

The Return of the Native

Study Guide by Course Hero

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Book Basics

AUTHOR
Thomas Hardy

YEAR PUBLISHED
1878

GENRE
Drama

PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR
The Return of the Native is narrated through a third-person omniscient point of view. The aloof narrator functions in many roles—historian, psychologist, and theatrical director.

TENSE
The Return of the Native is narrated in the past tense.

ABOUT THE TITLE
The novel's title *The Return of the Native* refers to the character Clym Yeobright, who returns home to his native Wessex in southwest England after working for a period in Paris. The novel explores multiple meanings of the terms *return* and *native,* focusing on the ideas of self-identity, place, time, and choice.

In Context

The Victorian Age

Some familiarity with Victorian social conventions is needed in order to understand how disturbing many of Thomas Hardy's readers found his novels. Hardy challenged virtually all the social norms of his era, especially the sanctity of marriage and the rigidity of class distinctions.

The reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901) marked the high point of British power and prosperity. The Industrial Revolution, which replaced human labor with machine power in many industries, was at its height. Largely thanks to the power and reach of the British navy, the nation's colonizing efforts spanned the globe. According to a popular adage, the sun never set on the British Empire.

British global supremacy in the second half of the 19th century had numerous implications on the home front as well. A rigid social code became even more established in a culture where class divisions had long been ingrained. Families were strongly patriarchal, with women and children relegated to silence and obedience. Institutions such as the monarchy, the nobility, the military, and the church were rarely, if ever, questioned.

Responsibility and respectability were supreme virtues. There were occasional political reforms, however, and science did progress, as with English naturalist Charles Darwin's landmark work *The Origin of Species* (1859).

The Evolution of a Realist

In the early Victorian Age, the novel was revitalized by the Brontë sisters, a remarkable trio of writers whose greatest works were arguably Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Around the same time English writer Charles Dickens's stunning series of tales steered the novel firmly into the arena of social criticism, with works such as *Oliver Twist* (1837–39), *Hard Times* (1854), *Bleak House* (1852–53), and *Great Expectations* (1860–61). While Dickens exposed Victorian hypocrisy, crime, and deficient institutions, his contemporary English novelist George Eliot (the pen name of Mary Anne Evans, 1819–1880) probed the psychology of human relationships in novels such as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72).

Thomas Hardy's originality, when gauged against the Victorian novel's earlier development, is to have discovered a freshly penetrating level of psychological insight. Hardy is considered a realist in the tradition of George Eliot for his bleak portrayal of life. Literary realists attempt to show their subject matter truthfully. However, characteristics in his writing verge on modernism.

Modernist writers such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf rejected formal structures to experiment with techniques such as stream-of-consciousness writing, which replicated a character's thought process. While Hardy's structures are more traditional, his daring willingness to challenge Victorian conventions and his interest in conflict reflect modernist traits. Social concerns play an important role in Hardy's fiction, but it is the interplay of character and destiny that chiefly interests the author and enthralls the reader.

Hardy's Wessex

With *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Hardy made an important decision regarding his literary canon. He created a setting that was both real and fictional. For the rest of his career as a novelist, he set his stories in the region of Wessex, a semi-fictionalized landscape based on the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex and closely resembling his native county of Dorset. This literary device afforded him significant advantages:

- He could infuse his novels and short stories with appealing local color through traditional folkways and dialect.
- He could critique social prejudice and injustice without unduly offending real-life culprits.
- He could appeal to familiar character types and landscapes while bathing them in a somewhat unfamiliar and alluring light.

When revising his novels for collected editions in 1895 and 1912, Hardy changed some place names in *The Return of the Native* and other earlier novels to match the Wessex place names he invented for later novels. There are widely circulated editions of both earlier and later editions.

After Hardy, major novelists who adopted such a strategy included the American writer William Faulkner, who set many of his novels in fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi, and the Indian novelist R.K. Narayan, whose works unfolded in fictional Malgudi, a small town in South India.

Hardy's Worldview

In his novels and his poetry, Hardy espoused a worldview that may be called pessimistic at best and nihilistic, or despairing, at worst. Over a 20-year span from *Far Ffom the Madding Crowd* (1874) to *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the novels grow steadily darker in their view of human nature and behavior. Hardy believed that chance, irony, and coincidence played a major role in human affairs, and he often portrayed human destiny as unfolding in an indifferent, perhaps even hostile, environment.

Compounding Hardy's pessimistic outlook was his critical approach to some of the hallowed institutions of his time. Marriage, especially, came under Hardy's microscope and was found to be largely vain and hollow. Hardy's views on the materialism, hypocrisy, and social vanity of Victorian marriage became steadily more forthright, and they eventually provoked the scathing reviews of his final novel, *Jude the Obscure.*

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Note on Editions

The Return of the Native was first serialized in *Belgravia* magazine between January and December of 1878. The first edition of the novel, with some revisions by the author, was published in 1878. Hardy substantially revised the novel for an 1895 collected edition of his novels, and yet again in 1912 for the Wessex Edition of his works. Many modern editions follow the first edition, while others follow Hardy's last revision of 1912. Editions that use the place name *Southerton* in Book 1, Chapter 2 are based on the first edition, while those that use *Anglebury* are based on one of the later editions. This study guide follows the later editions in use of names.

Author Biography

Early Life

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, in southwestern England, on June 2, 1840. He was the first child of Jemima and Thomas Sr., arriving five months after his parents' marriage. His mother, a domestic servant, and his father, a stonemason, were working-class country people. Nonetheless, Hardy's intelligent and ambitious mother sent him to the best school available, in the nearby town of Dorchester. Hardy's family could not afford a university education, but after Thomas graduated at 16, his mother arranged for him to be apprenticed to an architect so he could transition into the professional class. Masons like his father were considered working class. Hardy's working-class origins caused him anxiety, but his early immersion into the rhythms of nature, oral culture, and folk traditions had a profound effect on his second and third careers as novelist and poet.

Early Career

After leaving school Hardy became an apprentice to local architect John Hicks in 1856. In 1862 he moved to London, where he was employed as a draftsman in the office of a leading ecclesiastical (church) architect, working on Gothic churches and rectory houses and participating in the culture of the great metropolis of London. Hardy spent his spare time teaching himself about poetry, experimenting with verse forms, and studying Greek. For a time he had ambitions of obtaining a university education and becoming an Anglican priest, but he realized in 1866 the notion was "farfetched," as he told his sister Mary. Ill health drove him back to the country in 1867, and he was rehired by Hicks. He then fell in love with his 16-year-old cousin, Tryphena Sparks, an apprentice teacher who later became headmistress at a girls' school in Plymouth. The relationship eventually faded as they spent less time together.

Early Prose Works and Marriage

Hardy considered himself primarily a poet, not a novelist, throughout his career. He wrote poetry in the 1860s but could not get any of his work published, so he turned to novel writing in 1867. *The Poor Man and the Lady*, his first attempt in the genre, was rejected because it was too critical of the status quo—Hardy called it a "striking socialistic novel." His second attempt, *Desperate Remedies,* was meant to be commercial and sensationalistic; it was published in 1871. Hardy slowly began to build his reputation, publishing *Under the Greenwood Tree* in 1872. He was still working as an architect in 1870 when he met his wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford. Emma was the daughter of a lawyer, which put her socially above Hardy, an architectural skilled laborer. He had to wait four years to marry her because her family did not approve of her marriage to someone of a lower class. They married in September 1874. Initially a happy couple, they remained childless and eventually became estranged. Toward the end of her life, Emma became a devout Evangelical, a troublesome issue in the marriage as Hardy moved toward skepticism and atheism.

Literary Success

Hardy became a full-time writer in 1872, when he serialized his next novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. His next work, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), introduced Wessex, the semi-fictional region based on the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex—full of real cities and places—where his mature novels would be set. From then on, Hardy became more and more successful as a fiction writer, publishing 10 novels and 50 short stories from 1876 to 1895. His later and most famous novels come from this period: *The Return of the Native* (1878),

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The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

As a novelist Hardy was forced to tone down his work so as not to offend readers with his frank depictions of sexual relationships and criticism of Victorian hypocrisy. His serialized novels were less explicit than the published volumes, and he allowed his editors, in some instances, to pare away what the public might find objectionable in the published volumes. Although *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* did receive some good reviews, it was widely criticized for its perceived sexual immorality. But if some critics were repelled by *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* with its pessimistic determinism and overtly sexual subject matter, most critics were outraged by *Jude the Obscure*. The latter novel was darker, more shocking, and overtly condemnatory of both class structure and conventional morality.

Later Years

Beginning in 1885 Hardy lived in Max Gate, a house he designed and which was built by his father and brother. His wife Emma died in November 1912, after a long period of estrangement between the couple. Hardy was much affected and tended to idealize their early relationship in subsequent poetry, to the mortification of his second wife, Florence Dugdale. After the reception of *Jude the Obscure*, which was materially successful but much maligned by the critics, Hardy abandoned fiction and wrote only poetry.

Fourteen months after his first wife's death, he married Dugdale, his secretary, who was nearly 40 years his junior. She had worked for Hardy for about 10 years and was his nominal biographer—although Hardy really wrote most of his biography. In all Hardy produced eight volumes of poetry and some 900 poems over more than 30 years. He was fortunate to gain recognition as a great writer and early modernist in his lifetime and was courted by the next generation of writers, including English poet Robert Graves and English novelist Virginia Woolf. He received honorary doctorates from Cambridge and Oxford as well as other literary honors. He died on January 11, 1928. In a macabre turn of events worthy of Hardy's fiction, his heart was buried with his first wife, Emma, among the family graves. The rest of his remains were cremated and interred next to English novelist Charles Dickens in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey—an appropriate resting place for one of the most widely read Victorian writers.

Characters

Eustacia Vye

The narrative primarily focuses on Eustacia Vye's relationships with Damon Wildeve (her would-be husband) and Clym Yeobright (her husband). Both men can be said to disappoint her expectations. Damon Wildeve, although possessing an attractive flair, is inconstant and indecisive. Clym Yeobright kindled passion in Eustacia largely because of his glittering career in Paris. He cruelly disappoints her hopes when he refuses to return to the continent and when he falls victim to a debilitating eye ailment. Eustacia Vye is one of Hardy's most fascinating creations. From the very beginning, she is characterized as alluring but enigmatic. Men's adoration, money, fashion, status, and power are her principal values. Despite this materialistic mindset, however, her domination of her surroundings, resembling that of a petty aristocrat, seems generally accepted in Egdon Heath. Eustacia's hopes focus on a glittering life, and the city of Paris becomes for her a symbol of what her future might, and should, be like. This is one reason for her impulsive attachment to Clym Yeobright. In an irony of situation, he has returned from Paris to Egdon Heath with the ambition of giving up a successful and prosperous career and of becoming a schoolteacher for poor and ignorant youngsters.

Clym Yeobright

Clym Yeobright, in many respects, is as enigmatic as his wife, Eustacia Vye. Hardy seems to have been determined to develop this marriage as the worst possible match, with the materialistic, ambitious Eustacia contrasting starkly with the idealistic Clym. Nevertheless, there are moments when the reader cannot refrain from admiring Clym. For example, he cheerfully accepts his eye troubles and tries to make the best of adversity. The contrast with Eustacia's self-pity is striking. Perhaps fittingly, in the final book of the novel, Clym finds his vocation, and is perhaps able to exorcize his guilt for the deaths of his mother and Eustacia, by becoming a traveling preacher. Appropriately, his failing eyesight in the novel suggests his inability to identify and consider other people's points of view. Clym's mother, the heath people, and Eustacia Vye are all opposed to his plan to give up his business career

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and become a schoolteacher, but he only digs in his heels further. When his eyesight makes his studies hard to continue, he further rattles local opinion by taking employment as a lowly furze-cutter. In his obliviousness of social status, he is the opposite of many characters in the novel. Yet Hardy by no means portrays Clym as heroic. He is stubborn and sometimes muddle-headed.

Damon Wildeve

Damon Wildeve marries Thomasin Yeobright, thus dashing the hopes of Diggory Venn, but he continues to harbor tender emotions for Eustacia Vye. Even as a married man, Damon Wildeve slips out of the house for meetings with Eustacia. His attempts to manipulate her are balanced by her "power" treatment of him. Late in the novel, Wildeve inherits a substantial fortune, thus making him more attractive to Eustacia. He plays a major role in her ill-fated attempt to escape from Egdon Heath, desert her husband Clym, and start a new life.

Thomasin Yeobright

Thomasin Yeobright passively follows the advice of her aunt in rejecting Diggory Venn as a suitor and marries Damon Wildeve instead, a match that does not result in happiness. Late in the novel, after Wildeve's death, she is reunited with Diggory Venn and marries him. Thomasin and Diggory Venn are the closest Hardy comes in the novel to portraying sweetness, fidelity, and good sense, so it is appropriate that they are finally united in marriage in Book 6 at the end of the novel. Before that happens, Thomasin primarily serves as a victim of deception for Damon Wildeve and as a consoler for her cousin Clym, whose woes steadily mount in the course of the story.

Mrs. Yeobright

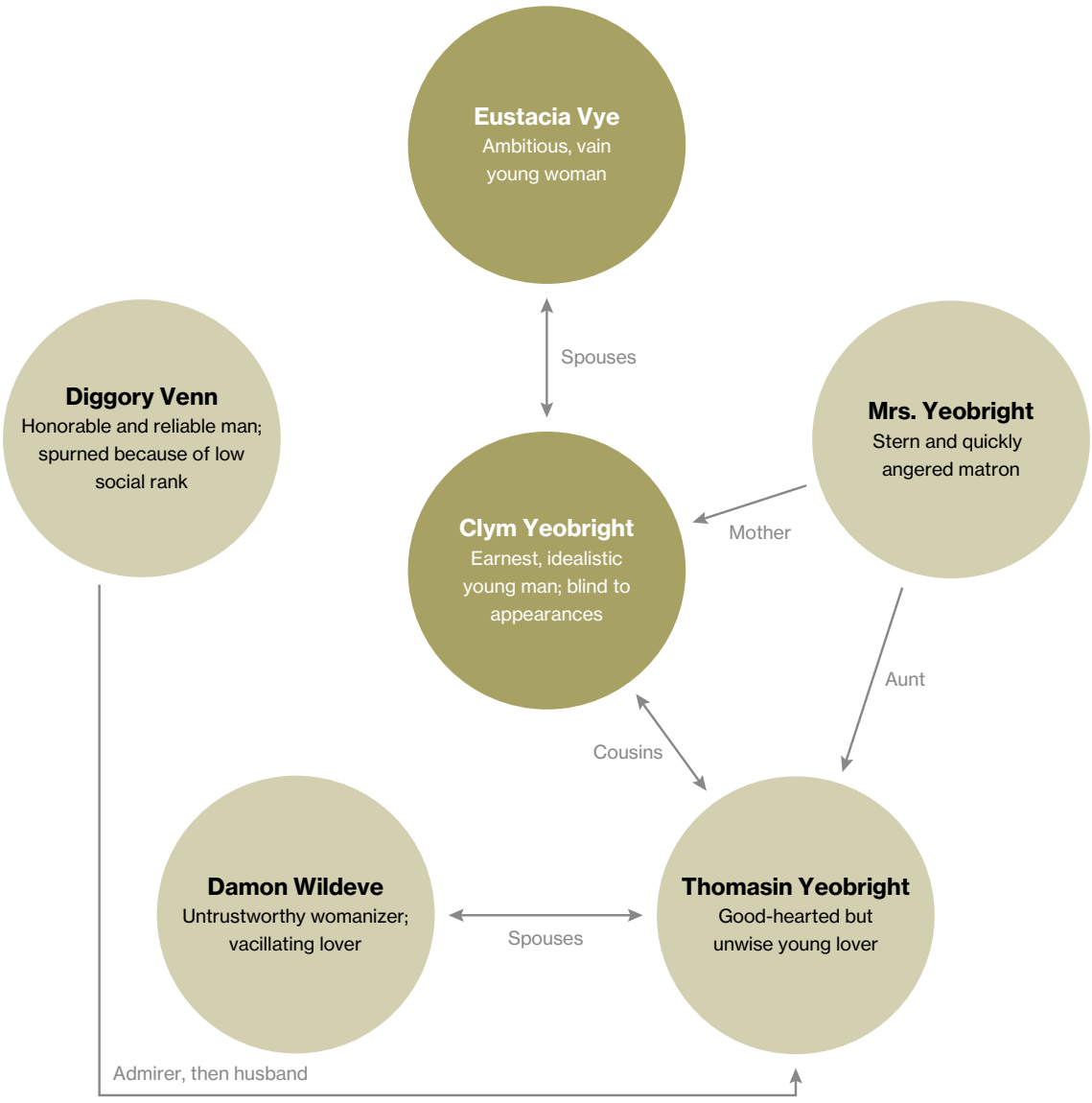
Mrs. Yeobright's snobbery plays an important part in her persuasion of her niece Thomasin to reject the courtship of Diggory Venn. She is proud of the material success of her son Clym in business in Paris, but she is unnerved when he returns home to announce his wish to become a schoolteacher of poor heath children. She is further embarrassed when Clym, who has lost much of his eyesight, becomes a humble furze-cutter to raise income. Although Mrs. Yeobright is the victim of a cruel misunderstanding and suffers a painful and wrenching death, it is often hard for readers to sympathize with her, considering her ego, pride, and bouts of self-pity. Even her parting comment to the boy Johnny Nunsuch, who has helped her on the heath, bespeaks her prickly character: "Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son." One problem with Mrs. Yeobright is her readiness to believe the worst in people. She habitually scrutinizes people for their faults, including Thomasin, Clym, Eustacia, Wildeve, and Diggory Venn.

