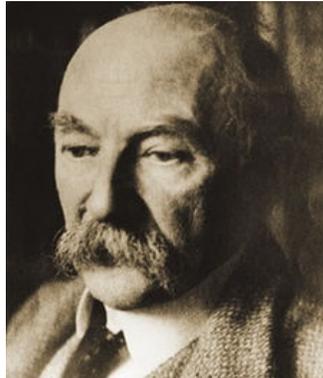


THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

by Thomas Hardy



THE AUTHOR

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born in southwestern England to parents who passed on to him a great love for art, music, and literature. He was given little formal education, but taught himself French, German, and Latin. He was later apprenticed to an architect, for whom he went to work in London from 1862-1867. While in London, he began to write poetry - his first literary venture.

After leaving London, he took a job in Dorchester (the model for his fictional Casterbridge) as a church restorer, and continued his writing career, publishing anonymously at first, but then affixing his own name to his novels as they gained public acceptance. He always considered himself primarily a poet, and only wrote novels to support himself financially. Like Charles Dickens, many of his novels were published in serial form in magazines. His first novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was published in 1872, followed by *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The success of the second allowed him to marry and pursue writing full-time, but the public found his later works too shocking for their tastes, and the criticism of his last two novels was so great that he gave up novel-writing and turned his attention to poetry, ultimately writing more than 800 poems prior to his death in 1928. He is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Hardy lived in an age of transition between the Victorian Age and the modern world of the twentieth century. His novels, though written in the serial format typical of the Victorian era, also reflect the changes in thought and social conditions occurring during his lifetime. He was raised in a Christian home, even writing strongly evangelical sermons at the age of eighteen and seriously considering a life in the ministry, but reading Charles Darwin led him to reject Christianity, and his fascination with the German philosopher Schopenhauer led him to postulate the cause of all things as an impersonal Unconscious Will, though he often longed for the security that was lost forever when he jettisoned his old belief system (see especially his poem *The Oxen*).

The Return of the Native, like his others novels, was written against the backdrop of the changing world in which he lived. He wrote the book only a few years after his return to his

Dorcestershire home, so that the experience of Clym Yeobright in some small way mirrors his own. Like many Victorian novels, it is full of classical and biblical allusions, reflective of Hardy's upbringing and education, but, unlike other novels of the period, promotes moral relativism, favors paganism over Christianity, and contains ambiguous and hard to define characters, including the omnipresent Egdon Heath. Even the ending is ambiguous; Hardy originally intended to end the book with the double drowning, but was pressured to add Book Sixth, with its happy ending in the marriage of Diggory and Thomasin and the fulfilling career of Clym, by his readers and his publisher.

PLOT SUMMARY

BOOK FIRST – “The Three Women”

The novel begins with a description of somber but imposing Egdon Heath at twilight. It is pictured as the natural realm of the ascetic or the Ishmaelite, best experienced in storm and tempest. The heath is unchanged from prehistoric times, the implacable enemy of civilization and modernity. Across the heath stretches a country road, and on that road walks an old man, a former naval officer requiring a cane to keep him upright. Despite his slow pace, he soon catches up with a reddleman and his horse-drawn cart, his skin and clothing permeated by the red dye he sells for a living. He is a handsome young man despite the pervasive tint of his person. As the two men walk together they converse very little, though the reddleman repeatedly pauses to look through the window of his cart. When the old man asks about his strange behavior, the reddleman admits that he has a pretty young woman in his cart who caught a ride with him from Anglebury. When he pauses to rest his horses, the old man continues without him. As he takes his rest, he sees in the distance a woman standing on a barrow atop the highest hill in the region. When a crowd of men and boys arrives, the woman quietly descends the other side of the barrow.

The men then build a huge pyramid of furze on top of the barrow, known locally as Rainbarrow, and set it afire; soon some thirty similar bonfires appear on other summits nearby. To the observer the scene appeared like one from Dante's Limbo, but it more resembled the fires of the funeral pyres of ancient Britons or even those celebrating the ancient pagan gods of the Saxons. In fact, they were part of the annual celebration of Guy Fawkes Day. The men on the barrow soon begin discussing a wedding that had occurred the same morning between Damon Wildeve, a local publican, and Thomasin (Tamsin) Yeobright; the bride was the cousin of Clym Yeobright, who is coming home from abroad to see to his mother's welfare now that she will be living alone. Mrs. Yeobright had in fact originally opposed the marriage, but once she changed her mind the two decided to wed out of town. As the group continues to discuss marriage in general, they opine that no man exists who will not be taken by some woman, but soon Christian Cantle speaks up, insisting that, at the age of thirty-one, every woman he has ever asked has rejected his offer of marriage, calling him effeminate. They then propose going down to the Quiet Woman, Wildeve's pub, to serenade the newlyweds. As the fires burn down, one remains brightly glowing – that of Eustacia Vye, the granddaughter of Captain Vye, who lives with her grandfather and is considered rather strange by the locals. As the celebrants dance, the reddleman comes up behind them and asks the way to Mrs. Yeobright's house. After he leaves, the widow herself appears on her way to welcome her niece and her new husband back from their wedding.

Mrs. Yeobright then descends from the barrow, bemoaning the marriage of her niece Thomasin to Mr. Wildeve. She soon meets the reddleman, whose name is Diggory Venn. He tells her that the woman in his cart is in fact Thomasin, who earlier had run toward him on the road and fainted, apparently never having married her intended. When Mrs. Yeobright looks into the van, Thomasin wakes up, thanks Diggory, and decides to walk the rest of the way home. She explains to her aunt that the parson refused to marry them because of some technicality in the license and that they plan to be married in a few days, and Mrs. Yeobright, despite her objections to the marriage, agrees that no other course is possible. They stop at the Quiet Woman (the sign hanging over the entrance shows a stout woman carrying her head under her arm), because Mrs. Yeobright wants to make sure that the young man intends to make good his promises to her niece. She speaks very harshly to him, though he assures both her and Thomasin that he intends to keep his word and go through with the marriage. Just then the townsfolk arrive to serenade them on their supposed wedding night. Wildeve intercepts them as they flood into his tavern and offers them drinks in the hope of getting rid of them quickly, but by the time they leave, the women have escaped through the rear window. He then locks up the tavern and heads for the distant signal fire still burning outside the cottage of Captain Vye.

As all becomes dark and quiet, the female form observed earlier by the reddleman emerges once more upon the barrow. She listens to the sounds of the night and sighs deeply, then opens a telescope and peers at the window of the inn far below. She uses a live coal to check an hourglass, which has run out, and proceeds toward the signal fire below. There she finds a young boy tending the fire; he identifies her as Eustacia Vye, Captain Vye's granddaughter. The captain was the old man who encountered Diggory Venn at the beginning of the story, and he soon emerges from his cottage to greet Eustacia after her walk to the top of the barrow. He scolds her for using his best thorn roots to keep up the fire, but she sends him off to bed in a way that shows that she is really in charge of the domicile. She then continues her walk, and when she hears a prearranged signal of stones splashing in the pond, she pays the child and sends him home. Soon Damon Wildeve arrives. A year before the two had become lovers, and when Eustacia heard that he had not married Thomasin, she prepared the signal fire in the hope of continuing their affair. They profess their love for one another, though Damon gives no assurance that he will forgo his marriage to Thomasin. After a few minutes they part and Eustacia goes up to bed.

