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On **Hardy's**

The Return of the Native

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Hardy's The Return of the Native

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藏书章

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The Return of the Native

HARDY'S LIFE AND CAREER

Born on June 2, 1840, in Upper Bockhampton, not far from Dorchester, in Dorsetshire, Thomas Hardy was the son of Thomas Hardy, a master mason or building contractor, and Jemima Hand, a woman of some literary interests. Hardy's formal education consisted only of some eight years in local schools, but by the end of this period he had on his own read a good deal in English, French, and Latin, just as later in London he made his own rather careful study of painting and English poetry. He was also interested in music and learned to play the violin. At the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to an architect in Dorchester and remained in that profession, later in London and then again in Dorchester, for almost twenty years.

He began to write poetry during this time, but none of it was published. His first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, written in 1867-68, was never published, and the manuscript did not survive except insofar as Hardy used parts of it in other books. His first published novel was *Desperate Remedies* in 1871; the first novel which came out in serial form before publication as a book, an arrangement he was to follow for the rest of his novels, was *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in 1873; his real fame as a novelist, along with sufficient income to enable him to abandon architecture for good, came with *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874. On September 17, 1874, Hardy married Emma Lavinia Gifford.

From this time on Hardy devoted his full time to writing, continuing to publish novels regularly until his last, *Jude the Obscure*, in 1895. Among these are some of the best of his so-called Wessex novels (Hardy uses the name of one of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon Britain to designate an area including his native Dorsetshire): *The Return of the Native*, 1878; *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 1886; *The Woodlanders*, 1887; *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891; in addition to *Jude*. To this list of best should be added the earlier *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

In writing most of his novels, Hardy meticulously worked out the details of time and geography he wanted to use; almost every

novel is, therefore, located in a carefully mapped out area of Wessex and covers a specified period of time. *The Return of the Native*, for example, covers the period 1842-43 in its first five books and is set on Puddletown Heath (called Egdon Heath in the novel), on which Upper Bockhampton is situated. This novel also reveals a side of Hardy's authorship for which he has been taken to task by critics. In response to requests from readers of the novel in serial form, he added a sixth book to the original five to give his story a happier ending. Hardy seems to have responded to the demands of his audience with what must seem like careless indifference nowadays. He says in a note to the novel that the reader can choose which of the two endings he prefers but that the rigorous reader will probably favor the original conception. (For a discussion of the effects on the novel of this addition of a book, see the Commentary for Book Sixth.)

Tess sold more rapidly than any of his other novels, and *Jude* was probably more vehemently denounced. During this period of time Hardy also published his first poems as well as short stories. On June 29, 1885, he moved into a house he had built in Dorchester and lived there for the rest of his life.

On November 27, 1912, Mrs. Hardy died, a woman with whom he had become increasingly incompatible; and on February 10, 1914, he married Florence Emily Dugdale, a woman whom he had referred to for several years previously as his assistant and who was about forty years younger than he. After the appearance of *Jude* Hardy devoted his attention entirely to poetry and drama, publishing a number of books of poems, including one which he prepared just before his death. He also wrote and published an epic drama on the Napoleonic era, *The Dynasts*, which appeared in three parts with a total of nineteen acts. He was given a number of honors, including an honorary degree from Oxford. The success of *Tess* had made possible a good income from his writing for the rest of his life, and when he died he left an estate of nearly half a million dollars. He died on January 11, 1928, and a few days later was buried in Westminster Abbey.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Across Egdon Heath on a November day a reddleman is traveling with a young woman whose identity he conceals from a

chance acquaintance of the road. The reddleman notices the figure of a woman atop Rainbarrow, the largest of the Celtic burial mounds in the area, and then, replacing her, other figures. These are heath folk come to start a Fifth of November bonfire.

The reddleman, Diggory Venn, returns safely to Mrs. Yeobright her niece, Thomasin Yeobright, who was to have married Damon Wildeve that day. Mrs. Yeobright takes Thomasin with her to see Wildeve at the inn he operates in order to demand an explanation of his failure to marry her. The heath folk, after the bonfire, come to serenade the supposed newlyweds, and when Wildeve is able to get rid of them he starts off to see Eustacia Vye, the mysterious figure Venn saw earlier on the barrow.