Diggory Venn

Diggory Venn has hoped, before the novel begins, to pay court to Thomasin Yeobright (Tamsie), the shy young cousin of Clym Yeobright. However, Thomasin's guardian and aunt, Mrs. Yeobright, regards Diggory as a social inferior and declares herself as strongly opposed to the match. Even though he has been rejected and marginalized, Diggory Venn maintains an even-tempered view of society and plies his trade without complaint. Eventually, in the novel's epilogue, he marries Thomasin.

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Character Map



- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

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Full Character List

Character	Description
Eustacia Vye	Eustacia Vye is a young, handsome, ambitious woman whose magnetic allure and passionate nature make her the heroine of the novel. Full of contradictions herself, her acumen in spotting conflicts in her gentlemen admirers allows her to manipulate them deftly.
Clym Yeobright	Clym (Clement) Yeobright is the "native" of the novel's title. Intelligent, upright, and highly conscientious, Clym is portrayed as idealistic almost to the point of martyrdom.
Damon Wildeve	Damon Wildeve is a young innkeeper who has previously worked as an engineer. Often balancing two infatuations at the same time, he is dapper, handsome, and fancies himself a lady-killer.
Thomasin Yeobright	Thomasin (Tamsie or Tamsin) Yeobright is the shy, mild-mannered niece of Mrs. Yeobright and the first cousin of Clym Yeobright, her aunt's son. Although initially portrayed as naive and manipulable, she proves to possess surprising resolve as the novel progresses.
Mrs. Yeobright	Mrs. Yeobright is stern, upright, didactic, and inflexible. Socially, she believes herself to be the superior of the "heath people."
Diggory Venn	Diggory Venn is a young, itinerant reddleman, a tradesman who travels to sell reddle (red ochre or chalk for marking sheep) to farmers and shepherds. Good-hearted and resourceful, Venn becomes embroiled in the affairs of the Yeobright family, but he is consistently a force for good sense and prudent action.
Christian Cantle	Christian Cantle is Grandfer Cantle's son. Timid and somewhat feeble-minded, his major scene in the novel is the gambling match with Damon Wildeve, in which Christian loses the money entrusted to him by Mrs. Yeobright and intended for Clym and Thomasin.
Grandfer Cantle	Grandfer Cantle is a garrulous, pompous elderly resident of the heath. In virtually all his speeches he refers glowingly to his military service in Britain's wars against Napoleon, singling out especially a campaign fought in 1804.
Charley	Charley, age 16, is an employee of Captain Vye who loves puppies and has a crush on Eustacia.
Olly Dowden	Olly Dowden is a resident of the heath who makes brooms.
Timothy Fairway	Timothy Fairway is a middle-aged heath dweller who commands some respect from the other heath people, despite his rather pompous, smug demeanor.
Humphrey	Humphry is a furze-cutter on the heath who is befriended by Clym Yeobright.
Johnny Nunsuch	Johnny Nunsuch is the young son of Susan. He plays an important role in the novel on several occasions: for example, in building and maintaining Eustacia's signal fire for her meeting with Wildeve, and in helping Mrs. Yeobright during the latter's desperate return journey across the heath.
Susan Nunsuch	Susan Nunsuch is a superstitious resident of Egdon Heath who thinks Eustacia practices witchcraft and has cast a spell on her young son, Johnny. To counteract what she believes is black magic, she conducts a bizarre ritual of exorcism.
Sam	Sam is a turf cutter on the heath.
Captain Vye	Captain Vye is Eustacia's elderly grandfather. He is somewhat prickly and eccentric.

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Plot Summary

Book 1: The Three Women

On November 5, Guy Fawkes Day, Thomasin Yeobright returns home on what was to be her wedding day. Her wedding to Damon Wildeve has been postponed. Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt, discusses the matter with Wildeve. That evening, as the locals hold bonfires for the holiday, Wildeve meets secretly with Eustacia Vye, his previous sweetheart. Diggory Venn, who previously had been turned down as a suitor to Thomasin, learns of the illicit meeting. He attempts to convince Eustacia to break off her involvement with Wildeve. Unsuccessful, he goes to Mrs. Yeobright to ask again for permission to court her niece.

Book 2: The Arrival

News comes to Egdon Heath that Clym Yeobright, son of Mrs. Yeobright, will be coming home from Paris for Christmas. Eustacia Vye is fascinated at the idea of a man from Paris. She arranges to see him by taking part in a mummers' play at the Yeobrights' Christmas party. Clym sees through her disguise, and they have a pleasant talk before she leaves.

Eustacia gives Diggory Venn a letter to deliver to Damon Wildeve in which she cuts off their relationship. Wildeve, spurned by Eustacia and intrigued by news of Venn as a possible suitor to Thomasin, agrees to resume the engagement.

Thomasin and Wildeve are married, but Mrs. Yeobright refuses to attend, still angry over the earlier postponement. Eustacia Vye and Diggory Venn attend the wedding.

Book 3: The Fascination

Clym Yeobright stays at Egdon Heath longer than expected; he has decided to give up his profession as a jeweler and become a schoolmaster for the local people. He meets Eustacia Vye, no longer disguised, while helping locals retrieve the bucket from the bottom of Captain Vye's well. The two strike up a quick courtship, to which Clym's mother objects. This causes division between mother and son.

During an eclipse of the moon Clym asks Eustacia to marry him. She agrees on the condition that they would soon be set up in a situation agreeable to her materialistic desires. News of the engagement enrages Mrs. Yeobright and rekindles Damon Wildeve's interest in Eustacia. After fighting with his mother, Clym resolves to leave her home and marry as soon as possible.

The two are wed, but Mrs. Yeobright refuses to attend the ceremony. She sends Christian Cantle to deliver money as a gift to be divided between Thomasin and Clym. But Christian loses the money in a dice game to Wildeve. Wildeve then loses the money to Diggory Venn, who delivers it to Thomasin.

Book 4: The Closed Door

Mrs. Yeobright, having not heard from either recipient of her gift, learns it has been lost by Christian Cantle. She goes to discuss it with Eustacia, and they have a terrible argument primarily because of miscommunication and already hurt feelings. The misunderstanding about the money is soon resolved, but more trouble comes as Clym suffers inflammation of the eyes. He is unable to continue his studies, so he takes up furze-cutting—the harvesting of furze or gorse, a type of heath plant, used for livestock feed and fire kindling.

Depressed by her change of fortunes, Eustacia seeks diversion by attending local festivities. She meets Damon Wildeve there by chance. They dance, and his interest in her is further enflamed. He walks with her afterward, and they are seen by Diggory Venn. Venn sets about foiling Wildeve's attempts to meet with Eustacia again. Venn also talks with Mrs. Yeobright, urging her to reconcile with her son and daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Yeobright goes to visit Clym on a very hot day. She happens to arrive just after Wildeve, who has chosen to visit Eustacia by day to avoid trouble with Venn. Eustacia and Wildeve retreat to the back room when they learn Mrs. Yeobright has come. They believe Clym has awoken to meet his mother, but he was only talking in his sleep.

Mrs. Yeobright, having seen Eustacia through the window, believes she has been shut out deliberately. She leaves in bitterness and talks with a young boy as she suffers in the heat.

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When Clym awakens, he is inspired to seek out his mother and reconcile with her. On the way, he finds her collapsed on the heath, bitten by an adder, a small poisonous snake. She dies that night. Clym learns from the boy, Johnny, that his mother had believed her son had forsaken her. That same night Eustacia learns Wildeve has come into a large inheritance.

Book 5: The Discovery

Clym Yeobright suffers a deep depression after his mother's death. When he recovers, he sets about learning the details of her last day. He soon learns that she had been at his house and had been seen but not let in by his wife. He confronts Eustacia, and after a terrible fight the two separate. Eustacia moves back into her grandfather's house. On the first night, the servant Charley hides Captain Vye's pistols after realizing Eustacia is suicidal.

Guy Fawkes Day comes, and Charley starts a bonfire for Eustacia, not knowing this will summon Damon Wildeve as it had in the past. Wildeve appears, and he agrees to help Eustacia leave Egdon Heath and go to Paris.

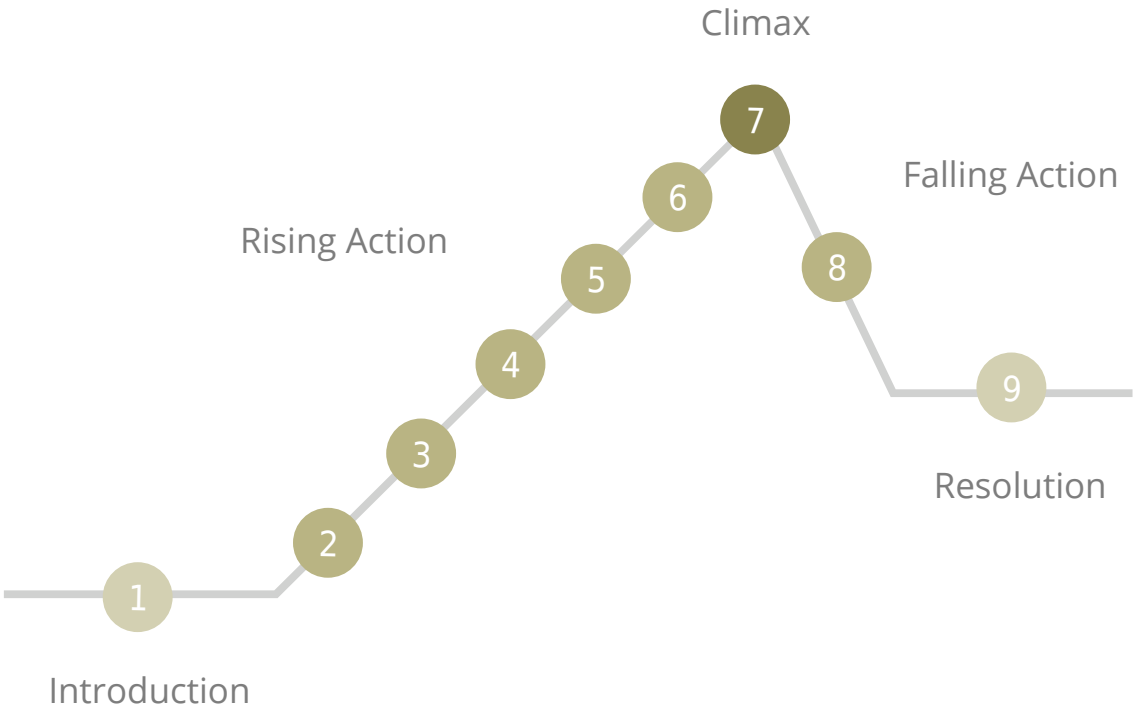
The next day, Eustacia gives the signal for Wildeve to take her away. Wildeve has decided to go with her, eloping and leaving his wife and daughter behind. Thomasin notices his irregular behavior and goes to Clym with the alarming news that her husband and his wife are likely to run off together. At about the same time Captain Vye appears and tells them of Eustacia's recent suicidal mood. A search begins, but Eustacia is not found until after she has jumped into Shadwater Weir. Clym and Wildeve go after her, but only Clym survives.

Book 6: Aftercourses

About 18 months after the deaths Thomasin has moved into her old home at Blooms-End with Clym. Diggory Venn appears and begins seeking Thomasin's attentions again. The two are soon married. Clym takes up a new profession as an itinerant preacher.

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Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Thomasin Yeobright's wedding to Damon Wildeve is postponed.

Rising Action

2. Clym Yeobright arrives home in time for Christmas.

3. Damon Wildeve and Thomasin Yeobright are married.

4. Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye are married.

5. An eye infection ends Clym Yeobright's plan to be a teacher.

6. Damon Wildeve agrees to help Eustacia Vye leave Egdon Heath.

Climax

7. Eustacia Vye drowns herself; Damon Wildeve dies trying to save her.

Falling Action

8. Thomasin Yeobright is married to Diggory Venn.

Resolution

9. Clym Yeobright becomes an itinerant preacher.

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Timeline of Events

Guy Fawkes Day, November 5

Damon Wildeve meets with Eustacia Vye.

Christmas Day

Eustacia Vye disguises herself to take part in the mummers' play and meets Clym Yeobright.

June 25

Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye are married.

June 25

Diggory Venn wins the money back from Damon Wildeve, then mistakenly gives it all to Thomasin Yeobright.

July

Clym Yeobright suffers an ailment of the eyes and must stop his studies.

Guy Fawkes Day, November 5

Thomasin Yeobright's wedding to Damon Wildeve is postponed.

December

Clym Yeobright arrives home in time for Christmas.

Winter

Damon Wildeve and Thomasin Yeobright are married.

June 25

Christian Cantle loses to Damon Wildeve the money that Mrs. Yeobright intended for Thomasin and Clym.

July

Eustacia Vye and Mrs. Yeobright have a row.

Late August

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August 31

Mrs. Yeobright journeys across the heath and dies from an adder's bite.

October

Clym Yeobright discovers his wife's role in his mother's failed visit.

Guy Fawkes Day, November 5

Damon Wildeve meets Eustacia Vye at her bonfire as he did last year; he agrees to help her leave Egdon Heath.

November 7, after midnight

Eustacia Vye jumps into Shadwater Weir; Damon Wildeve and Clym Yeobright jump in after. Eustacia and Wildeve drown.

Summer, two years later

Clym Yeobright begins his new career as an itinerant preacher.

