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STUDY GUIDE
TO
THOMAS HARDY'S *THE RETURN OF*
THE NATIVE

BY
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This work is totally based on:
BRIGHT NOTES: The Return of the Native
www.BrightNotes.com

LECTURE 3

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Hardy classified this work as a Novel of Character and Environment. Albert Guerard calls it a tragedy of cross purpose, which is universal and vast. Here we have the brooding heath, less concerned over human beings caught in its spell than human beings are concerned over the plight of ants in an anthill on its wild surface. Here we have characters, themselves strong personalities, playing upon each other and played upon by this imperturbable environment. Guerard says that Hardy believed literally in the power of imagination over the body and in the magnetic, compelling power of the strong mind over the weak. In *The Return of the Native* the heath is the ultimate strong mind.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

Eustacia Vye, a nineteen-year-old, sultry beauty, has one compelling desire: to marry a man worthy of her and to travel to exotic distant lands with him as her cavalier. Living on Egdon Heath, she has only one possible candidate: Damon Wildeve, keeper of the village inn, a former civil engineer who somehow failed in his profession. Wildeve and Eustacia Vye have equally uncurbed passionate natures. They seem to thrive on tormenting each other - now passionately loving, now passionately hating. Wildeve, however, has a roving eye which has been caught by the innocent simplicity of Thomasin Yeobright. She is not one to be trifled with, and he has asked her to marry him; but at church on the wedding day, whether by his intent, or by his mistake, the license proves invalid. Eustacia is overjoyed at the news, thinking Wildeve is so much in love with her that he cannot marry another.

Thomasin Yeobright, however, has a protector, Diggory Venn. Diggory is in love with Thomasin. He has earlier proposed to her but has been gently refused. Diggory determines that she shall have the man she wants. He and Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt, contrive separately and together, to bring about the delayed wedding.

Eustacia, confronted with an actual proposal of marriage from Wildeve, cannot

bring herself to believe him good enough for her; neither can she bring herself to accept what she considers second place, since Thomasin received his first proposal of marriage.

The arrival of Clym Yeobright, Mrs. Yeobright's son, stirs Eustacia's spirit of adventure. Clym's business is in Paris. Bright lights glitter in Eustacia's mind. Clym is well-educated and well-to-do; he is her knight-in-armor come to rescue her; Thomasin, his earlier sweetheart, must not get him. Eustacia joins the schemers to bring about the postponed wedding of Thomasin and Damon Wildeve. Meanwhile Mrs. Yeobright, by telling Wildeve of another suitor who wants Thomasin, rekindles his desire for her. Diggory Venn, by admitting himself the other suitor, and Eustacia Vye, by spurning Wildeve's proposal to her, send Wildeve, in a pique, to set a date with Thomasin.

Thomasin marries Wildeve. Wildeve thinks he is having revenge on Eustacia, but Eustacia is happy to have Thomasin removed as a rival for Clym Yeobright's affections. When Clym marries Eustacia, despite his mother's disapproval of the "hussy," he has to move from his mother's house because of the rift, and the wedding is without her blessing or presence.

Eustacia has heard Clym say that he wants to stay on the heath and become a teacher, but she cannot believe that anyone who has been to Paris will not go back there. By the end of their honeymoon, however, she realizes his firm resolve never to go back. Clym plunges deeper into his studies to hasten his becoming a teacher, and thus ruins his eyesight. Unable to read for months, he finds in furze-cutting (cutting bushes on the heath) an occupation which enables him to keep his self-respect. Eustacia, however, is humiliated and in despair.

Clym's mother, learning of his misfortune through Diggory Venn (the ever-watchful one), is persuaded to relent and go to call on the couple. Through a mistake, however, no one answers her knocks, though she knows her son, his wife, and another man are in the house. She stumbles back over the heath in the broiling sun, to be found later by her son in a state of exhaustion from which she dies.

Clym is ill and broken-hearted for weeks. He cannot understand how his mother could have been turned from his door thinking she was cast off by her son, as a neighbor boy reports. He blindly blames himself and will not be comforted. Finally he learns that it all happened while he was taking his mid-day nap. Eustacia has a visitor with her

and, thinking Clym had roused to answer his mother's knock, had not gone to the door. Clym demands to know who the visitor was. Eustacia will not say. Clym, beside himself with rage and grief, says things that drive Eustacia from the cottage back to her grandfather's house at Mistover.

Eustacia meets secretly with Wildeve, who has now inherited a considerable sum of money. He agrees to help Eustacia escape to the seaport, inwardly planning to escape with her. She still has her dream of Paris; he relishes the thought of an illicit elopement with her.

Thomasin suspects the plan and goes to Clym, her cousin, for help. He sets forth to intercept the pair; Thomasin goes on to ask help of Diggory Venn. Diggory and Thomasin go together to the place where Clym and Wildeve have met - on the heath road beside the river. Suddenly they all hear a dull thud and soon discover that Eustacia, overwhelmed by the futility of it all, has slipped or flung herself into the water to drown. Wildeve and Clym Yeobright both swim to rescue her. All three are finally dragged from the water by Diggory Venn. Eustacia and Wildeve are dead, but Clym is revived.

Hardy's sixth book of the novel, written at the demand of his public, has Thomasin, now a widow, marry her faithful lover, Diggory Venn. Clym Yeobright plunges on alone through life in his chosen professions of teaching and preaching.

