letter "A" on the bosom of her robe. This is the stigma that Hester is compelled to keep at all times. Puritan leaders declared that they were merciful because the death sentence had not been administered in light of her age and condition. However, they overlooked the enduring agony of the token of humiliation that she would be required to wear.

However, the scarlet letter has not had the desired effect on Hester, which is an ironic twist. She does not regard her adultery as an incriminating offence. Despite the fact that society has passed judgement on her, she does not feel any sense of remorse. She is a protagonist of the sacredness of the human spirit, because of her affection for Dimmesdale. She tells Dimmesdale in the forest, "What we did had a consecration of its own. We were of the opinion that it was so; we expressed it to one another" (Hawthorne, 170). The letter "A" does not indicate infidelity to Hester; it merely signifies "Arthur." When she is given the choice to disclose the name of her fellow sinner and get rid of that shameful token, she cries: "Never! It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony as well as mine" (Hawthorne, 63).

That is her act of defiance against the societal norms. She is labelled a 'sinner' by society for her affection, but she regards it as her "life-blood." The name of her lover is so profoundly ingrained in her mind that no one can rob her of it. The scaffold is not the conclusion of Hester's punishment. Every aspect of her existence is a complete violation of her freedom. In spite of her interactions with society, she has never experienced a sense of belonging. The clergyman paused in the street to offer words of advice, which drew a crowd to her. When she enters a church, she frequently finds herself the subject of the conversation. The agony of the letter "A" is re-felt upon the bosom of a newcomer to the region who gazes at it with inquisitive eyes. She never adjusts to the letter, on the contrary, it becomes increasingly sensitive as it endures daily torment. Despite the mental anguish and torment she endures, Puritan society is unable to convince her to repent of her adultery. Finally, Hester begins to win the affections of the common people through her charity. She responds cordially and becomes a "Sister of Mercy" during periods of general or individual sorrow. She is so beneficial to the members of the Puritan society that the letter "A" on her bosom assumes a meaning that differs from its original meaning. It now appears to be an acronym for "able."

She was self-ordained a sister of Mercy; or, we may rather say, the world's heavy hand had so ordained her when neither the world nor she looked forward to this result. The letter was the symbol of her calling. Such helpfulness was found in her, – so much power to do, and power to sympathize, – that many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Able; so strong was Hester with a woman's strength. (Hawthorne, 141)

Hester is the only individual who is willing to put her faith in the possibility of a new morality in the new world. In spite of the prejudice of Puritan society and her own human weakness, she attained mental freedom. She even exhibits the courage and mental fortitude to assist Dimmesdale in his pursuit

of a new existence in the forest. She is confident in her uniqueness and personality, regardless of the societal expectations:

you have deeply and sorely repented. Your sin is left behind you, in the days long past. Your present life is not less holy, in very truth, than it seems in people's eyes. Is there no reality in the penitence thus sealed and witnessed by good works? And wherefore should it not bring you peace? (Hawthorne, 167)

Hawthorne's emphasis is not on Hester's inner character, but rather on the societal forces that influence her. Before she committed infidelity, the readers had a limited understanding of Hester's character. Hawthorne provides only vague references to Hester's past, allowing readers to form their own conclusions. He informs the reader that Hester married Roger Chillingworth without being in love with him, and he suggests that Hester was an impulsive young woman who had to be restrained by her adoring parents prior to her marriage.

The opposite is true for Dimmesdale. His vengeance is entirely internal. Society does not punish him because it is unaware of the transgression he has committed. He is more sinful than Hester, as he has also committed the sin of hypocrisy or concealment in addition to the sin of infidelity. He is burdened by the weight of his crime, but he lacks the fortitude to publicly admit his guilt. He was unable to have the strength to stand alongside Pearl and Hester on the scaffold. His guilt has been discreetly accumulating in his breast for the past seven years. He is under the impression that he is an absolute contaminant. Occasionally, he even publicly acknowledges his error. However, he repeatedly steps into his own trap as a result of his admission of the fact in such superfluous and ornamented language. People come to embrace him as "The saint on earth" (Hawthorne, 126). The more he is revered by others, the more he experiences the throb of painful agony in his heart. He experiences hallucinations, occasionally observing a group of angels and other times a multitude of diabolic shapes. Dimmesdale is progressively deconstructed and driven to the brink of insanity as a result of his perpetual compromise

between honesty and respectability. As a form of retribution, he even ascends the scaffold on a single evening.

