

The Return of the Native

Written by : Thomas Hardy

Genre: Fiction/ Novel

Literary Period: Victorian Age

Published: 1878

The Novel is divided into six Books-

1. *The Three Women-* Thomsain, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright are introduced
2. *The Arrival-* Highlights the arrival of Clym Yeobright on the Egdon Heath
3. *The Fascination-* Depicts the increasing fascination of Eustacia for Clym
4. *The Closed Door-* Describes how Eustacia doesn't open the door for Mrs. Yeobright under some misconception and it leads to straining of relationship between the mother and the son.
5. *The Discovery-* Clym discovers the cause of his mother's death
6. *After Course-* Portrays the incidents on the Heath after the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve...

Brief Summary of the Novel:

- As the novel opens, the wild landscape of Egdon Heath broods alone, save for an old who makes his way. The old man is Captain Vye who soon encounters a horse-drawn van, being led by Diggory Venn, a *reddleman* . In the van there is a young woman whose identity Venn rudely conceals from the elderly hiker.
- Diggory is discreetly transporting a distressed young woman. She is Thomasin Yeobright, humiliated that her wedding to Damon Wildeve was halted due to an issue with the marriage license in a nearby community.
- The truth is more complicated, though. Wildeve is still infatuated with his former partner, the passionate and mysterious Eustacia Vye, who lives on the heath by circumstance but wants nothing more than to escape it. She lights a bonfire that evening to draw him to her. The fire attracts only minimal attention, since there are bonfires all along the heath to

commemorate November 5th. Wildeve correctly interprets her signal, and meets her.

- When Diggory learns of their liaison, he plans to intervene on Thomasin's behalf. He has long loved her, and though she once rejected his proposal because of his lower status, he is dedicated to ensuring her happiness, even with another man.
- Just as Eustacia's affection for Wildeve begins to wane, an exciting prospect returns to Egdon. Clym Yeobright is a local man who has made his way in the world as a diamond merchant in Paris. His visit prompts Eustacia to facilitate a meeting between them, which eventually results in a mutual attraction. Eustacia makes her disinterest known to Wildeve, and he finally marries Thomasin.
- She is disappointed, however, to discover that Clym has rejected his cosmopolitan lifestyle in hopes of founding a school on the heath. Hopeful that she can change his mind, Eustacia agrees to marry him. Clym's mother, Mrs. Yeobright, disapproves of both Thomasin's and Clym's weddings, and is further irked that her son Clym would refuse to exploit his intelligence and talent away from the heath. She refuses to attend his wedding.
- On the occasion of their marriage, Mrs. Yeobright decides to send a gift of money. Her son, Clym, is marrying Eustacia against her wishes, and she hopes that, by offering this gift, she and her son can repair their relationship. The other half of the money is to go to her niece, Thomasin, who has recently married Damon Wildeve, Eustacia's former lover.
- Unfortunately, Mrs. Yeobright selects as her messenger the inept Christian Cantle, the village simpleton. Cantle loses the money 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 should go to Clym, Venn he 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's studies in schoolkeeping are so intense that his eyesight fails, and he is forced to take a job as a furze cutter to generate an income. Eustacia is further disappointed in Clym's choice of a low career, and realizes she might never escape the heath.
- Her feelings for Wildeve are reawakened, however, when she learns that he has inherited a fortune, and plans to travel the world. Wildeve visits the Yeobright house one day, but Clym is asleep.
- Eustacia is shaken by his visit, and then confused when Mrs. Yeobright suddenly arrives on her own unannounced visit. Eustacia ignores her knocks, and, believing she has been spurned by her son, Mrs. Yeobright attempts the long journey back to her home, but passes out and dies on the heath from a snakebite.
- Clym holds first himself, then Eustacia, responsible for Mrs. Yeobright's death. Spurned by his grief and hatred, Eustacia returns to her grandfather's house, and Wildeve agrees to help her escape Egdon. She sets an evening for her escape, and does not cancel the plan even when that evening proves to be impossibly stormy. That night, Thomasin, Diggory, Clym and Captain Vye search for the missing couple, but discover only tragedy after Eustacia seems to drown herself and Wildeve dies in the rescue attempt. Clym, too, is wounded in his rescue attempt, but survives.
- Thomasin initially moves in with Clym and her daughter after the tragedy. Diggory Venn returns as a wealthy and dependable farmer, and she agrees to marry him. Clym never transcends his guilt and shame, and eventually turns to preaching to fill his solitude.

The Return of the Native is formally conventional; thematically it thrives on doubt and ambiguity. With its extensive narrative description, abundant classical and scriptural references and stylized dialogue, the book adheres closely to the high Victorian style.

Significance of the Egdon Heath in the Novel:

Egdon Heath is the first "character" introduced into the book. The heath proves physically and psychologically important throughout the novel: characters are

defined by their relation to the heath, and the weather patterns of the heath even reflect the inner dramas of the characters. Indeed, it almost seems as if the characters are formed by the heath itself: Diggory Venn, red from head to toe, is an actual embodiment of the muddy earth; Eustacia Vye seems to spring directly from the heath, a part of Rainbarrow itself, when she is first introduced; Wildeve's name might just as well refer to the wind-whipped heath itself. But, importantly, the heath manages to defy definition. It is, in chapter one, "a place perfectly accordant with man's nature." The narrator's descriptions of the heath vary widely throughout the novel, ranging from the sublime to the gothic. There is no possible objectivity about the heath. No reliable statement can be made about it. For Clym, the heath is beautiful; for Eustacia, it is hateful.

Major Characters in the Novel-

Clym (Clement) Yeobright- A young man of about thirty who gives up a business career in Paris and returns to his native Egdon Heath to become a "schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant."

Eustacia Vye- A young woman of nineteen who is frustrated by life on the heath, longs to escape it in order to lead the more adventure-filled 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 with an appetite for women.

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

Other inhabitants of the Heath (the village folk):

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.

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

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

Humphrey- A furze cutter (*furze* is a low, prickly shrub).

Sam- A turf cutter.

Susan Nunsuch- A woman who suspects that Eustacia is a witch who 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.

Web Source-

1. <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/returnofnative/section10/>
2. <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/r/the-return-of-the-native/book-summary>
3. <https://www.gradesaver.com/return-of-the-native/study-guide/summary>