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Lecturer : Dheyaa W. Ghafeer
Scientific Degree: Assistant Lecturer
Scientific Qualification: MA Holder
Specialty: English Language – Literature

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محاضرات مادة الرواية للمرحلة الثانية - قسم الترجمة

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

BY
DHEYAA W. GHAFEEER

This work is totally based on:
BRIGHT NOTES: The Return of the Native
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LECTURE 9: CHAPTER 6: THE FIGURE AGAINST THE SKY

Now we are to find out about the figure that rose from Rainbarrow “like a spike from a helmet” when the reddleman first surveyed Egdon Heath. As soon as everyone has left the top of Rainbarrow, this same figure, closely wrapped, climbs to the summit again. She approaches from the place where the little fire is still burning. Reaching the top, she stands still for some moments, listening to the sounds of the heath. Noticing the light at the Quiet Woman Inn, she takes out a telescope and gazes at the Inn. Finally, closing the telescope, she stoops to blow on a live coal. The light flares up, revealing an hourglass—with all the sand slipped through to the lower half. With a slight exclamation she picks it up, and with the telescope under her arm walks on down a faint path leading toward the still burning fire. As she approaches the fire, which is on a bank near a pool, she can see a small hand putting on fuel. “Occasionally an ember rolled off the bank, and dropped with a hiss into the pool.” The young woman walks to the bonfire, and is greeted by a little boy: “I am glad you have come, Miss Eustacia I don’t like biding by myself.”

From the conversation we learn that Eustacia Vye has been pacing back and forth from her bonfire over various parts of the heath all evening. Her grandfather comes out to urge her to come inside, but she excuses herself, insisting that Johnny wants the fire a little longer. Johnny is not so sure he does, but Eustacia speaks to him sharply, bending his will to hers. The grandfather goes back to the house. Eustacia promises Johnny “a

crooked sixpence” if he will keep putting wood on the fire, “And if you hear a frog jump into the pond...like a stone thrown in, be sure you run and tell me, because it is a sign of rain.” Eustacia keeps wandering off and coming back at intervals. Finally Johnny slides down the bank to run to tell her, “A hop frog have jumped into the pond. Yes, I heard ‘en!” Eustacia gives him the crooked sixpence, telling him to run off home fast. When he has gone, she walks toward an angle of the bank under the fire. She hears another splash and steps out upon the bank. The man, Wildeve, comes round the bank and leaps up beside her. Eustacia gives a low laugh of triumph. Her power over him has again drawn him to her. When he asks why she gives him no peace, she insists the bonfire is just for celebration; but he reminds her that last year it was a signal. She confesses that it is so tonight. They talk in passionate tones, now admitting their power over each other, now denying it. She tells Wildeve the signal is because she believes him to be faithful to her by not marrying Thomasin; he asks how she is so sure he is not married.

She is deeply offended to find he believes she sent the signal thinking him married. In a pout she tells him to go home, refusing even to let him take her hand, and “with the bow of a dancing master” he vanishes. After scattering the burning embers, Eustacia goes inside, undressing in the dark, heaving great sighs that shake her whole being.

Comment

In this chapter Hardy shows us Eustacia Vye’s personality through her actions: she is imperious in her manner with little Johnny and her father; she is capricious with her lover, now leading him on, now thrusting him away. Men to her are beings to be molded to her will. She is revealed as a creature ruled by a compelling, passionate nature, and as her own worst enemy. She and Wildeve are much alike: unscrupulous in plotting; wanting something only if it is hard to get; losing interest in anything easily attained.