His contrition is a product of the agony of sin and is deeply ingrained in the fear of repercussions. Nevertheless, we are also conscious of the manner in which his instructed conscience, which surpassed the orthodoxies and catechistic measures of the era, guides him in fulfilling the responsibilities that have been established in his vicinity. He comes to the realisation that he is more ego centered than the most depraved of sinners. Nevertheless, his apprehension of losing his reputation and prominence in society entangles him so closely that he is unable to act on his inclinations. He has been reduced to a puppet, a slave to the meaningless regulations of Puritan society, which have drained his individual spirit. He is unable to fixate upon inanimate objects or people due to his apprehension regarding the possibility that others may be able to observe his heart. He always covers his heart with his hands to conceal his transgression, as the acute agony of sin on the flesh of his breast has formed the letter "A."

Hawthorne's sympathies for these three Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth, are very apparent in the novel. He believes that Hester has sinned as a confirmation of life, if she has. Her life is founded on her error; she advocates for the rights of personality that society is inclined to disregard. the novel's fundamental conflict, which is complete. Hawthorne charges the society that confronts Hester Prynne with conviction and power, despite the fact that she has been injured by an obstinate world. Its opposition is both justifiable and even legitimate.

Puritan society has been unsuccessful in its efforts to enforce obedience among its members. Arthur Dimmesdale demonstrates the fortitude to discard the garment of fake holiness at the conclusion of the novel. He refrains from retreating with Hester to another region in order to enjoy a more comfortable existence. Therefore, he acquires his mental freedom by losing his own existence. He has the capacity to liberate himself from the oppressive confines of Puritan society. Pearl also liberates herself from the symbol of humiliation. At the instant her father confesses his relationship with Hester, she acquires a new identity. After some time, she locates a residence for herself. Hester discovers her authentic self in

New England. She provides assurance to other women who have been wounded, squandered, or wronged by society:

She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness. (Hawthorne, 227)

Ultimately, it is evident that the characters who are the victims of society repent in their own unique manner, rather than in accordance with societal norms. They are responsible for their own spirits and disregard the prevailing social values and dogmas.

Society brands Hester an adulteress, intending the scarlet 'A' to be a mark of perpetual shame and isolation. Instead, through her resilience, skill, charity, and quiet dignity, she transforms it into a symbol of "Able," "Angel," and ultimately, respect and moral authority. Her ostensible punishment becomes the source of her unique identity and power. While Hester endures public shame, Dimmesdale suffers intense, private agony fueled by guilt and hypocrisy. His eventual public confession and death offer him a kind of release, but it's not a suitable punishment fitting his crime. It's a self-inflicted torment that consumes him, far exceeding the societal penalty Hester bore. His death feels tragic and wasteful, not morally satisfying.

Also, Chillingworth dedicates himself to torturing Dimmesdale, becoming utterly consumed by vengeance. After Dimmesdale's death, his reason for living vanishes. He withers and dies within a year, a broken, hollow shell. This isn't divine retribution; it's the natural, pathetic consequence of his own self-destructive obsession. He becomes a victim of his own vice, but the mechanism is psychological decay, not cosmic justice. The hypocritical leaders who condemn Hester while benefiting from her skills suffer no consequences. The societal structure and its flawed moral code remain largely intact.

