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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
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LECTURE 12: CHAPTER 9: LOVE LEADS A SHREWD MAN INTO STRATEGY

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We learn that Diggory Venn, reddleman, is in love with Thomasin Yeobright. He reads over a letter from Thomasin written two years ago. Diggory, at that time a dairy farmer, had asked her to marry him. Her letter, a gentle refusal, had caused him to give up dairy farming and adopt the reddle trade. But in his wanderings he manages to be often in Thomasin's heath-near her, yet never intruding. He is happy that he is the one she trusted to help her on this day. He is doubtful of Wildeve's intentions, but Thomasin wants him, and Diggory Venn is "determined to aid her to be happy in her own chosen way."

He decides to spy upon Eustacia Vye, whom he regards as a conspirator against Thomasin's happiness. For the next six nights he goes to stand "behind a hollybush on the edge of the pit not twenty yards from Rainbarrow . . . but he watched in vain." The seventh night he sees "a female shape floating along the ridge and the outline of a young man ascending from the valley." Covering himself with a blanket of turves, he creeps along on his stomach till he is very close to where Eustacia and Damon Wildeve have met. Wildeve is asking Eustacia if he should marry Thomasin. He wishes "Tamsie were not such a confoundedly good little woman so that I could be faithful to you without injuring a worthy person."

Eustacia asks him why he has not married Thomasin: "Perhaps it was not for love of me you did not marry her." He replies that "the immediate reason was that the license would not do for the place, and before I could get another she ran away....Since then her aunt has spoken to me in a tone which I don't like at all." Eustacia is enraged that he will not admit a consuming passion for her. He accuses her of treating him cruelly when he did love her, while she maintains he loves her still. "You will love me all your life long. You would jump to marry me!" He now confesses he would. Wildeve presses her to leave the heath, which they both abhor, and go to America with him. She begs for time to think about it, and they walk away out of hearing. Diggory Venn, troubled, throws off his blanket of turves and walks back to his van. "My Tamsie" (he speaks to himself), "what can be done? Yes, I will see that Eustacia Vye."

Comment

Now we know why Diggory Venn is so much interested in the affair of Wildeve and Eustacia. His love for Thomasin transforms him from a humble, unassuming reddleman into a man of action. He unashamedly eavesdrops, and hears Eustacia reveal indecision to be her weakness. Wildeve is ready to marry her and take her to America, but “America is so far away.” She has the chance to escape the hated heath. Does she take it? No. Though she passionately loves Wildeve, her pride will not let her marry a man she considers inferior.