Hardy now gives a description of Eustacia Vye, who is a dark beauty. She grew up in the seaside town of Budmouth, the child of a Greek father and an English mother. The father was a musician who made a decent living, but who died in a drunken stupor after the death of his wife. Eustacia was then brought by her grandfather to Egdon Heath, where she felt like a stranger. She lived in isolation and became the lonely queen of the vast and lonely hills. She by the time of the story has become a hopeless romantic, wanting nothing more than to be loved passionately, and is a confirmed rebel and non-conformist in every aspect of life. Her love for Damon Wildeve is simply a reflection of the fact that no one better is available, and she knows it, longing for the arrival of a really suitable man. While she speaks to Wildeve, the boy who tended the fire, frightened by the sight of Diggory Venn on the heath, returns, sees the two of them together, and overhears their conversation. On the way home he meets the reddleman, and while they talk he reveals to Diggory what he has seen and heard.

Diggory Venn, the reddleman, still cherishes a letter that he had received two years earlier from Thomasin Yeobright. He had proposed marriage and she had gently rejected him because she had no feelings of love for him and thought him beneath her station. From that time, he had

given up dairy farming and taken on the solitary life of the purveyor of redde. Given this history, Diggory's opportunity to be of service to his beloved is a source of great joy to him. His love for Thomasin is so unselfish that he is determined to help her achieve her desired life with Wildeve despite the fact that he knows the man to be a scoundrel. Convinced that Eustacia is partly responsible for Thomasin's grief, he determines to watch the top of Rainbarrow every night to observe her tryst with Wildeve. After week of watching he is finally rewarded with a glimpse of the lovers. He tries to eavesdrop, but is unable to hear their conversation, so he conceals himself beneath some turves and creeps closer. Eustacia and Damon are having an argument. He is asking her advice about marrying Thomasin, and she calls him cruel for even bringing the subject up. They profess their love for one another, but he insists that Thomasin is in a worse position than she is, so he should marry her. Both then admit that they hate the heath, and Damon asks Eustacia to run away with him to America. She says she must think about it, then they wander off together out of Diggory's hearing.

The reddleman is now convinced that he must have a talk with Eustacia on behalf of his beloved Thomasin. The next morning he goes to her cottage and begs her help in convincing Wildeve to marry Thomasin. He tells her that he overheard their conversation and knows that she is the woman who has come between Thomasin and her love. She scorns his plea, after which he offers to help her escape the heath by putting her in touch with an elderly woman in Budmouth who needs a companion. As much as she loves Budmouth and hates Egdon, however, she is unwilling to sacrifice her independence and walks haughtily away from the faithful reddleman.

After leaving Eustacia's home, Diggory makes one more attempt. He meets Mrs. Yeobright on the road; she is obviously on her way to the Quiet Woman to discover Wildeve's intentions regarding Thomasin. Diggory tells her of his meeting with Eustacia and warns that she is undertaking a hopeless task, then proposes an alternative: he would be happy to marry Thomasin, and would treat her far better than the tavern-keeper was doing. She thanks him for his kindness, but insists that without Thomasin's approval, no such match is possible. However, she immediately goes to Wildeve and uses Diggory's proposal as a weapon against him, demanding that he promptly marry Thomasin or else agree to give her up entirely. He doesn't seem greatly troubled by the thought of giving Thomasin up, but this abrupt demand catches him by surprise; he promises to give her an answer in a day or two. He then rushes to Eustacia and again begs her to run away with him to America. Sensing that something has changed, she questions him further and discovers that Thomasin is on the verge of rejecting him. She balks at the idea of taking a lover on the rebound, realizing that she only made advances to him because he belonged to someone else. Now, she no longer wants him, but promises to give him an answer at Rainbarrow on the following Monday. After Wildeve leaves, Captain Vye returns and tells Eustacia that Clym Yeobright, Mrs. Yeobright's cousin, is coming home from Paris for Christmas and will arrive the following week.

BOOK SECOND – “The Arrival”

As Christmas approaches, the men of Egdon Heath gossip about the impending arrival of Clym Yeobright. They think he is a fool to have left home rather than taking up his father's business, and conclude that his decision to work for a diamond merchant in Paris shows that he is overeducated, if nothing worse. They further speculate that he would make a nice match for Eustacia, who also has more education than is good for her. Eustacia overhears their conversation

and begins to be interested in the new visitor; after all, he has lived in *Paris*. She spends the rest of the day daydreaming about Clym Yeobright, and at dusk takes her accustomed walk in the direction of the Yeobright residence at Blooms-End.

All is astir in the Yeobright residence in preparation for Clym's arrival. Even Thomasin is setting aside her grief long enough to make ready for the festivities. Her aunt alternates between reminding her of the shame she has brought on the family through the abortive wedding journey with Damon Wildeve and suggesting that her life could have been much happier had she married her cousin instead. Thomasin rejects the notion that she is a fallen woman, insisting that she has done nothing wrong, but fears the censure of her friends and neighbors nonetheless. The two women agree to keep the shame of her almost-marriage a secret from Clym. They soon return home with the apples and holly boughs they have gathered, then set off to meet the young man himself. On the way home with Clym they pass Eustacia, and Clym gives her a polite greeting. His two words are sufficient; Eustacia is overwhelmed, with her imagination supplying the rest. That night she dreams of Clym, and on the succeeding days walks the heath hoping to run into him, but without success.

By December 23, Eustacia still has not met Clym, and she fears he will return to Paris before she gets to do so. Her mind then leaps ahead: should she cultivate a relationship with the Yeobrights in view of his next visit? As she broods, mummers gather in her grandfather's fuel house to practice their Christmas play. As they practice, Eustacia overhears them discussing a Christmas party to be thrown by Mrs. Yeobright in honor of Clym's visit, but to which she has not been invited. She then convinces young Charley, the boy who had tended her fire earlier, to let her play his part on the night of the party; he agrees if she is willing to let him hold her hand for fifteen minutes and kiss it.

Eustacia appears in the costume of the Turkish Knight, claiming to be her own cousin and informing the group that Charley has been unavoidably detained. Once they are satisfied that she knows the lines, they set off for Mrs. Yeobright's house. They hear dancing inside, and Eustacia becomes impatient waiting for the revelry to subside so they can enter and perform their play. Her incessant complaining, however, allows the members of the troop to recognize her voice, but she swears them to secrecy. The dancing ends and the masque proceeds, and after Eustacia's Turkish Knight is killed, she looks around the room for the object of her desire, Clym Yeobright, while the play continues to its conclusion. As she peruses the room, her eyes fall for the first time on the person of Clym Yeobright. Once the play is over the party-goers begin to talk about the new arrival, but Eustacia ignores them. When Clym offers her some refreshment, she speaks as little as possible and only takes some wine so she can avoid removing her mask. She is smitten, largely because she had predetermined that she would be. Her reverie is interrupted when she sees Thomasin come to meet Clym in the pantry; the tender exchange between the two sends her into a fit of jealousy. She leaves the house in embarrassment, but soon Clym follows and bluntly asks her if she is a woman. She admits she is, and he invites her to come into the party without her disguise. She refuses, not wanting to be recognized, and he respects her privacy. She then takes off her costume and strikes out across the heath for home, bemoaning the fact that her own warning may have prevented Thomasin and Wildeve from marrying and leaving Clym Yeobright to her.

The next morning, Captain Vye asks Eustacia what had kept her out so late the previous night and is thoroughly amused when she tells him about her venture in mummery. She again takes to the heath and soon encounters Diggory Venn. He lingers on the Egdon Heath despite

the fact that the season for redden has passed because of his desire to be near Thomasin Yeobright. When Eustacia spots Damon Wildeve coming down the path, she hides in Diggory's wagon. He has already discerned that her ardor for her former lover has cooled because she had failed to meet Wildeve at the Rainbarrow the night before. She explains that she no longer wishes to see Wildeve and asks Diggory to return a parcel containing some of his things on her behalf. He agrees, and she is amazed at his willingness to advance the cause of his rival for Thomasin's affections because of his unselfish love for her. When he reads the accompanying letter indicating Eustacia's desire to see him no more, he determines to marry Thomasin as soon as possible to spite his former love. Diggory, meanwhile, having been told that Mrs. Yeobright has named him as Thomasin's future husband, makes his way in the direction of the Yeobright cottage. Wildeve gets there first, and when Diggory knocks at the door, he is dismayed to discover that her mother has agreed to let Thomasin marry his rival.