IV. THOMAS HARDY: THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Thomas Hardy a prominent name in English literature, he is called a transitional poet and a novelist, since he outlived two centuries the 19th century and the 20th century. Born in 1840 he is classified as both romantic and realistic in his novels and poems. His Wessex seems to follow the tradition of Wordsworth. *The Return of the Native* is a good example of Hardy's use of Wessex as natural setting as well as a dominating force. The beauty and sadness provoked by Egdon Heath creates a background for the story and controlling the fate of all people living there. A sophisticated relationship controllers the behaviour of characters. The 'native' in the title is Clym, a successful jeweler in Paris. He returns to his homeland the Heath to work as schoolmaster. Clym and his cousin represent the traditional way of life while Eustacia represents modernity and the wish to escape from the countryside to the city. To Eustacia Clym is a good opportunity to escape her life in the Heath.

The Return of the Native is a tragic novel by Thomas Hardy, set on Egdon Heath, an unforgiving stretch of land in Wessex, England. Set during a period of social and political change, the plot follows the intersecting fates of various characters as they pursue their ambitions, romantic and otherwise, against the backdrop of class, gender, and cultural expectation.

The novel opens on Guy Fawkes Day, when the heath is suffused with bonfire light, a ritual observance for the failed Gunpowder Plot. It is introduced to the principal characters: Eustacia Vye, an impetuous, passionate, and ambitious young woman who wants to escape the heath; Damon Wildeve, a local innkeeper who is in love with Eustacia; Thomasin Yeobright, Wildeve's betrothed bride, whose wedding is postponed due to a problem with a marriage license; and Diggory Venn, a reddleman, who is in love with Thomasin in secret and takes on the role of her custodian. The plot becomes more complicated with the arrival of Clym Yeobright, a local fellow who has built a successful career as a diamond merchant in Paris. Thus, Clym makes a journey, and he returns to Egdon Heath from Paris because he wants to start a school and bring life to the people who are living in the heath. Eustacia on the other hand withers life on the heath

and Clym represents an escape from the spinning isolation of her life. Eustacia, however, marries Clym, against Mrs. Yeobright's objections, expecting that he will take her to Paris one day. But Clym's rejection of his diverse life, as well as his choice to remain on the heath, brings on marital discontent. After that, Eustacia, who grows more and more miserable as Clym becomes obsessed with setting up a school, which eventually he gives up on when he goes blind. He gets a job cutting furze to support himself, which further disappoints Eustacia. Meanwhile, Wildeve comes into a fortune, reviving Eustacia's interest in him. And this triggers a series of tragic events when Clym's mother, Mrs. Yeobright, dies after being turned away from Eustacia's house, convinced that she has been abandoned by her son. As Eustacia, wracked with guilt for the death of Mrs. Yeobright and despair over her relationship with Wildeve, plots her escape with Wildeve, the novel approaches its climax. In a stormy night, she drowns in Shadwater Weir, and Wildeve dies in trying to save her. Clym, who also attempts to save them, survives but bears deep emotional scars. Thomasin moves in with Clym and her daughter in the aftermath. Diggory Venn, now a prosperous farmer, resumes his romance with Thomasin and they finally marry. Unable to combat his own guilt and grief, Clym becomes a wandering preacher.

Isolation, love, and the fight against social constraints are themes explored in *The Return of the Native*. In seeking to escape her limitations, Eustacia embodies the limitations faced by women more broadly in Victorian England, which is what makes her truly tragic. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is a novel that takes place within the contexts of fate and nature, both of which play the role of destiny in the fates of the characters. The novel is set in Egdon Heath, a representative landscape that is vast and inhospitable, and the forces of nature serve as a framework that influences human behavior, often leading characters down the paths of virtue or vice. Determinism, is a philosophical concept that describes how everything in life is influenced by factors beyond human control, which is consistent with Hardy's philosophy of fate. The fate has high spirits in the novel and several occasions fate governs over the characters which comes through chance and coincidence. The marriage of Thomasin Yeobright

and Damon Wildeve is delayed over a technicality, and that sets in motion a series of events that leads to the tragedy at the center of the novel. It implies that even the smallest of actions or decisions can lead to great consequences, reinforcing that fate is a powerful force beyond human control that determines human fate.