Eustacia watches for Wildeve on Rainbarrow, returning now and then to check on the signal fire she has had built before her grandfather's house (Captain Vye is the chance acquaintance of Venn's). Wildeve, who was once her lover but whom she has not seen since his interest in Thomasin, does finally arrive.

Venn accidentally learns of the meeting between Eustacia and Wildeve. The reddleman, a longtime admirer and once rejected suitor of Thomasin, resolves to help her and purposely overhears the conversation the next time Eustacia and Wildeve meet on Rainbarrow. Venn then calls on Eustacia to get her to help Thomasin, finally telling her he knows about her meetings with Wildeve. Venn also informs Mrs. Yeobright he would like to marry her niece. Though he is rejected, the aunt uses him as a means to put pressure on Wildeve. Wildeve goes immediately to Eustacia to convince her to leave with him, but she will not answer right away. The news of the arrival for the Christmas holidays of Mrs. Yeobright's son Clym is widely talked about on the heath, including Captain Vye's house.

Eustacia hears much about Clym, and Mrs. Yeobright and Thomasin make preparations for his arrival. After getting a glimpse of him, Eustacia is fascinated by this native returned from Paris and arranges to substitute for one of the boys in the traditional Christmas mumming, the first performance of which is at a party Mrs. Yeobright is giving. Eustacia succeeds in meeting Clym but while she is in costume. Now that her interest in Wildeve has paled, Eustacia makes clear to Venn that she would like to see Wildeve

married to Thomasin. They do marry, with Eustacia serving as witness. Mrs. Yeobright, who has once opposed the marriage, does not attend; and Clym, who has been away from home, finds out about it only after it has taken place.

Giving up his business career in Paris, Clym has returned to Egdon Heath to set up as a schoolteacher to those who can't afford existing schools. Mrs. Yeobright disapproves, thinking Clym is not ambitious enough. Clym meets Eustacia, in her own person this time, and is strongly attracted to her, an attraction that Mrs. Yeobright argues against. He sees Eustacia regularly, usually on the heath, for several months and then asks her to marry him. She says yes, though she hopes he will finally give up his plans and take her to Paris.

When Mrs. Yeobright and Clym quarrel over his love of Eustacia and he feels forced to leave his mother's house, he decides they should marry right away and live for a time on the heath. Clym finds a cottage and moves from home, leaving his mother disconsolate and bitter. Wildeve's interest in Eustacia revives when he hears of her approaching marriage. One the occasion of their marriage, Mrs. Yeobright sends a small inheritance to both Thomasin and Clym, but her handyman loses it gambling with Wildeve, who wants revenge on his wife's aunt for not trusting him with the money. Venn, protecting Thomasin, wins it back from Wildeve, but not understanding that part of it is Clym's, the reddleman delivers it all to Thomasin.

Eustacia and Clym for a time live a secluded life. When Mrs. Yeobright receives no response from Clym about the money, she calls on Eustacia, and they quarrel bitterly. Clym, hurrying his study to be a teacher so as to pacify the impatient Eustacia, develops severe eye trouble and is forced to suspend his work. To his wife's dismay, he takes up furze cutting as a way of making a little money and getting exercise. To Eustacia this is a far cry from what she yearns for: the gay life of the great world, especially as represented by Paris. To compensate, she goes to a gipsying (a dance) and unexpectedly encounters Wildeve and dances with him. Venn sees them together and attempts to discourage Wildeve's loitering around Clym's house at night.

Persuaded by the reddleman to forget her pride and call on her son, Mrs. Yeobright starts the long walk to his house on a hot

August day. She sees Wildeve admitted by Eustacia before she can get there; when she knocks on the door, Clym's wife looks out the window but doesn't answer. The older woman tries to walk back home, stops in exhaustion, and is bitten by an adder. She is later discovered by Clym, who has set off for her house to attempt a reconciliation, but even medical attention cannot save her and she dies. Clym blames himself for her death. Eustacia is nearby when Mrs. Yeobright dies but doesn't make an appearance; she has accidentally encountered Wildeve, who has lately come into an inheritance.