When Thomasin comes back inside after speaking to Wildeve, she tells her aunt that she has accepted his proposal of marriage in two days' time despite the fact that she no longer cares for him. The speed with which the ceremony is to occur coincides with the time when Clym is away visiting friends. She doesn't even want her aunt to attend the wedding because of her embarrassing circumstances. Clym gets home shortly after Thomasin leaves for the wedding and decides to support her by at least arriving in time for them to emerge from the church, but he soon returns with Diggory Venn, who has told him that the ceremony is already completed. He had observed it secretly, and gives one other surprising piece of intelligence: that Eustacia Vye had given the bride away. What Diggory could not have seen from his vantage point was the glance of triumph Wildeve threw in Eustacia's direction, as if the ceremony had been intended to punish her for her rejection of him, and the equally pleased look she gave in return, indicating that she was delighted rather than disturbed by the marriage.

BOOK THIRD – “The Fascination”

The third section of the novel begins with a brief description of Clym Yeobright, who has a face that shows the cares of the age. From his youth he had been well-known on the heath and gossip centered on him even during the years he was gone in Budmouth, London, and Paris. Expectations among the locals were high; they anticipated that he would be a great success or a great failure, and cared little which came to pass. One Sunday during a hair-cutting session Clym comes upon a group of men who have been talking about him, wondering why he had returned from Paris. He openly answers their question, telling them that he had found life in the great cities of the world empty and meaningless and had decided to return home to do something more useful with his life than being a diamond merchant; he now wants to start a school on Egdon Heath and become a teacher.

The author goes on to describe Clym as an idealist, the kind of man who, in casting off wealth and renown to devote his life to the benefit of his fellow men is so far ahead of his time that he is bound to be misunderstood and unappreciated. And unlike Eustacia, he loved the heath, which was his native turf. When he shares with his mother his intention to give up his diamond business and become a teacher of the poor, she chides him for giving up all that he has gained in life. Their conversation is interrupted by Christian Cantle, who excitedly tells them of the commotion at church that morning. Susan Nonsuch had stabbed Eustacia Vye with a sewing needle, believing that she had bewitched her children. The pain was so great that Eustacia fainted

on the spot, though she soon recovered. Later one of the turf-cutters comes to borrow a rope to retrieve Captain Vye's bucket from his well and again recounts the morning's excitement. Clym questions him closely; he clearly suspects the girl is the same one he encountered disguised as a mummer. Clym decides to help retrieve the bucket in an effort to meet the mysterious woman of the narrative.

Clym and his mother take a walk on the heath, after which she goes on to see Thomasin and he turns aside to go to Mistover Knap to help retrieve the Captain's bucket. Mrs. Yeobright fears the possible consequences of her son's eventual meeting with Eustacia. The men retrieve the bucket on the third try, but find that it is broken, leaving the family without water until it can be mended. Clym then offers to send some over from his home at Blooms-End, but Eustacia declines, saying that her grandfather insists that the water in the pool will serve in an emergency. She, however, is reluctant to drink standing water, and Clym then ties a pail to the end of the well rope and the two lower it into the depths. The rope tears the skin from Eustacia's hand – the second wound she received that day – and Clym sympathizes with her about the ignorance of the people that led to her earlier stabbing. He tells her about his idea of opening a school and asks for her help in the venture, but she declines, arguing that she has too little love for her fellow men to give herself to such a task. He speaks of his love for nature and she of her hatred for it; he wants to talk about the Druid stones on the heath and she of the boulevards of Paris. When they part, each is filled with thoughts of the other.

The next day Clym spends all day reading, then in the evening walks with Eustacia on the heath. A few days later some of the men open one of the barrows and discover pots filled with dead men's bones. Clym initially wants to bring one of them home, but at her request he gives it to Eustacia, who wanted the ancient burial urn. In the months that follow the two meet often, and a springtime kiss by the pool leads Clym to thoughts of marriage and a school run by the two of them. His mother, however, objects because Eustacia is penniless, restless, and unreliable; Clym, however, will hear none of his mother's criticisms.

The next night Clym goes out to see a lunar eclipse and finds himself at Rainbarrow, where he lies down in the heather and stares at the heavens. Ten minutes after the eclipse begins, Eustacia arrives and the two are soon in one another's arms, kissing passionately. She fears that their love will be only transitory, largely because of his mother's opposition, but he views it as eternal and proposes marriage to her. She asks for time to think, then begs him to speak to her of Paris. When he presses her, she agrees to marry him if he will take her back there, but he insists that he must pursue his goal of opening a school in Budmouth. She, convinced that he will never follow through on his ambition, promises to be his forever. After an hour they return to their homes, and Clym doubts that he can possibly meet his seemingly incompatible goals.

Their secret doesn't remain a secret for long. Soon Mrs. Yeobright hears from Captain Vye that Clym and Eustacia are engaged, and she is furious. She considers Eustacia an unsuitable match and thinks that his plan to start a school is a pipedream. In her opinion the world is filled with teachers far more qualified than her son, though he insists that a new approach to education he has developed will prove itself far better than common practice. Clym says he is old enough to know what is best for himself, but his mother responds that his choice of Eustacia clearly shows that he is not. He had hoped to introduce the two women that afternoon, but his mother's response makes that impossible. Instead, he goes off to meet Eustacia alone. By the time they complete their walk, they have agreed to marry in a fortnight, live in an isolated cottage for six months while Clym completes his studies, and then move into a small house in Budmouth where he can open his school.

Clym leaves his mother's house the next morning in search of a suitable cottage in which he and Eustacia might live. He finds such an abode five miles away and makes arrangements to rent it, then secures some simple furniture. He says goodbye to his mother, though she tells him she is unlikely ever to darken the door of their home after the wedding. That afternoon Thomasin visits her aunt and confesses that, though Wildeve is not cruel to her, he provides her with no money to run the household. She tries to comfort Mrs. Yeobright, but the old woman refuses to yield to any importunities from her niece. Later, however, Wildeve hears about the impending marriage and, as is his character, is disturbed that anyone but himself should ever possess Eustacia; his distress is such that he gives no thought whatsoever to Thomasin.

On the day of the wedding, Mrs. Yeobright sits in the very room where the party had been held at which Clym and Eustacia had met six months earlier. She refuses to attend the wedding and is waiting for Thomasin, who has asked for the money that would be her inheritance so she can keep her household together in the light of her husband's niggardly ways. While she waits she imagines the wedding in her mind. Wildeve arrives instead and, telling her that Thomasin has gone to the wedding, asks for what she had intended to pick up. Mrs. Yeobright, however, refuses, clearly not trusting Thomasin's husband with her money. She determines instead to send both Thomasin's and Clym's shares to Mistover by the hand of Christian Cantle. On the way he meets some of his friends and is convinced by them to accompany them to the Quiet Woman for a raffle. To his surprise, Christian wins the raffle and acquires a piece of cloth for making a woman's dress despite the fact that he has neither wife nor sweetheart. He makes the mistake of telling Wildeve of the money he has concealed on his person, and the wily innkeeper offers to accompany him to Mistover. Christian asks if he can borrow the dice that have brought him so much luck that night, and Wildeve agrees. Diggory Venn is concealed in a corner of the Quiet Woman and overhears all this, however, and quickly slips out the door to follow the two men. They stop for a break near Rainbarrow and Christian, fascinated, pulls the dice out of his pocket. Wildeve soon convinces him to continue his run of unusual luck, and before an hour has passed Christian has lost all of Mrs. Yeobright's hundred guineas, both Thomasin's and Clym's.