Eustacia Vye attends the gypsying festivities and meets Damon Wildeve there, reviving his interest in her.

August 31

Damon Wildeve inherits a substantial sum of money.

October

Clym and Eustacia Yeobright separate from each other.

November 6

Eustacia Vye signals to Damon Wildeve to take her away.

Summer, two years later

Thomasin Yeobright Wildeve is married to Diggory Venn.

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Chapter Summaries

Book 1, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression

The opening scene of the novel is set on Egdon Heath, a wild, sparsely inhabited, open expanse of countryside in southwest England. The heath is ancient, and civilization is its enemy. As twilight approaches, the heath already appears gloomy, and night seems to have taken up its stand there. This wasteland, says Hardy, is indeed "a near relation of night." It is a place of solitude and loneliness, the author adds darkly, "suggesting tragical possibilities."

Chapter 2: Humanity Appears upon the Scene Hand in Hand with Trouble

On the single highway traversing the heath, an old, white-haired man encounters a van driven by a reddleman, whose profession is to sell red ochre or chalk to farmers, a material they use to mark their sheep. As the two travelers converse, the reddleman reveals that he is transporting a young woman in need of assistance. Over the next few chapters, it gradually becomes clear that the reddleman is young Diggory Venn, the old traveler is Captain Vye, and the young woman is Thomasin Yeobright, who was supposed to be married that very day to Damon Wildeve. As Venn stares at the barrow, or mound, at the summit of the heath, he sees a woman's ghostly figure outlined against the sky for a short time. This figure is later identified as the novel's heroine, Eustacia Vye. The form then disappears, to be replaced by a mysterious group of human shapes.

Analysis

Hardy includes an epigraph for the novel—a brief statement or quotation intended to set the tone for the narrative or to suggest an important aspect of the theme. Hardy's epigraph is taken from the poem "Endymion" (1818) by John Keats, a pastoral narrative featuring a shepherd who was beloved by the moon goddess. The lines Hardy cites are distinctly mournful, paradoxically personifying sorrow as "cheerly," "constant," and "kind." The quotation effectively foreshadows a mournful, even tragic, tale to come:

> *To sorrow*
> *I bade good morrow*
> *And thought to leave her far away behind*
> *But cheerly, cheerly,*
> *She loves me dearly;*
> *She is so constant to me, and so kind.*
> *I would deceive her,*
> *And so leave her,*
> *But ah! she is so constant and so kind.*

The description in Chapter 1 of Egdon Heath is one of the most celebrated accounts of setting in English literature. A heath is a wild, mostly open tract of countryside used by grazing animals and very thinly populated by human beings. Hardy emphasizes the land's antiquity, changelessness, and enduring solitude. The extended description begins with a distinctly oppressive simile, in which Hardy compares the scene to the upper reaches and flooring of a vast tent. From then on, in paragraph after paragraph, the description creates a solemn, mournful atmosphere, much of it evoked by word connotations. Consider these words in the second paragraph, for example: *pallid*, *darkest*, *darkness*, *distant*, *retard*, *sadden*, *frowning*, *storms*, *opacity*, *moonless*, and *dread*.

Before Hardy's novels, heaths (sometimes called moors) had

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served as intensely dramatic settings for at least two well-known works: Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* (1607–07), and Emily Brontë's Romantic novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), whose hero is named Heathcliff. Hardy would have known both of these works well, and he would have been acutely aware of the atmospheric and symbolic contributions such a setting could make to a narrative. In *The Return of the Native*, Egdon Heath plays such a prominent role that critics and commentators sometimes elevate it to the status of a character in the novel.

A second distinguishing feature of the way Hardy begins the novel is his oblique introduction of major characters. Diggory Venn, Thomasin Yeobright, and Eustacia Vye are all described, alluded to, or indirectly perceived rather than named or clearly introduced. Readers should keep in mind that Hardy's style and techniques were, like those of Dickens, substantially influenced by the custom of serializing lengthy narratives. This publication method put a premium on suspense, or the deliberate creation of tension or uncertainty in the reader's mind.

Book 1, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: The Custom of the Country

In this chapter Hardy begins his portrayal of two of the most characteristic aspects of his Wessex novels: the role of traditional folkways in the local setting and his characters' use of local dialect. The action focuses on the building of a large bonfire to celebrate Guy Fawkes Day (November 5). This holiday is the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when a group of dissidents plotted to use explosives to blow up the Houses of Parliament, the king, and the government's ministers. The plot was foiled, and the leading conspirators were executed. It is possibly significant that the Gunpowder Plot, which had contemporary significance for Shakespeare, also figures substantially in the background of *Macbeth.* Hardy comments on how the historical events of 1605 have melded with age-old seasonal rituals to produce the local observance.

In Chapter 3 we meet the "heath people": Timothy Fairway, Grandfer Cantle and his son Christian, Susan Nunsuch, Humphrey the furze-cutter, and the broom-maker Olly Dowden. Gossip about the wedding of Thomasin Yeobright to the innkeeper Damon Wildeve dominates their conversation. The locals discuss how Mrs. Yeobright had forbidden the *banns*, or public notice in church of a prospective marriage, a year ago. The return from Paris of Thomasin's cousin, Clym Yeobright, in time for Christmas is also mentioned.

Chapter 4: The Halt on the Turnpike Road

This chapter clarifies some of the mysteries and uncertainties of Chapter 1. It turns out that Thomasin Yeobright, who was engaged to be married to the innkeeper, Damon Wildeve, has returned from Anglebury in the cart of the reddleman Diggory Venn. Due to a mistake or irregularity in the official documents, she has not been married after all. Her aunt, Mrs. Yeobright, sternly demands to know what has happened to postpone or cancel the wedding, since she regards such an event as a slight on the family honor.

Analysis

Some critics have compared the heath people—superstitious, semi-educated, and gossip-prone—to a Greek chorus, the group of onlookers in ancient Greek drama who periodically sang and danced in commentary on the main action of the play. The persuasiveness of such a comparison is still in doubt, however. It is reasonable to believe Hardy included such characters in a number of his novels to render his setting more vivid and credible. His imaginative presentation of Wessex, a fictional place similar to Hardy's home county of Dorset, appealed to the nostalgia of an increasingly urbanized reading public. Four years before *The Return of the Native*, in 1874, Hardy had used such scenes to great effect in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, his first notable success as a novelist. Leslie Stephen, the editor of *The Cornhill Magazine*, which had serialized that novel, had commented admiringly on Hardy's "prose idylls of country life," encouraging him to write more in this "original vein." It is notable that Hardy lifted the title of *Far from the Madding Crowd* from Thomas Gray's well-known poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751), which celebrated the lives of the rural poor and unfamous. Thus, there were more immediate reasons than any strained "imitation" of Greek tragedy for Hardy to include the Wessex

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country folk in his fiction.

Considering the major themes of *The Return of the Native* as a whole, the discussion of "no moon, no man" about marriage is especially significant. Christian Cantle's awkwardness with women serves as the springboard for a conversation on the folk belief that a boy born at the new moon will never amount to a worthy husband. The ominous relevance of the discussion does not emerge until Book 3, Chapter 4, when Clym Yeobright proposes marriage to Eustacia Vye during an eclipse of the moon.

Although Hardy introduces some other characters obliquely, as noted previously, our first impressions of Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt, are sharply drawn. She is imperious and opinionated. Her treatment of Diggory Venn is off-putting and condescending, considering he has treated her niece kindly and respectfully.

Book 1, Chapters 5–6

Summary

Chapter 5: Perplexity among Honest People

Mrs. Yeobright questions her niece about how the wedding was postponed. Unsatisfied, she interrogates Damon Wildeve, who is the innkeeper of the local hostelry, the Quiet Woman, and a glibly suave lady-killer who is her niece's fiancé. Wildeve's excuses for the postponed wedding are not altogether convincing, but he assures Thomasin's aunt that he will still go through with the marriage. Meanwhile, the group of folksy heath dwellers arrives from Rainbarrow, still under the mistaken impression that the wedding has taken place. The group has come to serenade and celebrate the couple. Wildeve's frustration and annoyance reach a climax when he catches sight of a light to the right of Rainbarrow, a signal from his former flame Eustacia Vye that she is ready and eager to meet with him. The heath folk take their leave, and Wildeve slips out of the inn to keep his meeting with Eustacia.

Chapter 6: The Figure against the Sky

Eustacia impatiently awaits the arrival of Wildeve, who was her former lover. She chats with young Johnny Nunsuch, whom she has engaged to keep the signal fire burning. After Wildeve arrives, he and Eustacia hold a tense discussion. She heard from her grandfather that Wildeve had not married that day, and she asks him directly if he would not go through with the marriage because he could not give up his passion for her. Each one appears suspicious of the other's motives and intentions. Eustacia accuses Wildeve of not being worthy of her, an accusation Wildeve rebuts gloomily. Eustacia taunts him with comparisons between her own voluptuous self and Thomasin's plainness, and she boasts that she has "shown her power" by compelling Wildeve to heed her summons. He retorts that he saw her on Rainbarrow at dusk, claiming it as a sign of his own power over her. (Note: earlier editions of the novel called the place "Blackbarrow.") For his part, "the revived embers of an old passion" glow clearly in Wildeve. The two former lovers part with their relations still tense, conflicted, and ambiguous.

Analysis

These chapters definitively establish Damon Wildeve as a charming but unreliable and irresponsible two-timer. Although Mrs. Yeobright is judgmental and stern, she is right to mistrust him. Thomasin, as presented here in the early part of the novel, is portrayed as an innocent dupe.

Nevertheless, Wildeve must confront a powerful, resourceful antagonist in Eustacia. Her wiles and "power" are vividly portrayed as superior to his clever maneuvers. Although he evidently likes to think of himself as a lady-killer, Eustacia's allure clearly overwhelms him.

Part of Hardy's genius as a novelist is to reveal such psychological insights in the dialogue between the two characters. Toward the end of Chapter 6 the dialogue concisely captures a very broad spectrum of moods: regret, impatience, contempt, sarcasm, impulsive passion, nostalgia, bluffing, anger, bitterness, threat, and manipulation. It is gradually apparent that, for both Damon and Eustacia, marriage amounts to a competitive endeavor, in which it is all-important not to be left behind. Neither of the characters will commit themselves—adding to the reader's impression that they are both keeping their options open. This kind of calculus

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does not entail or even imply long-term devotion or fidelity, but only a materialistic, status-driven attitude toward marriage.

Book 1, Chapters 7–8

Summary

Chapter 7: Queen of Night

Chapter 7 is almost purely descriptive. Hardy devotes this section to an extensive, rather static portrayal of Eustacia. He details her physical features, her background, and her ambitions. Along with her beauty and charm, Hardy points out several glaring character flaws but grudgingly admits that "at times she was not altogether unlovable."

Chapter 8: Those Who Are Found Where There Is Said to Be Nobody

In this chapter the narrator traces the lonely journey of young Johnny Nunsuch as he travels home across the heath from Eustacia Vye's house. Alarmed by a strange glow in the night, Johnny turns back. When he finds Eustacia, she is talking with a gentleman. Johnny deems the unknown glow less frightening than interrupting Eustacia's talk and turns back again, unnoticed by the adults.

Turning back homeward, Johnny encounters a cart with a man in it. Titillated by the possibility of encountering a gypsy, he spies upon the cart, but Johnny meets Diggory Venn instead of a gypsy. The reddleman treats the boy kindly. As they chat, Venn learns the gist of Eustacia's conversation with Wildeve. Encouraging Johnny to not be afraid, the reddleman escorts the boy part of the way home.

Analysis

By Chapter 7, it is clear to whom Hardy refers in the title of Book 1. The "three women" are Thomasin Yeobright, Mrs. Yeobright, and Eustacia Vye. For the remainder of the novel, these will remain the primary female characters, but they are all very different.

At the beginning of the story, Thomasin, with a face "between pretty and beautiful," is a young, naïve bride-to-be whose wedding to Damon Wildeve emerges as the first conflicted situation in the novel. Thomasin's aunt, Mrs. Yeobright, is a great deal more world-wise but also sternly judgmental and opinionated. Mrs. Yeobright, in fact, had taken the unusual step of forbidding the *banns*, or public notice in church of a prospective marriage, between her niece and Wildeve for a while.

Finally, Eustacia Vye, who is the most important woman in the novel, is presented in quasi-mythological terms as the "queen of night." Hardy's elaborate description of Eustacia in Chapter 7 is studded with allusions to classical mythology. He refers, for example, to the Greek goddesses Artemis, Athena, and Hera, calling her "the raw material of a divinity." This is not uncritical adulation, however, as Hardy adds that these qualities "make not quite a model woman."

In Chapter 8 Hardy employs a semi-flashback to supplement the account of the dramatic encounter between Eustacia and Wildeve in Chapter 6. This time, the perspective is from the child Johnny Nunsuch, who is questioned in a kindly but detailed fashion by Diggory Venn. Once again, the dialogue provides a poignant but penetrating view of Eustacia.

Book 1, Chapters 9–11

Summary

Chapter 9: Love Leads a Shrewd Man into Strategy

In this chapter Hardy provides some background on the strange, perhaps unfamiliar history of reddlemen, touching on the mistaken beliefs linking them with gypsies and criminals. Testifying to the good nature and integrity of Diggory Venn, he recounts how Thomasin rejected Venn as a suitor. Generous even in rejection, Venn takes it upon himself to look after Thomasin's interests by monitoring and eavesdropping on the secretive trysts between Wildeve and Eustacia. He listens in as Wildeve consults Eustacia about his marrying Thomasin and then asks Eustacia to elope to America. She deflects, asking for time to consider. Diggory is so troubled by what he

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overhears that he resolves to call on Eustacia.

Chapter 10: A Desperate Attempt at Persuasion

During his visit to Eustacia, Diggory Venn attempts to persuade her to give up her relationship with Wildeve, asserting that it is the source of domestic trouble and unhappiness. Eustacia stubbornly refuses to agree, saying she will never give up Wildeve. Arrogantly declaring that Thomasin is "an inferior woman," Eustacia asserts her prior rights to Wildeve's affections. She dismisses Diggory in an imperious manner, and he withdraws despondently.

Chapter 11: The Dishonesty of an Honest Woman

Thomasin's marriage still lies in the balance. Feeling, perhaps, that he has little to lose, Diggory Venn now presents himself to Mrs. Yeobright, asking to be reconsidered as a suitor for Thomasin's hand. Mrs. Yeobright is unenthusiastic. She takes Venn's offer seriously enough, however, to use it to put pressure on Wildeve by telling him that another suitor is interested in Thomasin. Wildeve attempts to turn the situation to his own advantage and then pleads for more time to make his decision.

Wildeve then arranges a meeting with Eustacia and attempts to pressure her into a decision regarding eloping to America. But he is met with the same strategy: Eustacia says she is not ready to make up her mind. The two taunt each other. Privately, Eustacia decides that Wildeve is now "a superfluity": "to perceive his mediocrity now was to admit her own great folly heretofore." Wildeve's failure to get a woman "inferior to herself" is proof enough to Eustacia of his lack of value.

When Eustacia's grandfather returns home, he informs her of the "Egdon news": young Clym Yeobright will be returning home from Paris soon to spend Christmas with his mother.

