

Eustacia Vye between Dreams and Realities in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

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Abstract: Eustacia Vye is a typical romantic young woman who has given up on dreaming and is particularly susceptible to illusions about life and her prospects. She is considered one of the main characters in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. She is the wife of Clym Yeobright who is reduced to being a traveling preacher at the end. Eustacia's frustrations and her disappointment at her husband's failure to take her to Paris lead to the resumption of her secret relationship with Wildeve. She is responsible for her misfortune on account of her characteristic failure to control her passions and desires, and her tendency to yield to her impulses and illusions. This study aims to give an analysis of Eustacia Vye's character between her dreams and her realities of going to Paris. The study concludes with the failure of Eustacia's Vye dream to go to Paris and finally her death.

Keywords: Eustacia Vye, dreams, realities, failure, Egdon Heath.

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Introduction:

The Return of the Native is a novel written by Thomas Hardy in 1878; it is considered a masterpiece of English Fiction and one of Thomas Hardy's most powerful works. The story of this novel is about the promise and failure of Eustacia Vye's Dream; it centers around the character of Eustacia Vye, a young woman who rises in Egdon Heath, and her attraction for a young man, Clym Yeobright (Rutland, 1938).

The Return of the Native also tells the story of Clym Yeobright's obsession with Eustacia Vye and highlights the disillusionment of Eustacia's Dream. Clym Yeobright is a young man who returns to his place of birth to pursue an impossible ideal. In his pursuit he happens to be the indirect cause of the deaths of his mother wife, and cousin's husband (ibid).

Clym Yeobright meets Eustacia Vye in a play of "Saint George" at his house. Eustacia disguises herself as a boy and takes the part of the Turkish knight in the play to have a close look on Clym. Clym sees through the disguise, and the hero and the heroine become attracted to each other and finally got married to each other. Eustacia has been tempted to marry Clym in the hope that he will one day take her to Paris instead she gets drowned. The novel ends with reflecting on the emptiness of Eustacia's dream (Luke, 1994).

The Return of the Native centers around key characters such as Clym Yeobright, his mother Mrs. Yeobright, his cousin

Thomasin, the villainous Wildeve, the cunning Eustacia Vye, and the honest Diggory Venn. After returning from Paris, where he managed a diamond cutter's farm, Clym decides to settle in Egdon Heath to establish a school. Eustacia, who had an affair with Wildeve, hopes to marry Clym to escape her life on the heath and move to Paris (Dutta, 2014).

In *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy uses symbolism in both characters and the setting, particularly the heath, to convey the central theme of modernism. He objectively presents his characters based on their attitudes toward the heath and modern cities like Paris. Eustacia, Wildeve, and Mrs. Yeobright despise the heath and yearn for Paris, while Clym, Diggory Venn, and Thomasin cherish the heath as their ideal home" (Luke, 1994).

Hardy portrays Mrs. Yeobright as a genteel woman linked to the upper class, drawing her sense of worth from her societal status. Her noble characteristics stem from her husband, a farmer, and her father, a curate, which she covets for the prestige it brings. However, her selfworth is dictated by how others perceive her, revealing a lack of introspection. When Clym becomes a furze-cutter, she views him as shameful, indicating her failure to maintain her family's status. Yearning to break free from societal expectations, she remains trapped by her identity as a widow, mother, and aunt (Dutta, 2014).

In summary, Hardy's love for nature is evident in his creation of Egdon Heath. However, his tendency to focus on life's darker aspects results in a portrayal of the Heath in a gloomy light.

The Return of the Native is one of his major tragic novels, and The Heath is set in this natural landscape. Hardy skillfully captures the Heath's diverse moods and tones, enhancing his artistic reputation, leading David Cecil to describe him as "a great artist" (Singh, 2022).

Setting:

The Return of the Native is set in Wessex, a small area of land in the south of England. The action of the novel takes place on Egdon Heath. The time of the action from Book First to the end of Book Fifth is a year and a day. Hardy's Wessex is such a small area that reader often has a feeling out of windows or over hedges, or following one another, or overhearing one another. This is a characteristic of Hardy's regional novels (Luke, 1994).

The Return of the Native begins with a vivid description of Egdon Heath, setting a solemn and timeless atmosphere that suggests a tragic turn of events. The setting of *The Return of the Native* is integral to understanding the novel's themes, particularly Hardy's focus on fate, nature, and human emotion. Egdon Heath, the sprawling and bleak moorland that dominates the narrative, is not just a backdrop but a central character in its own right. Hardy uses the heath to embody both physical and emotional isolation, framing it as a force that shapes the destinies of the characters. The oppressive atmosphere of the heath reflects the social and emotional isolation of the characters, particularly Eustacia Vye, whose discontent with the heath highlights her desire to escape to a more vibrant, cosmopolitan world (Gatrell, 1993).