Christian stumbles away in despair at his folly and wickedness, but Wildeve soon senses another presence – that of the reddleman. Diggory promptly places a guinea on the stone and challenges Wildeve to continue the game. The innkeeper can't resist, and soon Diggory has won back all of Mrs. Yeobright's guineas. He then goes to give the money to its rightful owner. He does not realize, however, that half of the money is intended for Clym, and thus gives all hundred guineas to Thomasin.

BOOK FOURTH – “The Closed Door”

The first month of Clym and Eustacia's marriage is spent in isolation from the rest of the world, which is no hardship, since the two are totally absorbed in one another. After a month, however, Clym buckles down to his books with an intensity that seems to threaten all of Eustacia's fond dreams of convincing him to return with her to Paris. Meanwhile, all of the parties to the adventure of the hundred guineas are understandably keeping silent about the whole affair. Soon Mrs. Yeobright wonders why she has not heard from Clym about his receipt of the money. She decides to speak to Eustacia when she visits her grandfather, but before she can go, Christian confesses what he knows of the tale - that Wildeve had won all the money from him; he hopes it eventually reached its intended destination. Her visit to Eustacia now takes on a different purpose.

They meet outside Captain Vye's cottage and Eustacia vehemently denies having received any money from Damon Wildeve. The conversation goes badly, with each misunderstanding the other, and they part with a greater breach between them than had existed before the meeting.

Eustacia is obviously upset when she gets home, and Clym inquires as to the cause of her condition. She tells him of her interview with his mother and swears that she will never speak to her again. She begs Clym to take her to Paris and get her away from the horrible people of Egdon Heath. He is amazed that she should even suggest such a thing and utterly refuses to consider it. The alienation between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright is so deep that no reconciliation is possible even after Thomasin brings Clym the guineas that rightly belong to him and explains the source of the confusion. Clym's response is to bury himself ever more deeply in his studies in order to show progress toward fulfilling his ambition.

Long hours of study soon weaken Clym's eyes so that he can no longer stand to be in the light, nor can he read; Eustacia must read to him. When the doctor is summoned, he tells Clym that he will not be able to read or go out in the sun for a long time – maybe never. After several weeks, the doctor assures him that he is not going blind, but that he will remain unable to focus his eyes on any particular object for long periods of time without harm and must wear smoked glasses when out of doors. He sets his sights on eventually opening an evening school, but meanwhile needs a means of making a living. He determines to become a furze-cutter. Engaging in this manual labor makes Clym happy, aside from the fact that his wife and his mother are estranged. His happiness, however, dismays Eustacia, who is embarrassed to have a husband engaged in such menial toil. She resents his willingness to accept his misfortune and even threatens to return to her grandfather's home after only two months of marriage.

A few days later Eustacia decides to fight her depression by going to a nearby village dance. Clym, despite a tinge of jealousy, agrees that she should go. When she gets there, however, she realizes that she knows no one, so decides to turn aside and rest. On her way back home, she again passes the dance and pauses to watch. To her surprise, Wildeve appears at her elbow and asks her to dance. As they dance, her emotions are stirred, and Wildeve too, for whom constancy is a foreign concept, takes the married woman in his arms as a challenge to be met and a victory to be won. When they leave the dance he offers to walk her home, but on the way they encounter Clym and Diggory, who are coming to pick her up. Wildeve quickly slips away, but not before the sharp-eyed reddleman spots him. In a short time Eustacia meets her husband and the two return home. Diggory follows Wildeve and succeeds in arriving at the Quiet Woman before him, soon dropping a hint to Thomasin that he had seen her husband leading a wild horse with a white face and black mane. She is then puzzled when Wildeve arrives without a horse, which he supposedly had gone to purchase, and he realizes that Diggory, whom he considers to be his enemy, has been once again meddling in his affairs.

Diggory's conversation with Thomasin convinces him that her husband is neglecting her, and he decides to keep watch to see what Wildeve does in the evenings. He discovers that he makes a habit of walking across the moor to gaze at Clym and Eustacia's cottage from afar, though the dance was the first time the two had met since their respective weddings. A few nights later, Diggory runs a string across the path that trips up Wildeve on his way back from the cottage; the red color of the string is a clear sign to the innkeeper that his movements are known, and by whom. He is not deterred, however, and a few nights later stands again outside the cottage. This time he looks in the window and signals Eustacia, but almost immediately Clym enters the kitchen. Eustacia tells him she needs a little air, intending to go outside to see Wildeve, but before she can

do so, a loud knock sounds at the door. When Clym opens it no one is there, but the noise was enough to frighten Wildeve away. He quickly realizes that the man who disrupted his plan must have been Diggory, watching him again. On his way home gunshots are fired in his direction, which cools his ardor for many days. Diggory follows up his gambit by visiting Mrs. Yeobright and seeks to convince her to spend more time at her son's house, or even to move in to provide some help in the home. He warns her that things may be heating up again between Wildeve and Eustacia and begs her to seek reconciliation with Clym. She agrees to do so. Meanwhile, Clym tells Eustacia that he intends to visit his mother to seek reconciliation from his end of the relationship. He asks Eustacia to forgive Mrs. Yeobright and act civilly toward her, but she insists that some affronts can never be forgiven.

The next day proves to be one of the dog days of August, dawning hot and hazy as Mrs. Yeobright sets out toward Clym and Eustacia's cottage. She has never visited it before, so she often strays from the path, but after asking directions begins to approach it. She sees a furze-cutter in the distance and with some dismay realizes that it is her son. She follows him home, but pauses to rest beneath a clump of trees called the Devil's Bellows. From there she observes another man entering the house, but, after hesitating, decides that her first visit might be simpler if someone else were present.

When Wildeve knocks at Eustacia's door, he presents himself as a relation rather than as a prospective lover. She invites him in and he quickly sees that Clym, exhausted from his work in the fields, is asleep on the floor before the fire. They speak cautiously, but eventually Wildeve confesses his love for her though he recognizes that doing anything about it is impossible. She speaks of her disappointment that Clym has not been able to fulfill her lifelong dream. As they speak, Mrs. Yeobright knocks at the door. Eustacia, remembering the old woman's past suspicions and harsh words, is reluctant to admit her, so she lets Wildeve out the back door, assuming that the knocking will waken Clym, who can then open the door for his mother. When she returns to the house, however, Clym is still asleep and Mrs. Yeobright is gone, having determined that her daughter-in-law has shut her house against her with Clym's cooperation.

As she travels home in the heat of the day, she mutters to herself about the pain of women who are abandoned by their sons and decides never to see them again, even should they ask. She stops often for rest, and about two-thirds of the way home she lies down, unable to rise again. When Clym wakes up, he decides to visit his mother that very evening. On the way, he hears moaning and discovers her lying in the grass. He picks her up and carries her toward home, but she is so weak that he takes her to a barn owned by one of the laborers. There they discover that she has been bitten by an adder, and they quickly prepare a folk remedy, frying three adders in a pan and rubbing the oil on the wound. Meanwhile Eustacia decides to meet Clym on his way home from his mother's, and on the way encounters her grandfather, who tells her the news that Wildeve has unexpectedly inherited eleven thousand pounds from an uncle in Canada. Her interest in Wildeve immediately grows stronger, and soon the man himself appears. They discuss his newly acquired wealth, and he tells her that he plans to invest most of it, but use a thousand pounds to spend a year traveling the world. Soon they arrive at the hut where Mrs. Yeobright is being attended by a physician, but she is failing fast. Eustacia and Wildeve stay out of sight, but are near enough to hear that the exhaustion of the walk and the effect of the adder bite have been sufficient to end her life.