Analysis

Hardy's presentation of the jockeying for position in these chapters between Diggory Venn, Mrs. Yeobright, Damon Wildeve, and Eustacia Vye casts a lurid glow on the author's view of marriage. With the exception of Venn, the characters are motivated by social status, snobbery, and pride. Mrs. Yeobright rejects Venn because she deems him socially unworthy. She pressures Wildeve in order to avoid social stigma. Wildeve, meanwhile, exploits the situation with the Yeobrights in order to pin Eustacia down. In an irony of situation, however, Eustacia inwardly spurns Wildeve because he has failed, in her eyes, to secure a match with Thomasin, whom Eustacia regards as *her* social inferior. Love and affection scarcely enter the picture.

As often with the conclusion of a major section of this work, the news of Clym's impending arrival provides suspense. The reader is left to wonder how the arrival of a new character will affect the fortunes of Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin, Wildeve, and Diggory Venn.

Book 2, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: Tidings of the Comer

Shortly before Christmas, Eustacia overhears Sam and Humphrey talking with her grandfather about Clym Yeobright's impending arrival home from Paris, where he is employed as the manager to a diamond merchant. Captain Vye moralistically declares that Clym should never have left home. He is suspicious of the "strange notions" imparted by modern education. He adds that it would be better for Eustacia if she had less "romantic nonsense" in her head. Humphrey and Sam, however, think Clym and Eustacia would make a fine couple. This prospect intrigues Eustacia, as she muses about Paris and its wonders. That evening she puts on her bonnet and strolls in a reverie to Blooms-End, the house to which Clym will soon return.

Chapter 2: The People at Blooms-End Make Ready

At Blooms-End Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright are occupied with preparations for Clym's arrival. Thomasin climbs into the

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loft of her aunt's fuel-house to select special apples known to be among Clym's favorite varieties. Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright exchange some remarks about the younger lady's current fortunes, with Mrs. Yeobright commenting that Thomasin could have avoided sorrow if she had been willing to be courted by her cousin Clym.

When the two proceed to gather holly boughs, Mrs. Yeobright raises the vexed subject of Damon Wildeve, whom Thomasin continues to defend. Thomasin is resolute in her decision to marry him, despite her aunt's hint that another man wishes to marry her. She earnestly persuades her aunt to say nothing to Clym on the subject. Mrs. Yeobright reasserts her pride and determination not to be "the sport of a man like Wildeve."

Analysis

At the end of Book 1 Captain Vye had scornfully characterized Paris to Eustacia as "that rookery of pomp and vanity." But in Book 2 Paris takes on a far different significance in Eustacia's mind as she overhears the conversation between Captain Vye and the heathmen. Paris itself—as a symbol of luxury and sophistication—supplies Eustacia with the romantic energy that she suddenly invests in a prospective relationship with Clym. She has never seen this particular native of the heath, and she has only a vague idea of his career in Paris. But his link with that glamorous metropolis—and the possible escape from Egdon Heath that the connection might offer her—suffice to trigger an infatuation. The picture is embellished by Humphrey's homespun observation that Eustacia and Clym might make "a very pretty pigeon-pair."

At the beginning of this fateful phase in her romantic fortunes, extremes are the order of the day for the 19-year-old Eustacia. For her, a "young and clever man" was arriving. "It was like a man coming from heaven." Furthermore, the speculations of the heathmen seem, to Eustacia at least, to foreordain the relationship of "a pair born for each other."

Contrasting with the tensely expectant atmosphere of Chapter 1, the next is a more centered kind of expectancy as the Yeobright women prepare for Clym's arrival in Chapter 2. Hardy includes here an idyllic description of the loft at Mrs. Yeobright's fuel-house as Thomasin busies herself gathering apples. However, the occasion's serenity and good cheer are buffeted somewhat by Mrs. Yeobright's habitual dissatisfaction. She is still anxious about Thomasin's position and the family's reputation as a result of the postponed marriage to Wildeve. Thomasin begins to assert her own mind, earnestly and firmly. She defends Wildeve, and she refuses to revisit old ground with discussion of a romance with Clym. For the first time, apparently, Mrs. Yeobright is compelled to assent to her niece's will.

Book 2, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: How a Little Sound Produced a Great Dream

On the edge of the heath, Eustacia eyes Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright at a distance. She suddenly hears a male voice bid "Good night!" She assumes that the greeting has come from Clym, but she cannot see his face in the darkness. Absorbed in her imaginings, she returns to her own house and briefly discusses the Yeobright family with her grandfather. That night, Eustacia has a vivid, mysterious dream in which she is dancing with a knight in armor whose face she cannot see. She has become "half in love with a vision." During the following days, Eustacia strolls the hills in the hope of meeting Clym but fails to do so.

Chapter 4: Eustacia Is Led On to an Adventure

Two days before Christmas, a group of mummers arrive at Captain Vye's house and ask permission to use the premises to rehearse their Christmas play. Mumming is a traditional holiday celebration of the Egdon Heath people, and rural England generally, involving disguises, dancing, and mild practical jokes. The custom is loosely assembled on the framework of the medieval legend of St. George, England's patron saint.

Eustacia learns the mummers will offer their first performance at a holiday party being given by Mrs. Yeobright in honor of Clym's return home. Upon speaking about his part with Charley, a teenage boy employed by Captain Vye, Eustacia has

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an idea: She will disguise herself as one of the players, so she can better observe Clym at his own house. She persuades Charley to allow her to substitute for him during one evening's performance. He must promise to keep the matter secret. He agrees, in exchange for Eustacia's permission for him to hold her hand for a quarter of an hour. The next evening, Eustacia tries on her costume and delivers her hand for Charley to hold.

Analysis

These chapters show Eustacia in the preliminary stages of an infatuation—from several different angles. In Chapter 3 her inquisitive nature results in a near-meeting with Clym—but all that transpires is a fleeting sound on the heath as he voices, in the company of Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright, a salutation of "Good night."

As usual, though, extremes have their way with Eustacia. That evening she has an extravagant dream in which a knight in elaborate armor attends her, only to disappear when he is on the brink of showing his face. Eustacia is all too alive to the connections between details in the dream and specific "images and fancies" of the preceding day. Hardy goes out of his way to stress that Eustacia has parted company with reality: "The perfervid woman was by this time half in love with a vision."

Eustacia's futile attempts to catch sight of Clym over the next few days are about to take an unexpected turn. Hardy hints at his characteristic emphasis on unpredictability and chance in the final sentence of Chapter 3: "But Providence is nothing if not coquettish."

In Chapter 4 Hardy advances the plot by wringing another new twist on Eustacia's romantic adventures. This time the catalyst is Eustacia's sudden decision to disguise herself as an actor in *Saint George*, to be performed at the Yeobrights' house. This way, she thinks, she can get closer to Clym and study him further. So Eustacia prevails on Charley to allow her to assume his role in the play for one night.

In a playful-serious bit of bargaining, Eustacia and Charley decide on his reward. Since Charley has a crush on Eustacia, she has no trouble in persuading him to accept a 15-minute period of hand-holding as the price for her wish. The anti-romantic tones of the scene are clear. Charley's adolescent, puppy-dog admiration from afar is reduced to a commercial transaction. Eustacia renders him a "payment," from which he takes "good measure." The contrast between her condescending attitude toward Charley and her exaggerated admiration for Clym throws the whole notion of romance into high, but extremely questionable, relief.

Book 2, Chapters 5–6

Summary

Chapter 5: Through the Moonlight

On the night of the mummers' first performance, Eustacia poses as her cousin, replacing Charley in the role of the Turkish Knight in the play. Making their way to Blooms-End, the amateur actors enact the play. Some of them, however, recognize Eustacia, but she binds them to secrecy.

Chapter 6: The Two Stand Face to Face

Identifying Clym among the spectators, Eustacia scrutinizes his face, which Hardy describes at length as a visage expressing inner conflict and turmoil. After the arrival of more guests from the heath and some bantering dialogue among them, Clym offers Eustacia some food, which she refuses. But she does take some elderwine, of which she can partake without removing her disguise. The sight of Thomasin ignites her jealousy, as she ponders how to prevent any renewed bond between Thomasin and Clym. Toward the end of the chapter Eustacia ventures outside the house and is followed by Clym. At their first face-to-face meeting, they briefly discuss her disguise—he has recognized her femininity. Eustacia declines Clym's invitation to return to the party indoors and begins to make her way home. On her journey she reflects on the possible threat Thomasin poses to her romantic designs on Clym. She also recalls that she was to have met Wildeve that very evening to discuss their possible elopement. She cavalierly dismisses any concern for Wildeve, regretting only that she had stood in the way of his wedding to Thomasin. Had they been married already, it would have removed Thomasin as her potential rival for Clym's affections.

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Analysis

Two important thematic strands in these chapters are the notion of heroism and the idea of disguise versus revelation. Heroism seems prized as an ideal by Eustacia, but she appears to define this quality narrowly and in conformity to traditional stereotypes. Perhaps the St. George play and her remarkable dream described in Chapter 3 together support her conception of a "knightly" rescuer. She imagines her hero will transform her constricted life on Egdon Heath into a glamorous existence in a place like Paris. For Eustacia at this point, this knightly figure is Clym Yeobright.

Disguise is also a prominent motif in these chapters. Eustacia is recognized by some of her fellow mummers in Chapter 5, but she entreats them not to reveal her identity. In Chapter 6 this pact proves vain, however, when Clym astutely recognizes her as a woman. In an awkward encounter, Eustacia is thrown on the defensive. Departing from Blooms-End prematurely, Eustacia has conflicting feelings about her adventure. "How could she," she wonders, "allow herself to become so infatuated with a stranger?" At the same time the thought of Thomasin's "inflammable proximity" to Clym is galling. Eustacia plainly fears being bested by Clym's cousin.

Eustacia's adventure, then, has had mixed results, at best. As she regrets her failure to make certain of Wildeve's marriage to Thomasin, she again reveals an almost unnaturally competitive mentality about marriage. The name "Vye" is clearly appropriate, as the verb *vie* means "to compete" or "contest." Eustacia is, if anything, a fierce contestant in the marriage game. Other *speaking names* in the novel include Wildeve, suggesting irresponsible abandon, and Clym, short for Clement, suggesting mercy or charity. Before Hardy, Charles Dickens had made effective use of speaking names, such as Stryver in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Book 2, Chapters 7–8

Summary

Chapter 7: A Coalition between Beauty and Oddness

The morning after the Yeobrights' party, Eustacia converses briefly with her grandfather and tells him of her adventure as a mummer. He laughs at the tale but warns her not to do it again. Later that day she meets Diggory and learns Wildeve had attempted to keep their rendezvous at Rainbarrow and had waited a long time for her. Eustacia tells Diggory that she would now be very glad to promote a marriage between Thomasin and Wildeve. Surprised, Diggory agrees to deliver a letter from Eustacia to Wildeve when the latter reappears at Rainbarrow that very evening. Eustacia craftily refuses to disclose to Diggory why she takes an interest in the matter.

That night at Rainbarrow, Diggory delivers Eustacia's letter, in which she definitively cuts Wildeve off. Wildeve and Diggory spar in a derisive dialogue, with Wildeve apparently besting him, at least for the moment.

Spurred by comments from both Eustacia and Wildeve saying he was himself in the running for Thomasin's hand, Diggory puts on his best, unstained clothing and goes to Blooms-End. As he arrives, Wildeve is leaving, triumphant in having claimed his bride. Diggory stays to talk with Mrs. Yeobright, who sends him away disappointed.

Chapter 8: Firmness Is Discovered in a Gentle Heart

Just after Wildeve leaves their house, Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright continue to discuss Thomasin's wedding and Wildeve's intentions. Thomasin has received a letter from her cousin Clym, away on a visit to friends, voicing concerns over Thomasin's engagement and the rumors swirling around it. Wildeve had asserted that the wedding should be held as swiftly as possible. He had refused to enter the house, however, since he feels estranged from Mrs. Yeobright. As the women talk, Diggory Venn arrives and is turned away by Mrs. Yeobright.

Thomasin firmly declares to her aunt that she wants to be married before Clym returns and that she does not want Mrs. Yeobright to give her away at the wedding. Despite their estrangement over this matter, Thomasin and her aunt embrace before the young woman leaves for her wedding.

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Clym returns home and receives an account of the wedding from Diggory, who informs him that Eustacia gave the bride away. Diggory, however, was too distant to see the contentious exchange of looks and murmurs between Wildeve and Eustacia at the wedding ceremony.

Analysis

These chapters are especially notable for Hardy's skillful use of dialogue. In Chapter 7, for example, Eustacia's cunning is juxtaposed with Diggory Venn's forthright unselfishness in their conversation about the prospective marriage between Thomasin and Wildeve. While she maneuvers, Eustacia is struck by Diggory's selflessness: "The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd." In contrast to Diggory, Eustacia's newfound, vigorous promotion of the match is motivated by her desire to eliminate Thomasin as a rival for Clym's affections. Later in the chapter, Diggory must engage in verbal sparring with Damon Wildeve.

In Chapter 8, Hardy re-emphasizes Mrs. Yeobright's tendencies of self-pity and social snobbery in her conversations with Thomasin and with Clym. Perhaps the most dramatic incident in this chapter is Diggory Venn's account of Thomasin's wedding, as he converses with Mrs. Yeobright. Here, Hardy mingles pathos with heavy irony. The sadness of Diggory, as one who had hoped to court Thomasin, is palpable, while the situational irony of Eustacia giving Thomasin away at the ceremony is all too clear to the reader. Eustacia is clearly delighted that Thomasin is now ineligible to "vie" with her for Clym.

Book 3, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is"

In this chapter Hardy expands the point of view, stepping back to consider Clym Yeobright's local reputation. At their regular Sunday-morning meeting for hair-cutting, presided over by Timothy Fairway, the locals trade gossip on the matter. Clym appears and tells his neighbors that he plans to open a school near Egdon. Though they are impressed by his achievements, the heath people are at a loss to understand his intention. In addition, they scarcely believe Clym's assertion that the diamond business is idle and vain.

Chapter 2: The New Course Causes Disappointment

In this chapter Clym shares his plans for the future with his mother. Predictably, Mrs. Yeobright is less than pleased. Mother and son argue over the nature of success and fulfillment. Soon Christian Cantle arrives, followed by Humphrey, to report an ugly incident that has happened in the church. Susan Nunsuch, convinced Eustacia is a witch, has stabbed her with a long stocking-needle. Clym seizes on the incident as a perfect example of the need for education to combat local ignorance and superstition.

Later that day Sam visits to borrow a rope. He informs the family that several of the men are going to Captain Vye's house to retrieve a bucket that has fallen into a well. Clym takes the opportunity to ask about the Captain's granddaughter. Curious about whether Miss Vye is the Turkish Knight he met at Christmas, Clym says he may join them their mission.

Analysis

Hardy's title for Chapter 1 comes from a lyric by the Elizabethan poet Sir Edward Dyer (1543–1607) on the theme of *otium*, a Latin word for leisurely contentment. It presumably suggests Clym's goal of a contented mind in his prospective career as a schoolteacher.

In this part of the novel Hardy devotes significant attention to Clym's decision to abandon his career in Paris and become a schoolteacher on the heath. The heath people react with incredulity and Mrs. Yeobright with disapproval. Clym's decision, then, is the cause of a rising tide of conflict. As stubborn as his mother, Clym does not seem to perceive how such a course may clash with the hopes and dreams of others. Eustacia's negative reaction may already be inferred; her snobbery and ambition would ensure her firm opposition to Clym's course.

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At the beginning of Chapter 2 Hardy compares Clym in his zeal and idealism to "a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text." In contrast to Eustacia, he knows the heath intimately and loves its landscapes. (Later on, in Chapter 4, Eustacia calls the heath a "cruel taskmaster.")