Clym for some time is ill and irrational because of his mother's death. His constant blaming of himself exhausts Eustacia, and she tries to find consolation in Wildeve. Once back to normal again, Clym sets out to discover what his mother was doing on the heath. From Mrs. Yeobright's handyman, Venn, and a young boy who came across his mother as she tried to get home that day, Clym learns what happened. He accuses Eustacia of cruelty to his mother and deception of himself as a husband, and she leaves his house to return to Captain Vye's.

At her grandfather's Eustacia doesn't know how to occupy herself and once even thinks of suicide. A bonfire is lit for her when the Fifth of November comes, an inadvertent signal to Wildeve, who offers to help Eustacia get away from the heath to Paris. On Thomasin's advice Clym, now moved back to his mother's house, writes to ask his wife to return to him.

On the evening of the sixth of November Eustacia signals to Wildeve that she wants to go, by chance not getting Clym's letter before she leaves the house. Thomasin, who has suspicions about Wildeve, and Captain Vye, who finds out Eustacia has left the house very late at night, come to ask Clym's help. As Thomasin tries to get back home, finally with Venn's assistance, as Wildeve waits with a gig for Eustacia, and as Clym looks for his wife, Eustacia on this dark, stormy night throws herself in a stream near a weir. Both Wildeve and Clym try to rescue her, but it is Venn who pulls out both men as well as Eustacia. Of the three only Clym survives.

After her husband's death, Thomasin moves into the family home with Clym. Venn, having given up the reddle trade, calls on her, and

they become interested in each other. However, Clym thinks he ought to ask his cousin to marry him, since his mother wished it. But Thomasin and Venn decide to marry and do. Clym is last seen on top of Rainbarrow, performing as an itinerant preacher of moral lectures.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Clym (Clement) Yeobright

A young man of about thirty who gives up a business career in Paris to return to his native Edgon Heath to become a "school-master to the poor and ignorant."

Eustacia Vye

A young woman of nineteen who is frustrated by life on the heath and who longs for the gay life of the world.

Mrs. Yeobright

Clym's mother, a widow of inflexible standards.

Thomasin (Tamsin) Yeobright

Clym's cousin and Mrs. Yeobright's niece, a young girl of gentle ways and conventional expectations.

Damon Wildeve

An ex-engineer who is keeper of the Quiet Woman Inn, a man easily infatuated by women.

Diggory Venn

A resourceful man of twenty-four and a reddleman (a traveling seller of reddle, red chalk used for marking sheep).

Captain Vye

Eustacia's grandfather and a former sailor.

Timothy Fairway

A pompous, sententious man of middle age who is greatly respected by the other heath folk and who is a furze dealer.

Grandfer Cattle

A somewhat senile and always lively ex-soldier of about sixty-nine.

Christian Cantle

Grandfer Cantle's fearful and timid thirty-one-year-old son.

Humphrey

A furze cutter.

Sam

A turf cutter.

Susan Nunsuch

A woman who suspects that Eustacia is a witch and that she has cast evil spells on her son.

Johnny Nunsuch

Susan's son, a young boy.

Olly Dowden

A besom (heath broom) maker.

Charley

A sixteen-year-old boy who works for Captain Vye and who admires Eustacia, largely from afar.

Summaries and Commentaries

BOOK FIRST

CHAPTERS 1-2

Summary

Near twilight on a Saturday in November Egdon Heath slowly turns dark. It has changed little from the way it was described in ancient times. The only evidence of man's activity is an old highway and an even older barrow.

An old man in clothes of nautical style makes his way along this highway and presently catches up with another traveler walking alongside a van. By the red color of his complexion, his clothes, and his van, the second man is identified as a reddleman. During a

desultory conversation, the old man discovers the other has a young woman in his van, but the reddleman will say little about her. He leaves the old man to pull off the road and rest, and while he does so the reddleman sees a figure on top of the highest point in the heath, a Celtic barrow. When it finally leaves its position, he can tell it is a woman, and he is surprised to see her place taken by several other figures.

Commentary

It is significant that Hardy devotes the entire first chapter of his novel to a description of Egdon Heath; even more significant is the way he described it. It is said to be eternally waiting and “unmoved” in its “ancient permanence.” The “storm [is] its lover, and the wind its friend.” “It [has] a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities”; and its characteristic vegetation gives it an “antique brown dress.” In short, Hardy gives animation and a personality to Egdon. Some critics have gone so far as to speak of the heath as one of the main characters in the novel, if not the sole main character.