BOOK FIFTH – “The Discovery”

His mother’s death, and especially her dying words, throws Clym into a state of deep depression because he blames himself for her demise. Eustacia dares not tell him of her failure to open the door on the fatal day. Thomasin visits and tries to comfort him, reminding him that Mrs. Yeobright had earlier forgiven her and surely would have forgiven her son had she lived long enough, but Clym refuses to be comforted. When Wildeve arrives to pick up Thomasin, Eustacia goes out to meet him. She asks his advice about telling Clym her secret, and he tells her that she should speak the truth only after Clym has recovered, but still withhold from him the fact that Wildeve was with her at the time.

Clym gradually recovers, and one day Christian Cantle arrives to tell him that Thomasin has given birth to a healthy girl, though her husband is disappointed because the baby is not a boy. Clym also finds out from him that his mother was coming to visit him on the day of her death, though Christian knows nothing about the reason for her visit. He suspects, however, that Diggory Venn knows something, since he met with Mrs. Yeobright on the night before her death. Clym asks Christian to bring Diggory to see him, but he has no success, so Clym decides to go to his mother’s house to try to straighten out her affairs. He considers how the house will have to be remodeled to accommodate Eustacia’s modern tastes and regrets the necessary changes. As he broods over these matters, Diggory knocks at the door. Upon questioning, he assures Clym that his mother had forgiven him and was intending to mend their relationship, though he has no explanation for her bitter last words. Clym, unable to live with uncertainty about his mother’s feelings, determines to find the boy Johnny who had met her on her trip. The boy tells Clym all he knows – that Mrs. Yeobright had reached his house, had seen a man going in, had knocked on the door, that Eustacia had looked out the window without admitting her. Clym now understands that the fault lies with Eustacia, and he is filled with murderous passion.

When Clym returns home he finds that Eustacia is just getting out of bed. The terrifying look on his face tells her that he has learned her secret. She fears he is about to kill her, but he assures her that he has no intention of sending her to the place where his mother now is. He demands a full account of the tragic day’s events, but she refuses to attempt to contradict his preconceptions, realizing any defense she presents would be futile while he is in such a temper. She refuses to tell him the name of the man who was with her in the house, but he smashes her writing desk and finds within an envelope addressed to her in Wildeve’s handwriting. Clym then tells Eustacia that he is leaving her, but she tells him that is not necessary because she intends to go away. Finally she breaks down and confesses that she deliberately did not open the door the first time Mrs. Yeobright knocked, but that she would have the second time had she not thought that Clym himself would answer it. She still refuses to confirm that Wildeve was the man with her despite Clym’s assurance that he might pity her should she confess. She then dresses, gathers a few things, and leaves the house, intending to return to the home of her grandfather. A few minutes later a messenger arrives to tell Clym that Thomasin and her baby girl are doing well, and that she has named the child Eustacia Clementine.

When Eustacia arrives at her grandfather’s cottage, she finds it locked and collapses on the bank by the pool. Young Charley asks if she needs help, and then proceeds to climb in a window, open the cottage, place Eustacia on a settee, cover her, build a fire and prepare some food for her. After some time she goes upstairs to her old room, then peeks into her grandfather’s bedroom, seeing there a brace of pistols that the old man always kept loaded in case of burglars. To her they

seem a natural means of escape from her misery, and she goes downstairs to contemplate this new possibility. When she goes back to the bedroom, however, she finds the pistols gone; Charley has taken them and locked them away because he noticed her staring at them for such a long time. When Captain Vye gets home, he says nothing to his granddaughter because he is able to see that she is in a bad way.

In the days that follow Charley continues to care for Eustacia, which is for him a labor of a year earlier. After the fire is burning brightly, he calls her and she comes out to stand by it, thus inadvertently repeating the actions of the previous year. Like a year ago, Wildeve appears in response to her perceived summons. Though she insists that she did not light the bonfire, he takes pity on her in her misery and offers to use some of his newfound wealth to help her in any way he can. Though she is fearful of how such aid might be perceived, she asks him to help her get to Budmouth, from whence she can sail to Paris. He agrees to drive her late at night so she can escape without the knowledge of her grandfather or her husband, and she tells him that she will signal at eight o'clock on the night when she intends to leave.

Clym, meanwhile, spends his days cleaning up his mother's house and longing for Eustacia's return so they might be reconciled. On the night of November 5 he visits the Quiet Woman, hoping that Wildeve will give an account of the tragic day that will confirm Eustacia's innocence. He finds, however, that Thomasin is alone in the house with the baby. She tells him that Wildeve is out for a walk on the heath and encourages him to get in touch with Eustacia and invite her to return home. He agrees to do so in two days' time if he has not heard from her by then. He goes home immediately and writes a letter, intending to send it the day after next. The letter asks Eustacia to return and promises never to mention the events of the fateful night again. He assures her that he will welcome her warmly and that he is eager to believe in her innocence regarding the unnamed visitor. When Wildeve gets home, Thomasin questions him, but fears to seek truth that she would prefer not knowing.

Eustacia, convinced that Clym can never love her again, prepares for her flight. She packs her few belongings and wanders the heath until the appointed hour. As she does so she is seen by Susan Nunsuch, the woman who had stabbed her in church. At eight she lights the signal for Wildeve and he responds with a signal of his own; departure is thus set for midnight that night. While she rests in her room, a messenger delivers Clym's letter, which her grandfather takes upstairs, but, finding her room dark, he decides to give it to her in the morning. She soon creeps out of the house, and in the midst of an increasingly severe storm, makes her way to the Rainbarrow. She suddenly realizes that she has no money, but is reluctant either to ask Wildeve for what is needed without allowing him to accompany her or to flee as his mistress. While Eustacia agonizes, Susan Nunsuch, convinced that her enemy is a witch, makes a wax effigy of Eustacia and shoves more than fifty pins into it. She then holds the effigy over the fire, and as it melts away recites the Lord's Prayer three times backwards, calling a curse down on the witch.

While Eustacia stands in the storm at Rainbarrow, Clym waits at Blooms-End, hoping for her return in response to his letter. An hour later, as the rain falls more heavily, Thomasin knocks on Clym's door and tells him of her fears that her husband and his wife intend to run off together. He embarks at once to try to locate the two prospective lovers. Before he can leave the house, Captain Vye arrives looking for Eustacia. Having heard from Charley of her thoughts of suicide, he fears the worst. As Clym heads out to find Wildeve and Eustacia, Captain Vye and Tams return to their homes, but Thomasin gets lost in the storm, finally stumbling upon Diggory Venn's wagon near the foot of Rainbarrow. He points her and her baby safely back to the inn, then turns to search for Eustacia, who had passed by his wagon shortly before Thomasin's arrival.

Wildeve had brought a substantial sum of money with him when he went to meet Eustacia, hoping to convince her to let him accompany her to Paris. As he waits for Eustacia near Shadwater Weir, a dam in the river, now swollen by the storm, he is approached instead by Clym. The two men then hear a splash in the water, and both suspect the sound is made by a body; both fear that it might be Eustacia. The two enemies seize lanterns and begin to search. They soon see a body floating in the water and both jump in to attempt a rescue. Wildeve, however, does not remove his coat and is soon overcome by the rushing current. Diggory and Thomasin hear the noises and rush to the scene. When they see what is happening, Diggory sends Thomasin to fetch help. He then detaches one of the weir gates and uses it to keep himself afloat, after which he pulls from the water two men, tightly entangled in one another's arms. He then returns, dives under the foaming water and finally drags out the inert form of Eustacia. The three unconscious bodies are then taken to the inn, where Clym revives, but the doctor determines that Wildeve and Eustacia are dead. Clym and Thomasin are left in deep mourning, while Diggory longs to comfort Thomasin, but feels he has no standing to do so.