It is at this point that Clym's contact with, and affection for, Eustacia begin to develop. Hardy has already foreshadowed a stormy relationship in his portrayal of the two characters' attitudes about Paris and the heath. Now he adds an even more telling anecdote recounting Susan Nunsuch's bizarre attack on Eustacia in church. Mrs. Yeobright, predictably, is judgmental. Observing her son's interest, she remarks drily, "Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. ... Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon." Toward the end of Chapter 2 Clym naively asks Sam if he thinks Eustacia would like to teach children. Hardy implies Clym is already pondering a romantic interest.

Book 3, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: The First Act in a Timeworn Drama

At Captain Vye's house, a half dozen of the heath people try to retrieve a bucket that has fallen into the well. Clym and Eustacia meet and converse, and Clym offers to haul up some water for her. While he secures the rope, she injures her hand trying to lower the bucket. They part, and Clym goes home to begin his studies in earnest.

As early spring arrives, the two young people grow closer, even as Clym and his mother feel more and more alienated from each other. Mrs. Yeobright learns details of the courtship from neighbors. Clym returns home after having kissed Eustacia, and at tea he announces to his mother that he is considering asking Eustacia to marry him. Although she is not wealthy, she is well educated and would make a good helpmate in his school. Unimpressed and pessimistic, Mrs. Yeobright calls Eustacia a "hussy," stirring Clym's anger.

Chapter 4: An Hour of Bliss and Many Hours of Sadness

The following evening Clym leaves his house to travel toward Rainbarrow with the declared intent of watching an eclipse of the moon, and he meets Eustacia there. In less than three months' acquaintance, they have started to address each other with tender endearments. As the phases of the lunar eclipse unfold overhead, the two speak of many subjects, including Paris and the heath. Their contrasting attitudes are clearly stated, and Eustacia expresses her concern that their love cannot last.

As the eclipse continues, Clym asks Eustacia to marry him. She initially deflects, then says she will promise to marry Clym if he agrees to return with her to Paris, but he refuses. After repeated requests and some more hesitation, Eustacia assents, saying she is sure Clym will not adhere to his "education plan." After they part and Clym heads homeward, he struggles with conflicting emotions, feeling his love for Eustacia has landed him in a dilemma.

Analysis

The plot developments and dialogue in these chapters lay the groundwork for the tragic outcome of the novel's plot. Clym's growing estrangement from Mrs. Yeobright is shown to be rooted in two causes: his own stubborn and oblivious idealism, and her stern, controlling nature. The issue of his possible return to Paris generates mild disagreement, but his relationship with Eustacia sets mother and son on a collision course. At the end of Chapter 3 Mrs. Yeobright's curt dismissal of Eustacia as a "hussy" deeply offends Clym.

Chapter 4, one of the most dramatic and important in the entire novel, features the nighttime meeting between Clym and Eustacia. Their feelings for each other in this chapter give extra depth to the book title—"The Fascination." He proposes marriage, and she accepts his proposal. But the setting, the dialogue, and the mood offer ominous foreshadowings in almost every direction. The lunar eclipse provides an indirect but telling echo of the heath people's joking references to the new moon in Book 1, Chapter 3 ("no moon, no man"—a saying associated with marital failure). A lunar eclipse always occurs at full moon, rather than at new moon. But still, the gradual darkening of the moon in the Earth's shadow to a blood-red

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color has portended evil and sorrow for thousands of years. Intriguingly, Eustacia and Clym interpret the celestial phenomenon entirely differently. Eustacia enthuses that the moon's "strange foreign color" means Clym should be doing better things, while Clym asserts that he could "live and die in a hermitage" on Egdon Heath, provided he had "proper work to do." A hermitage, the reader knows well, is scarcely Eustacia's ideal destination.

Such disconnects in the dialogue are a continuing feature in this scene. Eustacia does not seem to understand that Clym is poised to surrender the very life of gaiety and luxury of which she has long dreamed. Clym seems insensible to Eustacia's driving, materialistic ambitions and competitiveness. Both are aware of the evident fact that they are entirely unsuited to one another, but they proceed in their mutual fascination regardless. Without unduly tarnishing the romantic aura, Hardy could hardly be more explicit in his foreshadowing of sorrow and tragedy. "How terrible it would be," he has Eustacia say, "if a time should come when I could not love you, my Clym!" To which Clym only replies, "Please don't say such reckless things."

Book 3, Chapters 5–6

Summary

Chapter 5: Sharp Words Are Spoken, and a Crisis Ensues

At Blooms-End, Mrs. Yeobright returns from a visit to Thomasin and confronts Clym, having heard at the Quiet Woman of his engagement to Eustacia Vye. They argue on the issues of a return to Paris and his marriage to Eustacia. Their discussion grows so heated that Clym resolves to leave home.

It is now early summer, and on this sunny day Clym had planned to bring his mother and Eustacia together so they could be friends. In a bitter irony of situation, his project has utterly failed. Clym meets with Eustacia and tells her that they must do their best to be married as soon as possible, after which they will occupy a tiny cottage on the heath until Clym manages to rent a house in the town of Budmouth (an imagined Wessex town, corresponding to Weymouth in Hardy's native Dorset county). Eustacia somewhat reluctantly agrees, provided that their stay in the small cottage will not exceed six months.

Chapter 6: Yeobright Goes, and the Breach Is Complete

Clym makes a final parting from his mother, who is unyielding in her stern severity. She even refuses to be consoled by a visit from the gentle Thomasin, who visits her daily for the next week. During her first visit Thomasin reports that Wildeve treats her "fairly," but she lacks money. Having asked her husband for money previously and been put off, she is reluctant to ask again.

Meanwhile, the news of Clym and Eustacia's relationship rekindles desire for Eustacia in the heart of Damon Wildeve, Thomasin's husband. Hardy attributes Wildeve's emotional affliction to his nature. His propensity "to care for the remote, to dislike the near" shows "the true mark of a man of sentiment."

Analysis

At this point Clym's thoughts about Eustacia Vye are unsettled and changeable. Just as at the end of Chapter 4, Clym experiences second thoughts after persuading Eustacia to agree to a hasty marriage. At the end of Chapter 5 Hardy says, "Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for, support, help, be maligned for." Significantly, Eustacia is portrayed as haggling over the terms of marriage. She specifies that their stay in a tiny cottage should not exceed six months. Similarly, in Chapter 4 she proposes that living in Paris be a condition of marriage. The reader is left with the impression that material comforts mean a great deal to her. In contrast, such comforts mean little to Clym.

Thomasin's visit to Mrs. Yeobright in Chapter 6, although ineffective, exhibits a delightful facet of Hardy's style when he compares her to birds. Her gentleness and grace pointedly contrast with the ominous account of Damon Wildeve at the end of the chapter. Wildeve is said to experience "a curious heartache": "the old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul." In referring to him as "the Rousseau of Egdon," Hardy alludes to the Swiss-French philosopher Jean-Jacques

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Rousseau (1712–78). Rousseau's unconventional, nonconformist, and idealistic doctrines were hailed by many as the epitome of Romanticism and as a significant incitement of the French Revolution (1787–99).

Book 3, Chapters 7–8

Summary

Chapter 7: The Morning and the Evening of a Day

It is June 25, exactly six months after the mummers' play celebrating Christmas and the return home to Egdon Heath of "the native," Clym Yeobright. Mrs. Yeobright has declined to attend the wedding ceremony of her son Clym and Eustacia Vye. Damon Wildeve visits, asking after the item Thomasin was to fetch that day, though he knows not what it is. Mrs. Yeobright decides not to give him the large sum of money, which she intends to be divided by Thomasin and Clym. She doubts Wildeve's honesty. Insulted, but protective as always of his pride and self-image, Wildeve sulkily withdraws.

Instead of Wildeve, Mrs. Yeobright commissions Christian Cantle to deliver the money. This decision, however, turns out to be a serious mistake. Hardy has already introduced Christian as a man of limited mental capacity and judgment. It is he, for example, who is at the center of the "no moon, no man" superstition about marriage in Book 1. He is also the narrator of Susan Nunsuch's "witchcraft" attack on Eustacia in Book 3. In an ironic situation, Mrs. Yeobright's choice of Christian as a courier founders on the meddling of the man she had rejected for the mission: Damon Wildeve.

On his way to Mistover, Christian encounters several locals who are on their way to a raffle, which is a dicing game, at the Quiet Woman. They convince Christian to join them, overcoming his fears of cost and immorality. At the raffle Christian makes a winning roll of the dice and wins a gown-piece. He is embarrassed, having no wife or sweetheart to give it to, but also mystified by the dice and having won something. He accidentally reveals to Wildeve that he is carrying money to Thomasin. Wildeve decides to accompany Christian to Mistover.

On their walk to Mistover, Wildeve stops at Rainbarrow and tempts Christian with tales of fortunes won by gamblers. They play dice on a flat stone. After Christian loses his own money, he bets with the money Mrs. Yeobright entrusted to him. He reasons that if he wins he will have the money to give Thomasin, and if he loses the money goes to its "lawful owner," her husband. After losing Thomasin's money, Christian goes on to bet with and lose Clym's money, too. Christian leaves distraught. As Wildeve prepares to go home, he sees the reddleman approaching.

Chapter 8: A New Force Disturbs the Current

Diggory Venn has been unobtrusively observing the gambling match between Damon Wildeve and Christian Cantle. He takes Christian's place next to the stone and challenges Wildeve. In a suspenseful rematch, Diggory wins all the money back from Wildeve that the latter had won from Cantle.

After the gambling, Wildeve and Diggory see the lights of carriages coming down from Mistover. Wildeve withdraws, and Diggory waits for the carriages. The first contains the newlyweds. Seeing them together, "Wildeve forgot the loss of the money at the sight of his lost love." Diggory briefly talks with the couple, who tell him Thomasin will be following. He waits, and mistakenly gives to Mrs. Wildeve the entire inheritance that was to be divided between her and Clym.

Analysis

Gambling and dice, symbolizing chance, are a potent symbol of Hardy's outlook on human life and fortunes. Much of our lives, according to Hardy, follows a pattern fundamentally outside our own control. Destiny lays down a series of irrational and incomprehensible twists and turns that are useless for us to protest or attempt to control. As Christian Cantle innocently but significantly exclaims in Chapter 7, "What curious creatures these dice be—powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command!" A little later on, Christian speculates to Wildeve that the dice may be "the devil's playthings."

The gambling scene is one of the most suspenseful action sequences in the novel. At first Damon and Christian face off, and then Diggory Venn comes into to the picture. Hardy uses the changing lights, first from the lantern and later from

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glowworms, to augment the changing moods of the scene. Similarly, the interventions of wildlife including heath croppers and moths help to lend a fateful feeling to the action.

Whereas Christian Cantle is entrapped by stories of sudden, miraculous wealth, Wildeve falls victim, in turn, to the same sort of delusion when Diggory Venn enters the picture. As Hardy drily remarks, "Gambling is a species of amusement which is much more easily begun with full pockets than left off with the same." In Chapter 8 Hardy adeptly converts the "little flat stone" serving as a table surface for the gamblers into another symbol: the arena of a battlefield in the struggle of life itself. The gamblers' play becomes more and more desperate.

Eventually, when Diggory has defeated Wildeve, Hardy adds one final touch in a foreshadowing of the coming ironic situation at the end of the Book 3. Diggory Venn gives the entire sum of money to Thomasin because he is unaware that Mrs. Yeobright had intended half of it for Clym. By so doing, Diggory unintentionally sets in motion "more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done."

Book 4, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: The Rencounter by the Pool

July is the single month of the year in which the Egdon Heath landscape is truly beautiful. Clym and Eustacia live on in their small cottage at Alderworth, with Eustacia's hopes still bound up in her dreams of Paris. Thomasin writes to her aunt to thank her for the money delivered by Diggory Venn, but Mrs. Yeobright is puzzled by Clym's silence. Half the sum, after all, was intended for him. She questions Christian Cantle, who breaks down to confess the events of the gambling match. Dismissing Christian, Mrs. Yeobright determines to question Eustacia, for she fears that the money due to Clym has been misappropriated by Wildeve. The interview with Eustacia, however, results in a bitter series of misunderstandings, with the two women hurling accusations at each other.

Chapter 2: He Is Set Upon by Adversities; but He Sings a Song

Eustacia angrily returns home, telling Clym she will never see his mother again. She entreats him once more to take her to Paris. The following day, the mystery of the missing money is resolved, with Thomasin presenting his share to Clym. Continuing in his "scholastic plan," Clym soon experiences eye problems caused by an acute inflammation severe enough to make him an invalid. Eustacia gloomily realizes that her dream of Paris is not likely to come true because of this misfortune.

Determined to reengage in useful activity, Clym asks Humphrey to teach him the trade of furze-cutting. The pay is low and the work is socially looked down on, but Clym cheerfully undertakes it, even singing to himself. Eustacia finds it degrading to see her husband cheerfully singing while doing such low-status work. The two discuss the ways in which their relationship may be cooling.

Analysis

Hardy has amply foreshadowed tension and conflict between Eustacia Vye and Mrs. Yeobright. This part of the novel will bring that conflict to a height, so it is appropriate that Chapter 1 should highlight a scalding quarrel between the two women. Mrs. Yeobright's refusal to attend Eustacia's wedding to Clym and the misunderstanding regarding the money intended for Clym and Thomasin serve as kindling for this conflagration. In Eustacia's eyes, Mrs. Yeobright is arrogant and condescending; for Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia is scheming and manipulative. Social snobbery on Mrs. Yeobright's part also plays a role. Underlying the conflict are the built-in jealousies and resentments, prevalent in many cultures, of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

In Chapter 2 Clym's eye disorder quickly assumes the status of a symbol. On one hand, his condition stresses his conscientious application of his energies to prepare for his new career as a schoolmaster. On the other hand, the reader cannot help but feel that Hardy's choice of physical ailment for Clym is symbolically appropriate. He is emotionally and psychologically blind to interpersonal realities such as his mother's sensitivity to social opinion and Eustacia's needs for material comfort and glamor. Reactions to Clym's ailment show an ironic situation. His patience and good humor in spite of

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adversity, which would usually be seen as virtuous, intensify the setback in the eyes of Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia. Singing to himself and taking up furze-cutting may help Clym to weather the storm, but they do not do much to soften the blow for his wife and his mother. Eustacia tells Clym bluntly toward the end of Chapter 2, "I fear we are cooling." It has been less than two months since they were married.

Book 4, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: She Goes Out to Battle against Depression

It is now late August, and Eustacia has become almost apathetic. Attempting to cheer her up, Clym agrees that she may attend a village event to be held in East Egdon. Coincidentally, at the festivities she catches sight of Damon Wildeve, whom she has not seen since his wedding. He persuades her to join him in the dance, saying it would not be improper since they are "relations" (by marriage). Eustacia experiences a series of strong emotions, while Wildeve is carried away by euphoria. This sort of illicit enjoyment appeals to the man: "Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love." Walking part of the way homeward with Wildeve, the two catch sight of Diggory and Clym. Wildeve slips away before Clym can see him, but the ever-observant Diggory notes Wildeve's presence.

Diggory proceeds to take a direct path through the heath to the Quiet Woman. When he arrives, he asks the maid whether Wildeve is at home, knowing that he is not. Thomasin comes out to speak with Venn and tells him that Damon had gone out to buy a horse. The reddleman informs her that he saw her husband out walking with "a beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night." The two talk about Wildeve's habit of going out in the evenings, and Diggory leaves before he returns. When her husband comes home, Thomasin asks where the horse is and recounts Diggory's story to him, and Wildeve replies that it must be a mistake.