It is perhaps more relevant to think of Egdon Heath as a symbol. Hardy himself suggests that such a “gaunt waste” with its “chastened sublimity” may come to represent a new ideal of beauty for modern man. But this is, of course, an indirect way of commenting on modern man and his view of the universe. It is well to remember that no beings appear in the novel until the second chapter and even then they are not named. At the very least, Egdon is shown to be inhospitable to man, even as it is almost untouched by him.

It is here, then, that the events Hardy sets in motion will play themselves out. When human figures do finally appear, they seem insignificant against the backdrop of the indifferent, if not hostile, Egdon. Many times during the course of the story, for instance, Clym will be shown to appear like a tiny insect moving across the face of nature. The heath as a setting and a symbol as well as the way the first people to appear are shown in relation to their surroundings vividly conveys Hardy’s theme in the novel: that man lives his life in a universe that is at least indifferent to him and may be hostile.

Many events to come in the story are foreshadowed in these opening chapters. The fact that the old man is returning to his home

and the reddleman is bringing the young woman to hers (these characters are later identified as Captain Vye, Diggory Venn, and Thomasin Yeobright) hints at the more important homecoming of Clym Yeobright in Book Second. Hardy also uses deliberate mystification to presage the future: he raises questions about the reddleman and about the woman on the barrow (Eustacia Vye), and he implies that the young woman in the van is in some kind of difficulty. In fact, without identifying them yet, Hardy has presented most of the main characters about whose future the events of the novel will be concerned.

Hardy has sometimes been accused of inept handling of plot, partly because of his preference for developing his story through a series of short scenes. Such series do often occur in this novel, and it is sometimes distracting to be pulled from one scene to another so quickly, especially with the accompanying shift in point of view. Yet, in chapter 3 occurs one of several long scenes developed in rather great detail. It is true, however, that the short scene gets more frequent use than the long.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

The figures on Rainbarrow, as it is called, are the heath folk come to build the traditional Fifth of November bonfire. The group includes, among others, Timothy Fairway, Grandfer Cante, Christian Cante, Humphrey, Sam, Olly Dowden, and Susan Nunsuch. As they watch the fire, they discuss the marriage that day of Thomasin Yeobright, Mrs. Yeobright's niece, and Damon Wildeve, an engineer turned innkeeper, as well as Mrs. Yeobright's earlier disapproval of it. They also mention the imminent arrival of Mrs. Yeobright's son Clym. The bonfire in front of Captain Vye's leads to comments on him and his granddaughter Eustacia. And Christian's ineptness with women comes in for extended discussion. When their fire dies out, Fairway leads the way with Susan Nunsuch in a wild dance through the embers.

The dance is interrupted by the arrival of the reddleman, who inquires the way to Mrs. Yeobright's house. Mrs. Yeobright herself comes by, looking for Olly Dowden, and the two women go off

together toward the Quiet Woman Inn, which is now to be Thomasin's home.

Commentary

Of the bonfires lighting up the heath this night, Hardy says that they "are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot." The Gunpowder Plot refers to Guy Fawkes, and Fifth of November is Guy Fawkes Day. Though apparently the custom of observing this day is dying out elsewhere, on Egdon Heath, remote and provincial, it is still observed, along with other traditional or customary practices, as shown later in the novel.

The occasion of the bonfire also gives Hardy the opportunity to show the heath dwellers as not only traditional but also superstitious and prone to believe in folk wisdom. All are willing to ascribe truth to the saying "No moon, no man" as it applies in general as well as in particular to the case of Christian Cantle. They all appear to believe, also, that ghosts do exist (the one mentioned is said to be red) and that they appear only to "single sleepers," like Christian. Not even Fairway, who is looked up to by the others, questions any of these beliefs.