Hardy's treatment of the heath as a symbol of isolation extends beyond physical separation from society. It represents an emotional and psychological barrier for the characters, reinforcing their sense of alienation. Eustacia, for example, is portrayed as a character whose aspirations are in constant conflict with the reality of her surroundings. Her struggles with the heath reflect her larger existential crisis—her quest for meaning and belonging in a world that does not offer her easy answers (Williams, 1972).

The setting of Egdon Heath also serves as a contrast to the characters' aspirations and desires. While some, like Clym, find a sense of purpose in the simple, enduring nature of the heath, others, like Eustacia, find it stifling. The novel explores how the physical environment shapes and reflects the internal conflicts of the characters, especially regarding their aspirations and their identities. Hardy's exploration of these contrasting attitudes toward the heath speaks to his broader critique of the tension between nature's permanence and human fragility (Hardy, 1974).

Eustacia Vye's Dreams:

Eustacia has a youthful dream which she hopes to find fulfilled in Clym. Sam the turf-cutter said that her thoughts were far away from here, with lords and ladies she'll never know, and mansions she'll never see again. She wants music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world. In other words she is creating a life through her imagination. (Thurley, 1975).

Eustacia Vye is depicted as a rebellious and self-assertive woman struggling to find her place in a male dominated society. Her conflict with traditional norms highlights her tragic fate, as she seeks fulfillment amidst societal limitations on women's desires. Hardy portrays Eustacia as a unique heroine who challenges gender discrimination and traditional morality (Dutta, 2014).

Hardy acknowledges the economic, social, and legal constraints faced by women, contrasting their doomed circumstances with societal expectations for innocence and silence regarding sexuality. He emphasizes women's roles as passive and docile, showcasing the restrictions imposed on their aspirations. In a society that labeled sexually passionate women as "fallen," women were denied participation in political and economic spheres (Al - Mousa, 1996).

Eustacia's imagination works hard. She seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover. She is in love with the idea of passionate love and depends on her imagination to create it. When she hears of Clym's return to the heath her imagination makes him into a fascinating knight. She then falls in love with the product of her imagination rather than with the real Clym who knows that she loves him as a visitant from a gay world. Eustacia has romantic longing for Paris. Mrs. Yeobright is right when she says one day Eustacia's illusions will vanish and so will her love for Clym (ibid).

Eustacia Vye's Realities:

The narrative centers around Eustacia Vye, a passionate woman longing for a more vibrant life beyond the confines of the heath, and her interactions with Clym Yeobright, who returns from Paris intending to better the lives of the heath's inhabitants. Eustacia's aspirations clash with the realities of her environment, leading to her involvement with both Clym and Wildeve, the local innkeeper, which creates a web of romantic tension (Al- Mousa, 1996).

When Clym loses his sight and becomes a furze-cutter Eustacia's dreams are shattered. Her husband, the knight in shining armour, is now a peasant in a brown outfit who is happy to be a peasant. She says: "I have still some tenderness left for you." Her passion is spent (ibid).

As Clym's life takes a tragic turn, Eustacia becomes dissatisfied with her marriage due to Clym's refusal to return to Paris and his deteriorating eyesight, which forces him to abandon his teaching plans. Frustrated, she rekindles her affair with Wildeve, and during their attempt to escape, they both drown in a stream. Tired of Wildeve, she seeks out and marries Clym; tired of Clym she chooses flight. But she cannot escape from herself (Thurley, 1975).

According to Nasreen (2022), what the novel shows is the failure of Eustacia Vye's dream, its reduction to cheap materialism, its becoming a destructive force. Eustacia's dream is Paris. She proves to be only nothing, emptiness. Eustacia's dream as portrayed in is a severe criticism of the idea of the dream and what becomes of it in an age of materialism, ruthless competition, and selfish carlessness.

Conclusion:

The Return of the Native shows Eustacia Vye's failure dream. The novel emphasizes the continuous struggle to achieve the unattainable dream, symbolized by Eustacia Vye who has represented a dream that remains forever out of reach. The novel ended, tragically, with the death of Eustacia Vye who has relied on dream and appearance instead of moral and inner peace. It has been clear through Eustacia Vye's that living in a world based on personal interests can blind a person from making decisions that have real value and lead to lasting happiness. Eustacia's character

also shows the importance of being honest with oneself and others, and not allowing material conditions to destroy meaningful relationships.

Bio:

Dr. Fuad Nabhan has been a lecturer at Al-Quds Open University, Palestine, since 2002. Prior to this, he worked at Modern College, Palestine, from 1995 to 1997. Between 1998 and 2002, he was also a part-time lecturer at Al-Quds Open University.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in English from Aligarh Muslim University, India, awarded in 1990, followed by a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in English from the same institution in 1992. In 1995, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in English Literature from the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India.

Dr. Nabhan has actively participated in numerous academic conferences and training programs, particularly in the fields of distance education and e-learning within higher education institutions. His scholarly contributions include the publication of research articles and papers in various academic journals.

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