Chapter 4: Rough Coercion Is Employed

Concerned about the stability of Thomasin's marriage to Wildeve, Diggory undertakes the task of surveying Eustacia's house at night to try to prevent any nocturnal trysts. On several occasions he plays small tricks on Wildeve, like booby-trapping an approach path with a reddish-colored cord. To avoid Diggory's interference, Wildeve resolves to try by day rather than night.

Meeting Mrs. Yeobright, Venn tells her of his suspicions about Mr. Wildeve and urgently exhorts her to call on Clym and reconcile with him. At the same time in Alderworth, Clym discusses the matter with Eustacia, telling her he must do something to improve relations with his mother, but Eustacia remains noncommittal.

Analysis

Eustacia's excursion to the gypsying in Chapter 3 occurs with Clym's knowledge and also with his qualified approval. At the same time, Hardy furnishes a number of danger signals to alert the reader about the incident. Chief among these signals is the comment that Eustacia's psychological state has now reached a critical level: "To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further." There will be several additional examples of foreshadowing that suggest Eustacia's eventual suicide in Book 5.

Hardy's description of the village festivities may be compared with his accounts of the November 5 bonfires in Book 1 and the mummers' holiday theatricals in Book 2. The holiday charm, however, is short-lived. Chance, one of Hardy's most dependable allies, brings Wildeve on the scene once more. We already know that his affections for Eustacia have been rekindled. Now, under cover of dancing together "as relations," the two renew their fateful contact.

Their evening together, however, is complicated by the entrance of Clym and Diggory. Eustacia and Wildeve elude detection by Clym's impaired vision, but Diggory spots them clearly. This turn of events inspires a verbally ironic conclusion to Chapter 3, in which Venn exploits a series of double entendres (phrases with a double meaning), referring ambiguously both to Eustacia and to a newly acquired horse.

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In Chapter 4 Diggory steps forward vigorously to undercut Wildeve's maneuvers and to encourage a reconciliation between Clym and Mrs. Yeobright. In the former effort, he is reasonably successful as he carries out increasingly annoying practical tricks. In the latter enterprise, Diggory acts as the trigger, once again, for a wrenching irony of situation. Mrs. Yeobright's journey across the heath to visit her son is to result in tragedy rather than reconciliation.

Book 4, Chapters 5–6

Summary

Chapter 5: The Journey across the Heath

It is the last day of August, and Egdon Heath bakes like a kiln in the heat. Mrs. Yeobright has chosen this day to cross the heath on foot to her son's house. As she makes the journey, she sees two wayfarers. One is her son himself, who is preoccupied in his new—but socially despised—trade of cutting furze. She follows him to his home, unable to keep up with his pace. And the other is Damon Wildeve, whom Mrs. Yeobright fails to recognize. She sees the man look about the property, then knock at the door and enter. In a case of dramatic irony, she supposes the presence of some acquaintance may make the meeting less awkward.

Chapter 6: A Conjuncture, and Its Result upon the Pedestrian

Since their meeting at the "gypsying," Wildeve has been determined to visit Eustacia openly by day, thus foiling Diggory's annoying tricks and nocturnal surveillance. By chance he arrives on this day just after Clym has retired for a rest from his fatiguing physical labor. He gets there shortly before Mrs. Yeobright.

Wildeve and Eustacia discuss her present marriage and their past relationship. He tells her that she rightly belonged to him. She admits sadness about her misfortune, but she also says she loves Clym and asks Wildeve to make this his last visit to her home. In the middle of their conversation, there is a knock at the door. Going to a window, Eustacia ascertains that the visitor is Mrs. Yeobright. From the other room, they hear Clym say the word *Mother*. Mistakenly inferring that Clym is awake (he is only dreaming), Eustacia takes Damon to the back door and ushers him out of the house. She finds Clym still asleep, then hastens to open the front door. But Mrs. Yeobright has gone.

The elderly woman's return journey across the heath occupies the rest of this harrowing chapter. She has seriously misinterpreted the scene. She first sees Clym's furze hook and brambles outside the door, and then she glimpses Eustacia's face at a window. Based on this she has inferred that Clym has permitted Eustacia to shut the door against her. Her misunderstanding of appearances leads her to believe that she has been shunned and betrayed by her own son.

With such tormenting thoughts roiling through her mind, Mrs. Yeobright encounters young Johnny Nunsuch, who offers to accompany her on part of her return journey. The child's innocent questions offer a counterpoint to Mrs. Yeobright's suffering. She sits down momentarily to rest and sends the boy to fetch water from a pool. When Johnny departs, Mrs. Yeobright presses on, then stops to rest once more, watching a heron fly with its face toward the sun.

Analysis

Once again, the setting of Egdon Heath plays a key role in these chapters. Although Hardy has earlier described the heath as a place where "time makes but little impression," he skillfully manipulates the locale to suit the emotional pitch of the plot at various points in the novel. These chapters will be among the most emotionally fraught parts of the story; it is fitting, therefore, that the weather is both extreme and exhausting.

This plot sequence makes prevalent use of dramatic irony. When she glimpses a furze-cutter ("of no more account in life than an insect"), Mrs. Yeobright at first has no idea of his identity. Soon, however, the man's gait reminds him of her husband's, and she recognizes the laborer as her son. The recognition deals a blow to her notions of social status and propriety.

As if this were not enough, Mrs. Yeobright discerns a second

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male figure as she approaches Clym and Eustacia's house. This time Hardy does not identify the man (Wildeve) until the beginning of the next chapter. But the opportunities for situational and dramatic irony are not lost. Mrs. Yeobright, at first perturbed, soon concludes that the presence of a neighbor or acquaintance may help smooth over any awkward moments in her reconciliation with Clym. She begins to feel comfortable with the situation, unaware that Wildeve's presence will cause this visit to go wrong.

In the final paragraph of Chapter 5, Hardy offers an idyllic vignette as a prelude to one of the most dramatic turning points in the novel's plot: A cat is asleep on the path; wasps roll drunk on the juice of apples fallen from a tree inside the gate; Clym's furze-hook lies by the door. This portrait of rural serenity is about to be shredded.

At the beginning of Chapter 6 Hardy explains to the reader that Wildeve was determined to visit Eustacia openly. Thus, his visit on this particular day has coincided with Mrs. Yeobright's attempt at reconciliation with her son. From this point on, events cascade. Wildeve and Eustacia converse about their relationship and Eustacia's marriage even as Clym, exhausted from his physical labor, lies asleep on the hearth in plain sight. Such physical proximity of wife, husband, and past and would-be lover would have been enough, by itself, to have disconcerted some readers in Hardy's audience.

Mrs. Yeobright's knock at the door is the key turning point in the scene. Aside from the dilemma it poses for Eustacia, two additional details are notable. The first is Eustacia's brief appearance at the window. She learns that the newly arrived visitor is Mrs. Yeobright, but—even more important for future events—Mrs. Yeobright glimpses and recognizes Eustacia. The second important detail is the utterance by Clym of the word *Mother*—interpreted by Eustacia and Wildeve as indicating that Clym has awakened from sleep, but in reality only a word he speaks as he is having a dream. In this detail a case of dramatic irony spells trouble for the characters who misinterpret his speech. The dream itself is an exemplar of verbal irony: Clym was indeed envisioning and speaking to his mother, but in an entirely different set of circumstances, which will be explained at the beginning of Chapter 7.

In the remainder of Chapter 6 Hardy narrates Mrs. Yeobright's harrowing attempt to return home across the heath. Given the torrid weather, her extreme fatigue, and her battered emotional state, her progress is slow and halting. During the journey, she encounters the child Johnny Nunsuch, who attempts to help her. However, the child does not really understand her physical predicament or her emotional state.

Book 4, Chapters 7–8

Summary

Chapter 7: The Tragic Meeting of Two Old Friends

At his small cottage, Clym awakens from his slumber and tells Eustacia about his dream. Eustacia says nothing about his mother's attempted visit earlier in the day. Clym decides he must go to Blooms-End at once. Eustacia, thinking she might be able to undo any damage done, petitions to go herself the next day, but she is overruled.

On his journey across the heath, Clym discovers his mother lying exhausted and almost unconscious. Raising her up onto his shoulders, he carries her to the shelter of a lonely shed. Then he summons the heath people, who bring lanterns, water, and other supplies.

It is discovered that Mrs. Yeobright has been bitten by an adder, a small poisonous snake. The heath people hasten to apply the traditional remedy: rubbing the bite with the fried fat of other adders. Clym, though distrustful, reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 8: Eustacia Hears of Good Fortune, and Beholds Evil

Eustacia impatiently wrestles with the dilemma posed by the nearly simultaneous arrivals in Chapter 6 of Wildeve and Mrs. Yeobright. Not able to sit still, she decides to walk toward Blooms-End and meet her husband on his return. As she is leaving, she meets Captain Vye, her grandfather, who informs her of the latest gossip: Wildeve has unexpectedly inherited a large sum of money from a relative in Canada. Captivated by new prospects, Eustacia hastens forth on her intended path to meet her husband. She stops for a while, and Wildeve appears. She discusses with him his plans for the use of his new inheritance.

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Walking on the heath, the two approach the small turf-shed where Mrs. Yeobright lies dying. They arrive in time to hear the heath women weeping as the doctor pronounces, "It is all over." Johnny Nunsuch steps forward to repeat to his mother Mrs. Yeobright's lament that she was a "broken-hearted woman ... cast off by her son." Appalled and severely frightened, Eustacia parts company with Wildeve and hastens home.

Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 7, Clym's account of his dream is intensely relevant in the context of recent events. He tells Eustacia that in the dream he took her to Mrs. Yeobright's house for a reconciliation. When they arrived, they were unable to gain entrance, despite his mother's continual cries for help. More than 20 years before Sigmund Freud published his *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Hardy's psychological insight into the relationship between dreams and waking reality is striking.

Eustacia deals with her feelings of regret and fear by postponing any statement to Clym about what actually happened at the cottage. Meanwhile, Clym sets out on a mission to find and conciliate his mother.

Although the ensuing scenes are replete with emotion, readers cannot overlook the symbolism of Mrs. Yeobright's death through an adder's poison. Her intolerance and snobbery have amounted to poison in her relationships with other people, including Eustacia and her son. She has been notably severe even with her mild-mannered niece Thomasin.

Damon Wildeve's unexpected enrichment as the result of a family legacy adds a new twist to the narrative in Chapter 8. Eustacia's reaction is breathtakingly self-centered: "O I see it, I see it! How much he wishes he had me now, that he might give me all I desire!" The ensuing conversation between them is significantly more restrained. Wildeve tells her that he may journey to Paris, a city he names as "the central beauty-spot of the world." Eustacia can only murmur "in a voice that was nearly a sigh."

The book's final blow is the repetition by Johnny Nunsuch of Mrs. Yeobright's words, saying she was "a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son." Eustacia hears the boy's report and immediately recognizes that she is to blame. Rather than going to Clym and consoling him, however, she skulks away from the scene.

Book 5, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: "Wherefore Is Light Given to Him That Is in Misery"

Shattered by his mother's death, Clym lies ill in the house at Alderworth for several weeks. Neither Eustacia nor Thomasin can console him. Eustacia writhes in guilt and shame while her husband reproaches himself for failing to reconcile with his mother. Wildeve comes to drive home with his wife, who is soon expecting a child. Before Thomasin comes out, Wildeve advises Eustacia never to tell the whole truth about what happened. In particular, she should conceal that Wildeve was in the house at the time.

Chapter 2: A Lurid Light Breaks In upon a Darkened Understanding

It is now October. Clym's grief gives way to renewed strength and energy. Christian Cantle arrives to announce the birth of a baby girl to Thomasin and Wildeve. Clym questions Christian about the day of Mrs. Yeobright's attempted visit. Acting on Christian's information, Clym has him seek out Diggory, who had met with Mrs. Yeobright the day before her death. Meeting a few days later at Blooms-End, Diggory tells Clym that his mother had forgiven him and that she planned to visit him to reconcile.

How can this news be squared with the remarks that Johnny Nunsuch repeated at the time, however? The key facts are provided on the next day by Johnny, whom Clym seeks out for more information. He reveals that Mrs. Yeobright was walking away from Clym's house, not toward it, as Clym had previously thought. He reports seeing another man arrive at the house just before Mrs. Yeobright. He also saw a woman's face appear at the window just as Mrs. Yeobright knocked at the door.

Clym has now put the information together and has made the

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discovery that gives Book 5 its title. He sets forth from Susan Nunsuch's house in a state of turmoil.

Analysis

Hardy uses several significant Biblical allusions in this section of the novel to intensify the drama. The title of Chapter 1, for example, refers to Job 3:20, in which Job, struck down by misfortune, wonders in his misery why his life should even continue. Later in Chapter 1 Hardy emphasizes Eustacia's sense of guilt, comparing her feelings to those of Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus to his enemies.

Chapter 2 establishes an accelerating momentum in Clym's relentless interrogations of Christian Cantle, Diggory Venn, and Johnny Nunsuch. When he discovers what he takes to be the truth, his wrath is tremendous. Hardy compares him to the Greek tragic hero Oedipus. In Chapter 1 Eustacia was right to quote the saying, "Beware the fury of a patient man." (The quote is drawn from John Dryden's political poem "Absalom and Achitophel," published in 1681.)

Book 5, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: Eustacia Dresses Herself on a Black Morning

The showdown between Clym and Eustacia unfolds with Clym in a towering rage. Clym moderates his violence to a degree by smashing a desk, but he does not strike his wife. With a touch of foreshadowing, Eustacia says bitterly, "I almost wish you would kill me." When Clym demands to know if the man with her in the house that day was Wildeve, she refuses to answer. However, Eustacia does tell her side of how the door was not opened for Mrs. Yeobright. The two argue over who will leave first to establish a separation. Eustacia flings on her shawl and angrily departs. In a darkly ironic situation at the end of the chapter, a servant arrives to announce that Thomasin and Wildeve's new baby girl has been named Eustacia Clementine. Clym decries the mockery in a name that "perpetuates" his unhappy marriage.

Chapter 4: The Ministrations of a Half-Forgotten One

Eustacia, at her wit's end, travels to her grandfather's house to find that he is away at Weatherbury and will not return home until evening. In a poignant scene, she renews her acquaintance with Charley, the teenage servant lad who had arranged for her to take his part in the mummers' play the previous Christmas. Eustacia notices the set of pistols belonging to her grandfather and considers them, then withdraws, seeking courage. When she returns, the weapons have been removed from their usual place on the wall, and she asks Charley about them. He has removed and hidden them, he admits, because he is concerned about Eustacia's state of mind. She argues with him briefly, asking "Why should I not die if I wish?" Eventually she regains some calm and assures him that the danger has passed. When her grandfather returns, Eustacia tell him she will want to stay at his house.

Analysis

In Chapter 3, Clym and Eustacia's lengthy, rhetorical speeches of accusation are full of exaggeration, distortion, and self-pity, as might be expected considering the situation. Still, it is notable that these words are consistent with the earlier hints that these two characters ought never to have married in the first place, since they are so ill matched. Clym's speech of reproach resembles a sermon, perhaps foreshadowing his eventual choice of the ministry as a profession at the end of the novel. Eustacia's speech, which she refuses to label a defense, whiningly castigates Clym for deceiving her and installing her in a "hut like this," keeping her "like the wife of a hind [deer]."

The nail in the coffin for this wretched debate is the news that Thomasin's daughter will be named Eustacia Clementine. Clym comments that the name amounts to a "mockery."