Certainly Christian Cantle's life is dominated by such wisdom and superstition; he says of himself that he is "a man of the mournfullest make." Hardy uses him as a ludicrous figure, a grotesque, who is defined solely by his shortcomings and fears. In him the fears of all the provincials or rustics are given open expression. Grandfer Cantle, Christian's father, is also a grotesque but of a different sort. If Christian is all fear, Grandfer is all self-advertised courage, as in his repeated references here and elsewhere to his service in 1804 as a soldier in the "Bang-up Locals." He is also a parody of senility in his songs and wild jigs. Between these two and the less demonstrative Humphrey and Sam, stands the pompous and sententious Fairway. Father and son are used by Hardy for the purposes of a slapstick humor, but Fairway is deflated as a stuffed shirt, as shown, for example, in the way he is presented in his telling of the tale about Mrs. Yeobright's earlier objections to Thomasin's marriage. Some critics say that Hardy uses this group of minor characters as a kind of chorus, in the manner of a Greek play.

Certainly the conversation and gossip of these characters is used to describe events that have happened in the past, an older technique partly replaced in the modern novel by the flashback. They also comment on events and people in the present as well as look to what will happen in the immediate future. Their opinions are important for Hardy's purposes, since they represent the community in which the main characters live out their lives.

CHAPTERS 4-5

Summary

Outside the inn Mrs. Yeobright encounters the reddleman, Diggory Venn, who she has been told is looking for her. He informs her that he has her niece in his van, and Mrs. Yeobright immediately goes to the girl. She very soon learns from Thomasin that the girl has returned home alone from Anglebury, where she and Wildeve were to have been married earlier in the day, and that she is not yet married. Her aunt takes her in immediately to confront Wildeve and is not entirely satisfied with his explanation of what happened. In private conversation apart from Mrs. Yeobright, Wildeve answers Thomasin's questions by saying that, of course, he will still marry her.

Their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of the group from Rainbarrow, led by Fairway and Grandfer Cattle, who have come to serenade the supposed newlyweds. Wildeve is annoyed by their appearance but must put up with their congratulations and rambling conversation. By the time they leave he discovers Mrs. Yeobright and Thomasin have already gone, and he starts off toward Mistover Knap, assuming that the fire still burning in front of Captain Vye's is a signal from Eustacia.

Commentary

Whatever else might be said about the character of Diggory Venn, certainly Hardy uses him as a "connector" in the development of the plot (to employ a term from the English critic E. M. Forster). He is a natural for the part: his occupation as a reddleman makes him a characteristic part of the setting but yet a person who is always traveling and not really one of the heath folk; the kind of person he is gives him the necessary resource-

fulness. A connector is a character who, though not important in himself to the main events of the story, brings about or makes possible these events. It is true that Venn eventually marries Thomasin Yeobright, in the Book Sixth that Hardy added to satisfy his readers. But he is in the novel primarily to do what he does in these chapters: he is the one who brings Thomasin back to her aunt. He is invariably in the right place at the right time to lend aid, offer advice in his humble way, or listen sympathetically to another with problems. His activity extends from bandaging Johnny Nunsuch's hand on one occasion to rescuing Clym Yeobright from death in the stream adjoining Shadwater Weir.

As has already been mentioned, Hardy makes light of the credulity of the heath folk, though he shows them as no more limited than any human being. He does so here, as many times elsewhere, in the long-winded discussion of the reputed musical ability of Thomasin's now dead father. But this in turn leads up to another variety of Hardy's humor, as shown in this sentence: "As with Farinelli's singing before the princesses, Sheridan's renowned Begum Speech, and other such examples, the fortunate condition of its being for ever lost to the world invested the deceased Mr. Yeobright's *tour de force* on that memorable afternoon with a cumulative glory which comparative criticism, had that been possible, might considerably have shorn down." In its apparently ponderous, certainly slow-breaking effect, this sentence is very much like something by Mark Twain. It is, of course, a variety of verbal humor.

CHAPTERS 6-7

Summary

On Rainbarrow again Eustacia Vye impatiently waits for Wildeve to heed her signal. After watching the inn for some time, she returns to the fire before her grandfather's house and persuades Johnny Nunsuch, her young assistant, to continue his work of feeding the blaze. When Wildeve signals his approach, she sends Johnny home and awaits Wildeve's appearance. Though she is pleased that she has made him come, in their conversation she is unable to get him to say he loves her more than he does Thomasin. Though they have been lovers in the past, each is now suspicious of the other's intentions. They part without any definite commitment to each other.