Also, Hardy's characters often have ingrained traits that direct their decisions with the implication that their destiny is to a degree predetermined. For example, Clym Yeobright's compassionate nature forces him to return to Egdon Heath to better the lives of those around him, whereas Eustacia Vye's aspirations and longing to flee the heath drive her towards disastrous decisions. It fits with Hardy's conviction that character is destiny, that people are bound by what they are.

How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! ... I do not deserve my lot! ... O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all! (Hardy, 271)

Nature, especially Egdon Heath, serves as a formidable and indifferent force in the lives of the characters. The heath is itself almost a character, vast and mysterious, and its wilderness is symbolic of the triviality of humanity's achievements. The heath's harsh conditions unto themselves require respect and readiness; its inhabitants must conform to the heath's practices and threats. One example is Diggory Venn, who is in close proximity with nature, functioning on the fringes of social propriety and ultimately reconciling with the natural world as a dairy farmer.

Thomas Hardy drew his characters in all his novels and particularly *The Return of the Native* as puppets in the hands of indifferent and ironic power. The governing power of the universe is presented by Hardy as unjust and blind to characters' morality. The good is not rewarded and the evil is not

punished, the controlling power shows no sympathy to those who deserve it. The irony of such a power is defined as "a situation that appears opposite to what one expects" (Oxford Dictionary, 480). M. H. Abrams explains in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by classifying his texts in the category of cosmic irony, wherein "a deity, or else fate, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate or mock them" (137). Hardy follows cosmic laws that embed ironies and misfortune on his characters. The forces that Hardy implies in his novels tend to influence characters towards evil rather than good. This is clear in *The Return of the Native* where evil things happen to the wrong people. Eustacia is victimized by her environment when she marries Clym Yeobright as an escape from her birthplace. To avenge Eustacia's rejection, Damon Wildeve marries Clym's cousin Thomasin. Hardy assures that there is no evil character in his novels, but tragedies accrue because of their own misfortune destined upon them by a more powerful force. Hardy is often described as a pessimist because of his beliefs about hope in life. Hardy's plots are dominated by external factors of chance and fate, often leading to crisis and negative outcome. According to Richards Hardy "felt sympathy for almost all of his characters; the 'villain' has almost no place in his works" (Richards, *Part Two*, 24). Hardy believes that all humanity is dominated by an outside power that leads to painful endings. This is clear in *The Return of the Native* where chance and coincidence work together to produce the worst circumstances indifferent to will and matters of equality and justice. Mrs Yeobright's journey across the Heath and her reunion with her son is a good example of the working of chance, and her son's marrying Eustacia without her consent. Mrs Yeobright tries to bridge the gap between herself and her son she sends him a gift by a messenger, who goes gambling he says: "To think that I should have been born so lucky as this, and not have found it out until now!" (Hardy, 175). When he starts losing he gambles with Mrs Yeobright's gift and loses it as well. He cries, "I don't care--I don't care!" . . . "The devil will toss me into the flame on his three-pronged fork for this night's work, I know! But perhaps I shall win yet" (Hardy, 179). Hardy plays with the fate of characters in an ironic manner. It was Mrs

Yeobright's decision to send her gift with Christian Cantle that led to further coincidence of bad relationship with her son. Hardy employs the chances and possibilities that might lead to disaster. Mrs Yeobright is elderly, Clym falls into deep sleep, Wildeva coming to the house all of the events led to tragedy by the dominance of a universal force. The "shocking discrepancy between what happens and what should happen if Right prevailed in the world" (Richards, *Part Two*, 274). The Will is "blind and distributes good or bad without regard to merit" (Chapman 146) in the Return of the Native Eustacia and Wildeva, Clym and Thomasin are all decent characters and the lack evil intentions. It is their misfortune and bad coincidence that led to Eustacia and Wildeva's death. Clym's dreams and hopes turn in the opposite direction at the end of the story. Diggory Venn and Thomasin find happiness not necessary because they are good but because of the higher power that influence human life usually for the worst. Hardy believes that the power of chance, change and coincidence are true in real life, as Chapman says: "*The Return of the Native* shows the workings of higher deity but does not offer the assurance of a continuing restored stability or an explanation of why things are as they are" (Chapman, 153). *The Return of the Native*, plays with the characters' lives always hoping 'if only'. different tools of fate influence Hardy's characters' lives as he believed influenced all of humanity's, and this tragic novel lends great insight into Hardy's philosophy of the workings of our own world.