BOOK SIXTH – “Aftercourses”

To Thomasin, her husband appears better in death than he had in life. When the estate is settled she is left with ten thousand pounds, which she invests for herself and her daughter. She moves to Blooms-End and becomes a tenant under Clym's ownership, though he remains apart in a small portion of the house while she furnishes the rest. Clym lives a solitary life, spending hours wandering the moors or sitting in his room reading large-print books. One spring day a year and a half after the tragedy at the weir Diggory Venn pays Thomasin a visit. He is dressed in respectable clothing and no longer has the telltale red tinge to his skin, having given up his former profession and taken over his father's dairy farm. He asks her permission to set up a maypole just outside her property on May Day, and she has no objections. The next day she puts on a brightly-colored dress and watches in the festivities – the first time she has shown any hint of happiness since the death of her husband – while Clym absents himself by walking on the heath. When the sun sets only Diggory Venn remains. Clym encourages Thomasin to invite him inside, but he declines, insisting that he is waiting for the moon to rise so he can find a glove lost by one of the girls at the dance. When he finds it, he makes his way home. Thomasin is convinced that Diggory is in love with the owner of the glove, but all her questioning fails to reveal the name of anyone in whom he might show interest. A few days later, she realizes that one of her own gloves is missing. Apparently Rachel, the girl who watches young Eustacia, had worn them at the May Day celebration and had lost one, and in the process of searching for it had told Diggory to whom the glove belonged. A few days later Thomasin goes walking on the heath with her daughter, who is just learning to walk. As they enjoy the soft young grass, Diggory comes riding by. Thomasin demands her glove, and he quickly draws it from his breast pocket and returns it. The ensuing brief conversation leads to many more such meetings in the days that follow.

Soon Clym begins to consider his responsibility to his cousin Thomasin. He hates the thought of her spending the rest of her life as a widow on the heath, but feels nothing for her comparable to the love he felt for Eustacia. On the other hand, his mother had long ago expressed her desire for them to be together. He is willing to propose, but hates to saddle his lively cousin with a ruined lover. Finally he decides to take the step, but before he can open his mouth, Thomasin tells him that she wishes to marry, but wants his approval. She wants to marry Diggory

Venn, but Clym considers him beneath her socially and voices his doubts. He soon relents, however, and in a few days the two announce their engagement. Clym then turns his attention to his old ambition to open a school and to become “a preacher of the eleventh commandment.” The wedding day arrives and the happy couple celebrates and soon goes off to enjoy their life together. Clym absents himself from the reception, fearing his melancholy might dim their pleasure. While the party is going on, Charley approaches Clym and asks him for some remembrance of Eustacia; Clym gladly gives him one of the locks of her hair that he has carefully preserved. On the following Sunday, Clym ascends Rainbarrow and preaches to the assembled group of people from Egdon Heath; his “Sermon on the Mount” (as Hardy calls it) is a moral lecture, the first of many as long as weather permits. For the rest of his life, he preaches on the moors, in fields and towns, farms and wharves, carrying with him his message of morality and common decency without a shred of theological doctrine and is kindly received by all.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Diggory Venn – A reddleman on Egdon Heath, he is in love with Thomasin Yeobright and will do anything to ensure her happiness, including facilitating her marriage to Damon Wildeve. After Wildeve’s death, he finally wins the girl of his dreams.
- Thomasin (Tamsin) Yeobright – A young woman who marries Damon Wildeve against her aunt’s wishes. He abuses her and dies trying to rescue Eustacia Vye, after which she marries the far worthier Diggory Venn.
- Damon Wildeve – A failed engineer who operates the Quiet Woman, a local tavern; he once had an affair with Eustacia Vye, but marries Thomasin Yeobright. Hardy describes him as “one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike.”
- Mrs. Yeobright – Thomasin’s aunt and guardian and Clym Yeobright’s mother, she objects to her niece’s marriage to Damon Wildeve and is even more indignant about Clym’s marriage to Eustacia Vye. She dies after being bitten by an adder while on a journey seeking reconciliation with her son.
- Clym Yeobright - The native of the title, he returns home from Paris for Christmas and to celebrate the marriage of his cousin. He intends to give up his career as a diamond merchant, stay on Egdon Heath, and become a teacher of the poor, which his mother thinks is foolish. His marriage to Eustacia Vye is doomed from the start because of their contrasting dreams and values, and matters grow even worse when his eyesight is seriously impaired as a result of eyestrain.
- Eustacia Vye – This wild nineteen-year-old was raised in the beach town of Budmouth and was brought Egdon Heath by her grandfather after the deaths of her parents. Despite a whirlwind affair with Damon Wildeve, she finds life on the heath dissatisfying and the people unwilling to accept her. When Clym Yeobright returns from Paris, she sets her sights on him, hoping he will take her away from the heath, and quickly wins his love.

Their marriage soon falls apart, and when Clym begins to lose his sight, she takes up with Wildeve again. Their plan to run away together is foiled, however, when she drowns in the storm-swollen Shadwater Weir.

- Captain Vye – Eustacia’s grandfather, he is a former sea captain.
- Christian Cantle - A local laborer who works for Mrs. Yeobright, he is foolish and superstitious. His main contribution to the plot occurs when he is entrusted with delivery of Clym’s and Tamsin’s inheritance by his employer and loses it by gambling with Damon Wildeve.
- Susan Nunsuch - A woman of the heath who hates Eustacia. She believes the beautiful young girl is a witch, and on two occasions uses witchcraft against her.
- Johnny Nunsuch - Susan’s son, he is very curious and on several occasions witnesses damaging incidents that lead to trouble for the main characters.
- Charley - A teenage boy who works for Captain Vye, he is hopelessly in love with Eustacia; at one point he allows her to take his place in a Christmas mummary in exchange for holding her hand for a few minutes.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“To sorrow
I bade good morrow
And thought to leave her far 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.” (Title page)

“The qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting.” (Book First, ch.1, p.2)

“Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity.” (Book First, ch.7, p.57)

“O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness: send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die.” (Eustacia, Book First, ch.7, p.61)

“Don’t you offer me tame love, or away you go!” (Eustacia, Book First, ch.9, p.73)

“She and Clym Yeobright would make a very pretty pigeon pair – hey? If they wouldn’t I’ll be dazed!” (Humphrey, Book Second, ch.1, p.94)

“To dance with a man is to concentrate a twelvemonth’s regulation fire upon him in the fragment of an hour. To pass to courtship without acquaintance, to pass to marriage without courtship, is a skipping of terms reserved for those alone who tread this royal road.” (Book Second, ch.5, p.115)

“Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for some one at a certain hour and place, and the thing is as good as done.” (Book Second, ch.6, p.125)

“Yeobright loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.” (Book Third, ch.2, p.151)

“Mother, what is doing well?” (Clym, Book Third, ch.2, p.155)

“He had reached the stage in a young man’s life when the grimness of the general human situation becomes clear; and the realization of this causes ambition to halt awhile.” (Book Third, ch.3, p.167)

“Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother’s trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia’s happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve.” (Book Third, ch.4, p.178)

“O, it is a mistake! And he will rue it some day, and think of me!” (Mrs. Yeobright, Book Third, ch.7, p.192)

“The more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away?” (Clym, Book Fourth, ch.2, p.226)

“Two wasted lives – his and mine. And am I to come to this! Will it drive me out of my mind?” (Eustacia, Book Fourth, ch.3, p.228)

“For the time Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.” (Book Fourth, ch.3, p.230)

“Instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot.” (Book Fourth, ch.8, p.264)