Chapter 4 provides further evidence of Eustacia's suicidal state of mind, moving from mere thoughts and oblique comments to overt discussion. Her distress is so evident that even the inexperienced youth Charley is able to see her intent as she gazes at the pistols. In a move that would not today be recommended regarding suicidal cases, Charley says he will not reveal her intentions, provided that she doesn't think of it again. As readers learn later, Charley's well-intentioned moves

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against her suicide prove insufficient.

Book 5, Chapters 5–6

Summary

Chapter 5: An Old Move Inadvertently Repeated

Once again, it is the Fifth of November, Guy Fawkes Day, exactly one year after the beginning of the story. Charley begins to build the bonfire at Captain Vye's house as had been done the two previous years. Eustacia musingly recalls her use of such a bonfire as a signal to Damon Wildeve.

Indeed, before long there is the sound of a stone splashing in a pond, indicating that once again Wildeve has come. Conversation between the two ex-lovers is uncertain and unsettled. Both seem to have lost their bearings. But Wildeve is wealthier now, thanks to his inheritance. He offers his help in whatever capacity she would take it. Eustacia says she may have him help her travel to Budmouth. He should look for a signal at 8 o'clock in the evenings to know when she is ready. From Budmouth, Eustacia can proceed onward to Paris. The two leave unresolved the issue of whether Wildeve will accompany Eustacia on her escape to Paris, the haven where she has always wished to travel.

Chapter 6: Thomasin Argues with Her Cousin, and He Writes a Letter

Separated from Eustacia, Clym has settled in at his deceased mother's house in Blooms-End. On the evening of November 5, thinking of Eustacia, he sets out to visit Thomasin. He finds her alone at home; coincidentally, Damon Wildeve is on his way to see Eustacia, having seen the bonfire innocently lit by Charley.

Clym confides to Thomasin what he has discovered regarding Mrs. Yeobright's attempted visit at the end of August—but he suppresses any mention of Wildeve's presence then. At Thomasin's urging, Clym agrees to write Eustacia a letter to forgive her and invite her back to him. Then he departs and writes the letter at home. He resolves to send it if she does not come back to him before the next evening.

When Wildeve returns home, Thomasin quizzes him on his whereabouts, somewhat to Wildeve's annoyance. Conflict rises between husband and wife, and Wildeve seems unduly defensive. The conversation ends on an indecisive note.

Analysis

Some critics have stressed Hardy's use of the classical unities of time, place, and action in *The Return of the Native.* Originally ascribed to the ancient Greek philosopher and literary critic Aristotle (384–22 BCE), these so-called rules applied to drama, not other literary forms. Shakespeare notably departed from them, and so did virtually every novelist in English. Hardy's original plot for *The Return of the Native* (comprising Books 1–5) spanned a year and a day. But this probably had more to do with replication of the Guy Fawkes bonfires than with any concern for perfection of form. Similarly, the fact that the entire story unfolds on Egdon Heath is more likely due to the heath's psychological and emotional prominence in the lives of the characters. It is unlikely that these choices show any obedience by Hardy to narrow protocols of fiction writing.

The dialogue between Eustacia and Wildeve in Chapter 5 is noteworthy for its discontinuity and digression. Eustacia's one clear goal is escape. Despite the lack of certainty, by the end of the chapter the reader is convinced that she will soon make a bid for freedom or release.

In his letter to Eustacia in Chapter 6, Clym again shows signs of self-righteousness that seem inappropriate. That is, inappropriate if his goal is to persuade Eustacia to return to him. Given Eustacia's traits of pride, self-pity, and melodramatic self-indulgence, this letter, with its emphasis on vows and mutual responsibility, is not likely to win her over. In any case, in the next chapter the letter is to be a casualty of one of Hardy's many strokes of chance and coincidence.

Book 5, Chapters 7–9

Summary

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Chapter 7: The Night of the Sixth of November

Restless on the eve of her escape, Eustacia walks on the heath that night in the vicinity of her grandfather's house and of Susan Nunsuch's cottage.

Eustacia sends Wildeve the prearranged signal summoning him so that he may drive her to Budmouth. In the meantime, Timothy Fairway arrives at Captain Vye's house. He hurriedly explains that he is late in delivering a letter from Clym Yeobright addressed to Eustacia. By chance, Captain Vye does not pass on the letter to his granddaughter. He finds the light out in Eustacia's room because she has lain down to rest before her strenuous journey to Budmouth. So he intends to give it to her in the morning.

Shortly before midnight, Eustacia leaves her grandfather's house and walks in the direction of Rainbarrow. Captain Vye hears her stirring and comes out to give her the letter. But she is already gone from the house, and her grandfather is troubled. The gloom of the night is intense. Eustacia intones a melancholy soliloquy, lamenting that destiny has dealt her an unjust, miserable fate. She rebels at the idea of going with Wildeve as his mistress and bemoans her lack of resources to escape on her own.

In the meantime, Susan Nunsuch is occupied with a superstitious ritual intended to counteract what she regards as Eustacia's witchcraft. She fashions a wax image of Eustacia and then impales it with pins as it melts away.

Chapter 8: Rain, Darkness, and Anxious Wanderers

As Clym Yeobright sits musing at Blooms-End, a storm picks up momentum outside on the heath. Thomasin arrives and agitatedly tells Clym that she fears her husband Damon Wildeve is about to desert her to elope with Eustacia Vye. Captain Vye appears soon after, looking for his granddaughter. He tells Clym abut Eustacia's suicidal thoughts, which he has just recently learned about from Charley.

Resolved to search her out, Captain Vye heads back to his home, and Clym goes toward the Quiet Woman Inn. Thomasin is left at Blooms-End with the baby, but soon she cannot take the waiting and goes back toward her home. She meets Diggory along the way, who has heard another woman passing by his van. In ever-mounting suspense, the search parties head for the Quiet Woman Inn.

Chapter 9: Sights and Sounds Draw the Wanderers Together

Damon Wildeve, having seen Eustacia's signal, has finally made up his mind. He will escape with his ex-lover, abandoning Thomasin and their newborn child, but leaving his wife half of his newly gained inheritance. His heart, says Hardy, beats fast "in the face of a mutual wish that they [he and Eustacia] should throw in their lot together." During the rising storm on the heath, he awaits Eustacia's arrival near the inn.

To Wildeve's chagrin, it is Clym who arrives, not Eustacia. Before the two men can exchange any conversation, Clym hears the sound of a body falling into the water of the nearby stream, close to the Shadwater Weir (a small dam where the water is extremely turbulent). He fears that it is Eustacia and angrily reproaches Wildeve.

Clym's suspicions are quickly proven correct. Exclaiming in "an agonized voice," Wildeve leaps into the water, followed shortly by Clym. Diggory and Thomasin soon arrive. Diggory sends Thomasin back to safety with the baby, then manages to accomplish a partial rescue in the water. Finally, Eustacia's body is recovered. Clym is alive, just barely—the only survivor of the tragedy. After Clym recovers, he bitterly blames himself for the deaths of both his mother and his wife.

Analysis

The fate of Clym's letter to Eustacia—which she never receives—echoes one important detail in Book 4, Chapter 6. In Book 5 Eustacia never reads the letter because she is asleep. Likewise, in Book 4 Clym is asleep when Mrs. Yeobright attempts to visit him and knocks at the closed door.

Eustacia's soliloquy in Chapter 7 is so riddled with melodramatic excess that it is hard to believe that Hardy fashioned it as it is shown. Yet Eustacia's over-the-top accusations, it must be admitted, are in character. When Hardy introduced her in Book 1, he called her "the raw material of a divinity." Now she laments that destiny has not paired her with

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a Saul or a Napoleon Bonaparte. Heaven, she moans, has crushed her, although she has "done no harm to Heaven at all." Elsewhere, however, Hardy concedes that those who stood by "would have pitied her." Yet another foreshadowing of Eustacia's fate occurs in the first paragraph of Chapter 7: "She had used to think of the heath alone as an uncongenial spot to be in; she felt it now of the whole world."

At the conclusion of Chapter 7 the episode portraying Susan Nunsuch in a superstitious ritual is acutely timed and dramatically recounted. Hardy has prepared the reader for this bit of melodrama. The fact that it virtually coincides with Eustacia's actual death adds to its power.

During Chapter 8 the storm's force mounts on the heath. Here, Hardy's use of setting furnishes a classic example of the *pathetic fallacy*, a literary convention in which the forces of nature are made to correspond with the emotional situation of the human characters in a narrative.

The *dénouement* (resolution) of the plot in Chapter 9 has been fully prepared for. It seems fitting that Clym and Wildeve should both plunge into the torrent to try to save Eustacia. Hardy's detailed narrative specifies that Wildeve had tightly wrapped his arms around Clym's legs in an attempt to rise to the surface—leaving the reader to wonder whether he was desperate to survive or perhaps eager to drag Clym down with him.

In the final Biblical allusion of Book 5, Clym is said to look "like Lazarus coming from the tomb," referring to a man brought back from death (see Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John). Clym's hopelessness, guilt, and despair, however, do not accord with the miraculous aura of the Gospel account of victory over death. Rather, he wishes that it had been himself who died.

Book 6, Chapters 1–2

Summary

Chapter 1: The Inevitable Movement Onward

This epilogue to the novel extends some 18 months beyond the events of Book 5. Thomasin, now a widow, has decided to live at Blooms-End with Clym, who remains in deep mourning for Eustacia. On a summer day Diggory Venn comes to call, and Thomasin is surprised by his changed appearance. He has given up dealing in reddle and bought his father's dairy farm. Diggory has been helping to organize the erection of a Maypole at Blooms-End. Thomasin says she has no objection to the local celebration of Maypole Day. The next day Clym does not take part in the festivities, while Thomasin dresses herself merrily but does not participate in the dancing. That evening Diggory searches for—and finds—Thomasin's glove, which was worn by one of the servant maids at the festivities.

Chapter 2: Thomasin Walks in a Green Place by the Roman Road

In a conversation with her servant Rachel, Thomasin discovers that the glove Diggory found was her own. Rachel had borrowed her gloves. Diggory secured the glove at the Maypole festivities because he continues to be romantically attracted to Thomasin. A few days later Diggory and Thomasin meet on the road and discuss their changed circumstances. Their talk is "of a not unpleasing kind," and they begin a series of regular meetings at the same place.

Analysis

In the 1912 edition of the novel, Hardy admits in a note that the epilogue was not part of the original plan for the novel's plot: Diggory and Thomasin's wedding was added later. Most critics have concluded that Hardy wrote Book 6 as a favor to his publishers. They were alarmed at the gloomy conclusion of the novel as it originally appeared—an alarm that may well have been justified, based on the negative reaction to the similarly catastrophic ending of Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy rather jauntily invites readers to choose between the two endings to see which they will like better. He adds ambiguously, however, that "those with a more austere artistic code can assume the more consistent conclusion to be the true one."

The Maypole celebrations are the final example of local festivities in the book, which include the Guy Fawkes bonfires (in Books 1 and 5) and the mummers' playacting (in Book 2). This, too, was likely a gift from Hardy to his publishers and

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readers, as his pictures of idyllic scenes and country customs were popular.

It is understandable that readers and publishers would expect a conclusion to the reddleman's tale. Diggory Venn's attention to Thomasin has been amply prepared for. Throughout the book he has been solicitous for her welfare, and his fairness and quiet courage have inspired the reader's admiration. Now it remains to be seen what Clym will think of a possible match.

Book 6, Chapters 3–4

Summary

Chapter 3: The Serious Discourse of Clym and His Cousin

Clym ponders with typical earnestness what his duty to Thomasin and her young child might be. He recalls that his mother favored a marriage between himself and Thomasin, yet he feels he is now only a shell of a man after Eustacia's death. An additional, complicating factor is his serious interest in training for a new career. Clym intends to become an itinerant preacher focused on the "eleventh commandment"—an allusion to Christ's exhortation to his followers to love one another.

In an unexpected irony of situation, however, Thomasin raises the subject of marriage before Clym does, saying she has now decided to marry Diggory. At first Clym reminds her of his mother's objection to the match, but after some thought Clym withdraws any objections. Soon after that a day is set for a wedding.

Chapter 4: Cheerfulness Again Asserts Itself at Blooms-End, and Clym Finds His Vocation

The day of Diggory and Thomasin's wedding is the occasion for a merry gathering of the heath people, who stuff a mattress with feathers as a gift to the bridal couple.

Clym presents young Charley with a bittersweet memento of Eustacia: a lock of her hair. Then, on the Sunday after the wedding, he delivers a sermon on Rainbarrow to local men and women of the heath.

Analysis

Readers who admirer Thomasin must be grateful that Clym finally exhibits some good sense on the issue of her marriage. In particular, he agrees with Thomasin that Mrs. Yeobright objected to Diggory primarily because he was a reddleman, which he no longer is.

In the novel's final chapter, Hardy includes two significant echoes of the early scenes in Book 1. Perhaps his intent is to lend a pleasing sort of unity for the whole narrative. The first is a wedding song for the newly married couple. The second is the delivery of Clym's first discourse on Rainbarrow, the location where we were first introduced to Eustacia. Hardy is noncommittal on how effective Clym's preaching was, saying only that "some people believed him, and some believed not." But he does affirm that the story of Clym's life, which had become "generally known," afforded him a kind reception.

“ Quotes

> *"As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities."*

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 1

Hardy's description of Egdon Heath in the novel's opening chapter is justly celebrated for its evocation of a solemn, almost hostile atmosphere. His chapter title, referring to the heath, is "A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression." The heath is the setting for the entire novel, and some critics are so impressed by its ubiquity that they have elevated it to the status of a character.

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"Instead of turning in the direction of home he pressed on rapidly by a path under Rainbarrow towards what was evidently a signal light."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 5

The character spoken of here is Damon Wildeve, the glib and charming lady-killer whose affections vacillate between Thomasin Yeobright and Eustacia Vye. Unreliable and hypocritical, Damon hastens in this passage to respond to a fire lit by Eustacia as a signal for a meeting. A number of similar scenes recur through the novel.

"Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 7

This chapter-opening sentence inaugurates Hardy's lengthy description of Eustacia Vye, the novel's heroine. A bewitching mixture of beauty, ego, vulnerability, indecision, pride, and ambition, Eustacia is the driving force of the novel's plot.

"To be loved to madness—such was her great desire."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 7

Eustacia may fairly be described as a narcissist. She is considerably better educated than the heath people, but she cherishes notably immature notions about love and marriage. She is also a person of low self-esteem, despite her occasional fits of arrogance and pride.

"[G]ood-nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the frame-work of his character."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 9

Here Hardy comments on the character of Diggory Venn, the reddleman. This kindly, gentle, and practical man is marginalized by many characters in the book. His appearance—caused by his trade of dealing with red ochre, a substance used by shepherds—seems bizarre. Yet Diggory is honest, upright, and honorable.

"It was as if the night sang dirges with clenched teeth."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 9

This brief sentence with its striking, ominous use of personification exemplifies Hardy's ability to create evocative settings through figurative language. The passage occurs during a tense discussion between Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve.

"Often a drop of irony into an indifferent situation renders the whole piquant."

— Narrator, Book 1, Chapter 10

No one knew the power of irony better than Hardy, and *The Return of the Native* features the device on a number of levels, ranging from the piquant to the tragic. In Hardy's fiction, irony often results from chance, coincidence, or misunderstanding.

""And then," said Diggory sadly, "I came away, for her history as Tamsin Yeobright was over.""