The novel's tragic outcomes are deeply intertwined with the social fabric and deterministic forces at play. Rather than presenting a world where justice prevails, Hardy's narrative exposes the oppressive nature of societal expectations, especially for women like Eustacia, whose rebellion against her environment leads not to just deserts but to destruction⁵. The critical consensus is that Hardy's characters are "good people without evil intent," whose suffering results from "blind" forces rather than any moral reckoning.

V. CONCLUSION

poetic justice in *The Scarlet Letter* is realized through the inevitable consequences of sin, the

transformation of punishment into personal growth, and the tension between social condemnation and individual redemption. Hawthorne criticizes the rigid Puritanical system by illustrating that justice is not only about punishment but also about the moral and spiritual journey toward forgiveness and understanding

The scarlet letter itself is a powerful symbol of poetic justice. Initially a mark of shame, it evolves in meaning throughout the novel, reflecting Hester's resilience and moral growth. Hawthorne uses the letter to reveal the hypocrisy of Puritan society, which punishes sin harshly but is itself defective and corrupt. The prison and the cemetery, first structures built in the Puritan settlements, symbolize the dark realities of sin and death underlying the community's moral pretensions. The scarlet letter, therefore, is not just a punishment but a complex symbol of sin, suffering, and eventual redemption, embodying poetic justice by transforming shame into strength. Hawthorne presents redemption as an individual, internal process rather than one granted by society or religious authorities. Hester's redemption comes through self-awareness, repentance, and good works, rather than public forgiveness. The community's perception of her shifts over time, illustrating that poetic justice in the novel is not fixed but evolves with personal growth and societal change. This contrasts with Puritan doctrine, which emphasizes external judgment and predestination. The novel also explores the destructive power of concealed sin, particularly in the character of Arthur Dimmesdale. His hidden guilt leads to self-torment and physical decline, demonstrating that unconfessed sin brings ruin, while confession and acceptance of one's faults lead to moral and spiritual liberation. This dynamic reinforces poetic justice by showing that true justice involves facing the truth of one's actions, not merely external punishment. Finally, poetic justice in *The Scarlet Letter* is realized through the inevitable consequences of sin, the transformation of punishment into personal growth, and the tension between social condemnation and individual redemption. Hawthorne condemns the rigid Puritanical system by illustrating that justice is not only about punishment but also about the moral and spiritual journey toward forgiveness and

understanding. Poetic justice, as traditionally conceived, refers to the literary convention where virtue is ultimately rewarded and vice punished, thus providing a morally satisfying resolution to a narrative. However, the applicability and presence of poetic justice in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* has been a subject of critical debate, especially given Hardy's philosophical outlook and narrative choices. The novel's tragic outcomes are deeply intertwined with the social elements and deterministic forces at play. Rather than presenting a world where justice prevails, Hardy's narrative exposes the oppressive nature of social expectations, especially for women like Eustacia, whose rebellion against her environment leads not to just deserts but to destruction. *The Return of the Native* stands as a powerful example of the notion of poetic justice. Hardy's novel replaces the moral lesson at the end with a vision of life dominated by irony, chance, and social grip. The suffering and fates of characters like Eustacia, Wildeve, and Clym are not morally deserved, but are the result of forces beyond their control, reflecting Hardy's skepticism toward the existence of poetic or divine justice in the world.

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