“How much he wishes he had me now, that he might give me all I desire!” (Eustacia, Book Fourth, ch.8, p.265)

“If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever!” (Clym, Book Fifth, ch.1, p.274)

“How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?” (Clym, Book Fifth, ch.3, p.292)

“Eustacia could now, like other people at such a stage, take a standing-point outside herself, observe herself as a disinterested spectator, and think what a sport for Heaven this woman Eustacia was.” (Book Fifth, ch.5, p.301)

“She had used to think of the heath alone as an uncongenial spot to be in; she felt it now of the whole world.” (Book Fifth, ch.7, p.310)

“Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without.” (Book Fifth, ch.7, p.314)

“How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot! O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!” (Eustacia, Book Fifth, ch.7, p.314-315)

“I am getting used to the horror of my existence. They say that a time comes when men laugh at misery through long acquaintance with it. Surely that time will soon come to me!” (Clym, Book Fifth, ch.9, p.335)

“The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were a reality in Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still; in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gayeties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived medieval doctrine.” (Book Sixth, ch.1, p.340)

“O, my mother, my mother! Would to God that I could live my life again, and endure for you what you endured for me!” (Clym, Book Sixth, ch.4, p.359)

“He stated that his discourses to people were to be sometimes secular, and sometimes religious, but never dogmatic; and that his texts would be taken from all kinds of books.” (Book Sixth, ch.4, p.360)

“And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother; and she sat on his right hand. Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay.” (Clym, Book Sixth, ch.4, p.360)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss how the first chapter of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* establishes the tone and mood of the entire novel. Be sure to make use of specific language in the opening chapter as well as relating it to later events and outcomes.
2. Consider the description of Eustacia Vye in chapter seven of the first book of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. To what extent does the description of the heroine foreshadow later events in the story? Make connections between specific quotations from the chapter and incidents that occur later in the book and discuss the connection between character and destiny in the mind of the author.
3. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Clym Yeobright becomes a preacher at the end of the novel. Discuss the relationship between the description of his preaching career and the worldview of the author. What is the eleventh commandment? Support your analysis with details and quotations from the novel.
4. Evaluate the career choice of Clym Yeobright in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Was his choice a noble one? Was it practical? Consider his motives as well as the two careers themselves in your analysis.
5. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* deals with a very narrow sliver of the population of nineteenth-century England. To what extent does this limit the applicability of the story? Would you describe it as touching universal experience? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
6. The title page of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* contains a poem, an excerpt from John Keats' *Endymion*. What is the relationship of the poem to the novel? What character or characters could be thought to speak those words? What particular phrases in the poem relate to the character you have chosen, and how? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
7. The theme of fate plays a major role in almost all of Thomas Hardy's novels. Discuss how that theme is central to the story of *The Return of the Native*. Choose three characters whose lives are governed by fate and explain how this is the case. To what extent does this explain why Hardy's work is so pessimistic?
8. British novelist Thomas Hardy believed that human life is controlled by fate - that people are basically helpless in the face of an impersonal universe. *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* all share this theme. Choose two of these novels and compare and contrast the ways in which the characters are subject to forces beyond their control. Be sure to cite specifics from both of the novels you choose.

9. Tess Durbeyfield in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* may in some sense be said to be "more sinned against than sinning," though she certainly bears some guilt for her condition. Can the same be said of Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*? Compare and contrast the two young women, considering in particular the extent to which they are the agents of their own destruction and the extent to which they are victims of circumstance.
10. To what extent may Egdon Heath be considered a major character in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*? How does the setting of the story help shape the plot and influence the characters? Is that influence benevolent, malevolent, or both?
11. Clym Yeobright is the title character in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, but is he the protagonist? Why or why not?
12. The setting of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is isolated from the outside world, but some of the characters are nonetheless influenced by that world and its ideas. Discuss the extent to which Eustacia, Clym, and Damon Wildeve are influenced by the world beyond Egdon Heath and how those influences shape the plot and the destinies of the respective characters.
13. Whom do you consider the most admirable character in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*? Why? In your essay, be sure to point out why the character you have chosen is more worthy of the title than other possible contenders.
14. The main female characters drown at the end of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Compare and contrast Eustacia Vye and Maggie Tulliver with regard to their personalities, their dreams, and the reasons for their ultimate ends.
15. Discuss the attitude of the author toward Christianity in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. How is this attitude reflected in the plot, the characters, and the tone of the novel? Be specific.
16. Discuss the ways in which love is portrayed in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Choose three examples of characters who display what they consider to be love. Compare and contrast them with one another and evaluate the picture of love in the novel on the basis of Scripture.
17. Four of the six main characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* are in one way or another outsiders on Egdon Heath. How are their experiences shaped by their alienation from moorland society? To what extent does their success in life depend on their ability to overcome their outsider status?

18. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is an example of nineteenth-century realism in fiction. Unlike the morally-themed fiction where "the good end happily and the bad unhappily," realism has no pretensions concerning the existence of a moral universe. What in the novel distinguishes between those characters who find happiness and those who don't? What does this tell you about Hardy's understanding of human life?
19. Thomas Hardy originally intended to end *The Return of the Native* after the fifth book with the double drowning at Shadwater Weir, but was pressured to add an epilogue, contained in the sixth book, by his readers and publisher. He did so with reluctance, advising readers to choose the ending they preferred. Which ending do you prefer, and why? Be sure to consider not only your personal likes and dislikes, but also the extent to which the two endings are consistent with the tone, content, and characterizations of the book as a whole.
20. Both Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* are novels where public pressure forced the addition of a "happy ending." Compare and contrast the two altered endings. Which is more faithful to the overall content of the novel? Which more accurately reflects (or betrays) the worldview of the author?
21. Thomas Hardy was raised in a Christian home, and his novels demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Consider the biblical allusions employed by the author in *The Return of the Native*. What do they demonstrate about Hardy's assumptions concerning his audience? Are the allusions faithful to the Scriptures from which they are taken? Why or why not? Be sure to support your conclusions with specific quotations from the novel.
22. Many of the key turns in the plot of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* are based on misunderstandings. Choose three such key turning points and discuss what caused the misunderstandings involved, the extent to which the problems were based on character and the extent to which they were based on chance, and what such a plot structure reveals about the author's understanding of the human condition.
23. Early readers criticized Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* because all of the main characters are morally ambiguous; they had trouble identifying with people who are so flawed. Does the fact that the "good" characters have serious flaws and the "bad" characters have redeeming qualities prevent the reader from identifying with them or make it easier to do so? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
24. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Diggory Venn always seems to be on the fringes of the action, but often works behind the scenes to manipulate people and situations. Evaluate his character. Is he a selfless protector of innocent people like Thomasin or a schemer who manipulates others for his own selfish ends? Support your analysis with details from the novel.