— Diggory Venn, Book 2, Chapter 8

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Diggory's plainspoken matter-of-factness here in telling Mrs. Yeobright his account of Thomasin's wedding disguises intense sorrow and disappointment, for he had wanted to marry Thomasin and had been rejected by her, with the approval of her aunt, since Mrs. Yeobright had regarded Diggory as socially undesirable.

""What curious creatures these dice be—powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command!""

— Christian Cantle, Book 3, Chapter 7

Christian Cantle's simple comment at the gambling match with Wildeve conveys more than Christian knows. His sentiment resonates with Hardy's view of human life being at the mercy of chance and coincidence. Meanwhile humans preserve the illusion that they are in control of their own destiny.

""I have seen your mother; and I will never see her again!""

— Eustacia Vye, Book 4, Chapter 2

This outburst by Eustacia Vye to Clym Yeobright encapsulates the young woman's anger and frustration. It follows a violent argument between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright. In context, the exclamation proves dramatically ironic. Although she does not know it, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright will never, in fact, meet again.

"To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further."

— Narrator, Book 4, Chapter 3

The passage occurs as Eustacia discusses whether to attend the gypsying dance at East Egdon without her husband. In the phrase "the satire of Heaven," Hardy hints at the outlook that human life unfolds in a hostile universe. In the words "death appeared the only door of relief," he foreshadows Eustacia's suicide.

""If you had never returned to your native place, Clym, what a blessing it would have been for you! ... It has altered the destinies of —""

— Eustacia Vye, Book 4, Chapter 4

To this statement of Eustacia's, Clym replies, "Three people," at which Eustacia thinks, "Five." Clym's "three people" are himself, herself, and his mother. However, Eustacia also includes Thomasin Yeobright, Clym's cousin, and her husband, the wayward Damon Wildeve, who used to be Eustacia's lover and seems to want to regain that position.

""Tell her you have seen a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son.""

— Mrs. Yeobright, Book 4, Chapter 6

Mrs. Yeobright's desperate words to the boy Johnny Nunsuch as she struggles to return over the heath have their roots in a tragic misunderstanding. When she was at Clym's cottage, no one opened the door for her because Eustacia was afraid (Damon Wildeve was in the house) and (2) Clym was asleep. Mrs. Yeobright drew the conclusion that her son was spurning her. Her words here will also have momentous implications further on in the story, since Johnny Nunsuch repeats them to Clym when he interrogates the boy.

"Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of

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her mind and the chaos of the world without."

— Narrator, Book 5, Chapter 7

Eustacia is on the verge of suicide. Hardy sets the event on a violently stormy night, using the *pathetic fallacy*, a device in which the face of nature mirrors the emotions within the human characters. In context the word *harmony* demonstrates an intense case of verbal irony. Eustacia's mind seethes with conflict and despair, while nature itself is the scene of a violent storm.

""They are not desperate. They are only hopeless; and my great regret as that for what I have done no man or law can punish me!""

— Clym Yeobright, Book 5, Chapter 9

Clym says this in response to Diggory Venn's question, "Why should you say such desperate things?"

At the novel's original ending (the culmination of Book 5), Clym seems overwhelmed by guilt. Brushing aside Diggory Venn's words of consolation, Clym regards the death of his mother and the suicide of Eustacia as his own fault.

Symbols

Egdon Heath

The heath plays such a central role in the novel that some critics have called it a character. Virtually all the events in the narrative unfold there between 1840 and 1850. In the famous description in Book 1, Chapter 1 Hardy describes it as enduring and virtually immemorial. It is a face "on which time makes but little impression." For virtually all the major characters, the heath evokes strong emotions. Eustacia regards it as a prison, while Clym, Diggory Venn, and Thomasin seem comfortable with their surroundings. The heath is, in sum, a symbol of the unchanging natural world—more powerful than any human presence.

The heath is also important as the native ground for the book's "heath people"—the relatively minor characters whose gossip, folkways, and superstitions give Hardy's novel much of its local color. Thus, the Guy Fawkes bonfires, the mummers' playacting, and the Maypole festivities are closely related to the local context, as are such superstitious prejudices as Susan Nunsuch's suspicions of Eustacia as a witch.

The character most closely associated with the heath and its ways is Diggory Venn, the reddleman. Intriguingly, he is able to transcend this relationship in the end, surrendering his soon-to-be outmoded occupation to become a dairy farmer.

Paris

Like Egdon Heath, Paris is a symbolic place that evokes a wide range of responses from various characters. For Eustacia, it is a lodestar: a magnetic center of elegance and luxury. Her grandfather, Captain Vye, regards Paris as a "rookery of pomp and vanity." Clym, who knows the city better than any of the other characters, is more than ready to relinquish it as materialistic and vainglorious. His mother, Mrs. Yeobright, however, takes pride in Clym's material success there.

The events in *The Return of the Native* are set in 1842–43, at which time Paris was an elegant, cosmopolitan European capital. France was then ruled by Louis-Philippe, whose semi-constitutional monarchy was supported by the wealthy business class and granted limited rights to democratic groups and interests.

Yet London, in the 1840s, was almost half again as much the size of Paris, and a city considerably more prominent on the world stage, despite the loss of Britain's American colonies some two generations beforehand. An intriguing aspect of Paris as a symbol in *The Return of the Native* is what is not said about it. Beyond the generalities of fashion, glamor, and wealth, virtually no one offers any specifics about the enticements of

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life that would make Paris desirable: food, for example, or art, music, theater, literature, drama, climate, or architecture. One almost has the impression that Paris exists as a byword rather than as a real location. Such a hollow symbolism may be precisely what Hardy intended.

Rainbarrow

Rainbarrow is a prominent mound on Egdon Heath, associated with a number of the novel's characters and important events. It is, for example, the location of the November 5 bonfires and Eustacia Vye's first appearance in the novel. Symmetrically, it is the venue at the end of the novel for Clym Yeobright's inaugural discourse as an itinerant preacher. At the mid-point of the novel, it is at Rainbarrow that Clym and Eustacia meet to observe a total eclipse of the moon and to pledge to be married to each other.

On one level, Rainbarrow symbolizes the ancient landscape of the heath itself. As Hardy says in Book 1, Chapter 3 it "commands the horizon" for a great distance around. On another level, Rainbarrow serves as a meeting place and as a signal point. Thus, it occupies a central position in the lives of the heath people as well as in the more personal destiny of such characters as Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve.

Themes

Inescapable Destiny

Destiny, or fate, is a leading theme in most of Thomas Hardy's fiction. From the very beginning of the novel, the description of Egdon Heath as an enduring, immemorial setting suggests that Hardy views the human characters as playing their parts against an indifferent, perhaps even hostile, backdrop. At one despairing moment, Eustacia thinks of death as a release if the "satire of Heaven" should continue much longer. Just before she commits suicide, she loudly laments her lot, ranting against the bitterness and injustice of her fate, despite the fact that she has never harmed Heaven.

Other characters besides Eustacia are ill-used by fate. Thomasin, for example, is deceived and eventually deserted by the insidious Damon Wildeve. Clym Yeobright is thwarted, both professionally and personally, by many obstacles not of his own making. Mrs. Yeobright is fearsomely judgmental, but also fearsomely unlucky, a victim of an ominous web of circumstances that lead to despair and death.

Hardy's view of destiny is combined with a certain element of poetic justice. For example, Eustacia's overweening ambition and ego recoil on her in ways that suggest Greek tragedy. Yet more important, in Hardy's worldview, is the weight of chance and coincidence in human affairs—that unpredictable conjunction of circumstances which, in the later novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* he would dub, in a memorable phrase, "the persistence of the unforeseen."

Marriage as a Trap

Hardy's pessimism about individual human destiny extended to social institutions as well, and no aspect of his novels was more controversial in his time than his views of marriage. Most Victorians regarded marriage as a sacred compact, blessed by the church and revered by every respectable quarter of society. In his fiction, however, Hardy drew steadily away from this idealization of marriage, going so far as to include extra-marital sex and rape in his plots. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge,* the protagonist Michael Henchard, acting in a drunken rage, sells his wife and daughter to the highest bidder in the first chapter. The view of marriage in Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, is even more negative.

In *The Return of the Native*, marriage is portrayed at the mercy of a cluster of materialistic and psychological forces that threaten to nullify it as a healthy or even legitimate human relationship. Social snobbery underlies Mrs. Yeobright's opposition to a marriage between her niece Thomasin and the reddleman Diggory Venn. The reddleman, in her eyes, is a social inferior whose bizarre appearance definitively excludes him from a marital alliance or relationship. Mrs. Yeobright exerts a slightly different form of this sort of prejudice against Eustacia as a potential wife for Clym, judging her to spring from questionable origins and to be inferior as a person of very

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limited means.

But the institution of marriage, as Hardy portrays it, is also buffeted by other powerful forces. There is, for example, egotistic competition. Wildeve and Eustacia are the chief contenders here, each measuring the attractiveness and potential of a mate by how alluring he or she may be to other contenders.

And finally, money and ambition are seen, through Hardy's lens, to distort what should ideally be a solemn compact of love and devotion. Eustacia's fascination with Clym is repeatedly portrayed as grounded on the glamor and luxury she expects him to provide her with in Paris. Wildeve's unexpected inheritance in the latter part of the narrative provides a strong incentive for Eustacia's renewed interest in his attentions. Marriage for Hardy, in short, is more of a trap and a delusion than a sacred state or hallowed relationship.

Heath Folkways as Part of the Setting

Throughout *The Return of the Native*, the folkways of the Egdon Heath people enrich the novel with colorful characterization, traditional celebrations, and vivid dialect. These sections of the story are more than digressions. They function as comic relief, picturesque background, and a reassuring center of gravity in a story that often verges on the desperate. Although the heath people have limited education and little sophistication, they are sometimes shown to advantage in comparison with their supposed "superiors" in the social order.

Hardy depicts the ways in which the heath celebrations accord with the cycle of seasons, linking the lives of the locals and the deep-seated rhythms of nature. The emblem of fall, for example, is the bonfires for the Fifth of November, the anniversary of Guy Fawkes' plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605. Hardy specifically notes that the November bonfires are closely related to ancient Druidical and Saxon ceremonies intended to mark the cycle of the seasons. Similar comments could be made about the mummers' Christmas plays (Book 2) and the springtime Maypole festivities (Book 6).

The portrayal of the heath folkways affords Hardy the opportunity to introduce a number of minor but generally attractive characters, including the eccentric Grandfer Cantle and his simple son Christian, the prickly and superstitious Susan Nunsuch and her boy Johnny, the loyal and helpful furze-cutter Humphrey, and the pompous Timothy Fairway. This gallery of personalities, juxtaposed with the novel's major characters, results in a more richly textured narrative. Perhaps the most poignant characterization of all is that of the boy Johnny Nunsuch, who has a major part to play in Books 4 and 5.

Social Status as a Motivator

For the vast majority of people, life in Victorian England depended on social status. Until the middle of the 19th century, only a small majority of male citizens (and no females) were eligible to vote. Class distinctions were rigid. The Industrial Revolution did not bring economic equality to Britain; on the contrary, it severely reinforced inequality. Many Victorian novels, prominently those of Charles Dickens, protested these conditions and impugned the character of Victorian institutions, including schools, courts of law, and organizations for social relief.

In *The Return of the Native* few characters openly question the social hierarchy on the heath. At the same time it is left somewhat unclear how the upper echelon has gained its position. For example, Eustacia Vye regards herself as superior. Yet her grandfather seems an ordinary sea-captain and her parents foreign drifters without much pretension to gentility. Mrs. Yeobright is in the same position: the daughter of a curate (rather than a rector or higher-ranking churchman), she has laid claim to a high social status in the community without really any credentials for it. The material achievements of her son Clym support her claim—until he sets about disowning those achievements.

Despite all these ambiguities, however, there is no question that social status plays an important thematic role in the story.

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Chance Reigns

Thomas Hardy is famous for the role that chance and coincidence play in his fictional plots. The prominence of the fortuitous is not the result of amateurish plotting, however. It is a very real outgrowth of Hardy's philosophical belief that much of human life is unpredictable and subject to hazard. In one of his most famous early poems, "Hap," Hardy singled out "purblind doomsters" and "dicing time" as the masters of human destiny. (In the poem, "hap" is a synonym for "chance.") In *The Return of the Native*, this outlook gives the gambling match between Damon Wildeve and Christian Cantle toward the end of Book 3 a special force.

In his foregrounding of chance and coincidence as significant determinants of destiny, Hardy implicitly positioned himself as opposed to conventional, religious views of his time, whereby destiny was governed by a more or less benevolent divine Providence. At the same time, from a 21st-century perspective, Hardy's view seems prophetic, since so many modernist and contemporary artists and writers have highlighted the role of chance in human affairs.

Classical Allusions

Throughout *The Return of the Native*, Hardy employs allusions to Greek and Roman mythology and history. Hardy would have assumed that most of his readers were the beneficiaries of a classical education and would have recognized the references. The allusions, presumably, added elegance and polish to the writing.

Aeneas|son of the goddess Venus and hero of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, who rescues his father and son from the city of Troy when it is destroyed by the invading Greeks

Artemis|Greek goddess of hunting and the moon

Athena|Greek goddess of wisdom and patron of the city of Athens

Atlas|demigod of Greek mythology said to support the world on his shoulders

Candaules|king of Lydia, who rashly invited the courtier Gyges to see his beautiful wife naked, whereupon Candaules's wife persuaded Gyges to assassinate the king and usurp the throne

Carpe diem|a maxim drawn from the odes of the Roman lyric poet Horace (65–8 BCE) meaning "Seize the day"

Chaldeans|residents of ancient Mesopotamia who practiced Babylonian astronomy and astrology

Echo|nymph in Greek mythology who fell in love with the handsome Narcissus, who spurned her until she wasted away and only her voice remained

Etna|volcano in eastern Sicily

Hades|in classical mythology, the underworld abode of the souls of the dead

Hera|Greek goddess of marriage and wife of Zeus

Maenades|female devotees of the Greek god Dionysus

Oedipus|ancient Greek tragic hero who unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother

Olympus|mountain that was the dwelling place of the gods in Greek mythology

Phaeacia|in Homer's *Odyssey*, a blessed region visited by Odysseus on his return home from the Trojan War to Ithaca

Pheidias|ancient Athenian sculptor, painter, and architect (c. 480–30 BCE)

Philip|also known as Philip II (382–36 BCE), general and king of Macedonia, north of Greece, and father of Alexander the Great (352–23 BCE)

Prometheus|in ancient Greek mythology, the deity who risked the other gods' displeasure by helping humankind, particularly with the gift of fire

Sappho|ancient Greek lyric poetess from the island of Lesbos who lived in the 6th century BCE

Scylla and Charybdis|in Greek mythology, two female monsters that posed perils to mariners on each side of the Strait of Messina between Italy and Sicily

Socrates|ancient Athenian philosopher (c. 469–399 BCE) famous for his rigorous pursuit of truth and ethical responsibility

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Tantalus|a son of Zeus who disobeyed the gods by revealing their secrets and was punished in the underworld by perpetual hunger and thirst

Tartarus|a deep gulf or abyss in Greek mythology that is used as a place of torment for the wicked

Tempe|valley sacred to the god Apollo in the Greek region of Thessaly

Ulysses|the Greek Odysseus, hero of the Trojan War, and famous for his long wanderings in his effort to return home after that conflict, recounted in Homer's epic *Odyssey*

Zenobia|queen of the prosperous city of Palmyra in Syria, 267–72 CE

Zeus|in Greek mythology, king of the gods

Suggested Reading

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