25. Literature often portrays love triangles, but in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* the love relationships cannot be described by a simple geometrical figure. The author presents love between Wildeva and Eustacia, Wildeva and Thomasin, Clym and Thomasin, Clym and Eustacia, Diggory and Thomasin, and even Charley and Eustacia. Which of these most closely fits the biblical picture of what love ought to be? Why do you think so? Be sure to indicate ways in which the others fall short in your analysis.
26. Are the various love relationships in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* more characterized by selflessness or by possessiveness? Choose three love relationships from the novel and evaluate them on this basis. What might the author be saying about the nature of human love from these examples?
27. Compare and contrast Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* with regard to the pictures of love and passion presented in the novels. How do the two writers understand love? What are their attitudes toward unbridled passion and its consequences? Support your arguments with specifics from both books.
28. Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* has characteristics of Romanticism, the Victorian era, and modern realism in its plot, characterization, style, and structure. Identify elements of the novel that fit each of the categories. Which do you consider to be the category into which the novel best fits? Why?
29. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, which of the main characters undergoes the greatest change and development in the course of the story? Support your conclusion, and be sure in the process to indicate why at least two other main characters deserve the description less than the one you have chosen.
30. Discuss the role of comedy in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Most of the comedy in the novel is associated with the laborers on the heath. Is this Shakespearean comic relief intended to give the reader a respite in what is essentially a tragic story, or is Hardy saying something about the local inhabitants that contributes to the themes of the novel? Support your arguments with specific details and quotations from the book.
31. Discuss the role of irony in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Does the author use it to distance the reader from the action, to evaluate the characters, or to engage in social commentary? To what extent may irony be said to be central to the narrative voice of the novel?
32. Discuss the treatment of parental figures in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Be sure to consider Mrs. Yeobright's relationship to both Clym and Thomasin and Captain Vye's relationship to Eustacia. Are the older characters good parents or surrogate parents? How would you characterize their love for the younger characters over whom they are given charge?

33. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, to what extent are Thomasin Yeobright and Eustacia Vye shaped by the fact that they are orphans? Consider their relationships with their guardians, their personalities, and their dreams and ambitions. Cite specifics from the novel to support your assessments.
34. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the climactic incident at Shadwater Weir, like much of the rest of the novel, is ambiguous. The narrator never tells the reader whether Eustacia fell into the weir accidentally or whether she committed suicide. Which do you think was the case? Base your answer on your analysis of Eustacia's character and the events of the story to that point.
35. The Retributive Principle is the idea that people get what they deserve in the end. To what extent does Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* indicate belief in the Retributive Principle? Apply the idea to the six main characters in your analysis, and indicate the extent to which the Retributive Principle is biblical. Does the author show any belief in the operations of grace in human experience?
36. May Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* be viewed as an Aristotelian tragedy? If so, who is the tragic hero (or heroine)? If not, why not? Support your conclusions with details from the novel.
37. Analyze the view of human nature presented in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Does he have an optimistic or pessimistic view of mankind, or does his naturalistic approach portray man as neither good nor evil, but instead the plaything of impersonal Fate?
38. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Rainbarrow, an eminent point on Egdon Heath, is an ancient burial mound from pagan, pre-Christian times. It is also the site of several key events and interactions in the story, including the introduction and the conclusion. What is the significance of the fact that a pagan symbol of death becomes the setting for some of the book's most important elements?
39. One aspect of the plot in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* involves the clash between the ancient and the modern, which affects Clym, Eustacia, and Damon Wildeve in particular. What is Hardy's attitude toward the encroachments of modernity on the traditional world of the English countryside? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
40. To what extent can Clym Yeobright, the title character in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, be described as a classic Liberal? What values does he share with the Liberals of the nineteenth century? Does he display any convictions that would be rejected by those who espoused Liberalism?

41. Opinions among the characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* concerning Eustacia Vye vary widely. Some think her a goddess while others prefer to see her as a witch. Does this complex character share the traits of both of these extremes? How would you describe her? Support your character analysis with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
42. Discuss the use of images of light and darkness in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Be sure to consider the role they play in setting, character, and plot. What do you believe they are intended to symbolize? Support your conclusions with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
43. Discuss the use of images of fire and water in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Be sure to consider the role they play in setting, character, and plot. What do you believe they are intended to symbolize? Support your conclusions with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
44. What view of marriage is presented in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*? Does he believe that happy marriages exist? If so, what distinguishes between a happy marriage and an unhappy one? If not, what objections does Hardy have to the institution of marriage itself? Support your arguments with details from the story.
45. Compare and contrast the role played by Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* to the way similar terrain functions in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Be sure to consider matters of setting, plot, and character and incorporate specific references from both works of literature.
46. Compare and contrast the role played by Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* to the way similar terrain functions in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Be sure to consider matters of setting, plot, and character and incorporate specific references from both works of literature.
47. Compare and contrast the role played by Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* to the way similar terrain functions in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Be sure to consider matters of setting, plot, and character and incorporate specific references from both works of literature.
48. Evaluate the maturity of Eustacia Vye in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. What aspects of her character indicate immaturity? Does she ever succeed in escaping these impulses, in really growing up, or is her refusal to do so the root of her tragedy? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
49. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the author organizes the story around four seasonal festivals, all of which have deep roots in paganism – the two Guy Fawkes bonfires, the Christmas mummers, and the spring Maypole dance. In what sense is each of these a turning point in the narrative? Why does Hardy choose pagan rituals as a framework for the novel?

50. Both Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* use a play as a key turning point in the story. Compare and contrast the Christmas mummery and "The Murder of Gonzago" in the ways in which they function in the two narratives and the extent to which they bring out the leading themes of the works in which they are found.
51. M. H. Abrams defined cosmic irony as a situation where "a deity, or else fate, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate or mock them." To what extent is such cosmic irony present in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*? Cite specific instances in the novel to support your arguments.
52. Darwinism envisioned a world where chance and change were the underlying principles of reality. Thomas Hardy was greatly influenced by Darwinism, which played a significant role in his ultimate rejection of the Christian faith in which he was raised. How do these underlying principles of evolutionary theory manifest themselves in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*? To what extent may the Fate to which all of the main characters are subject be understood in Darwinian terms?
53. Thomas Hardy was often accused of being a pessimist, but he rejected the label insisting instead that he was a realist, presenting life as it is. To what extent may one argue that both labels are accurate in the context of Hardy's worldview - that his realism was horribly pessimistic because of the way he understood human experience in relationship to the cosmos? Support your argument with specifics from Hardy's *The Return of the Native*.
54. Critics have often noted that the novels of Thomas Hardy are notable for their absence of villains despite the depressing outcomes at which the stories arrive. For Hardy, even disreputable characters like Damon Wildeve in *The Return of the Native* deserve sympathy. Some have suggested that this is true because Hardy's fatalistic worldview eliminates human responsibility. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.
55. Atheist Charles Baudelaire once said, "If there is a God, he is the Devil." To what extent does Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* provide evidence for Baudelaire's assertion? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
56. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the author often compares Egdon Heath with the Tartarus of Greek mythology or the Christian Hell. To what extent does the role played by the heath in the story justify these comparisons? Use specific incidents and quotations from the novel to support your conclusions.
57. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, one might argue that Eustacia Vye's failures in her relationships with her two suitors occur because Damon Wildeve is too much like her and Clym Yeobright is too different. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.

58. In I Timothy 6:6, Paul says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Choose three characters from Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* that illustrate the importance of Paul’s words, either positively or negatively. Include specific details and quotations.
59. In chapter four of the third book of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, Clym Yeobright’s dilemma is described in these terms: “Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother’s trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia’s happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve.” In the end, which of these three was the most important to Clym? How many did he succeed in preserving? Why do you think this was the case?
60. In chapter three of the fourth book of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, the narrator describes the mood at the village dance in the following words: “For the time Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.” How accurate a description of paganism is this? In what ways does the novel show Hardy’s admiration for it?
61. In the first chapter of the fifth book of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, Clym says, “If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever!” Using this quotation and others from the novel, analyze the theology of Clym Yeobright and evaluate in on the basis of Scripture.
62. In chapter seven of the fifth book of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia says, “How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot! O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!” Evaluate her self-assessment. In what ways is it accurate and in what ways is she deceived about her own character and actions? To what extent is this self-deception responsible for her ultimate end?
63. Discuss the relationship between Clym Yeobright and his mother in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*. Is their love for one another healthy or unhealthy? In your evaluation be sure to include the feelings and actions of both mother and son.
64. Compare and contrast the relationships that exist between mother and son in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. To what extent does the nature of these relationships contribute to the tragedies toward which both stories inexorably move?