Chapter III

Factors of Alienation in *The Return of the Native*

Contemporary readers tend to take for granted the notion that literature does not convey, or even attempt to convey, absolute truth. Since the modernist movement at the beginning of the 20th century, literature has tended to pose questions rather than define answers. One of the hallmarks of modern literature can be said to be unreliable, authors and readers recognize that literature is difficult; it is not to be trusted, or to be taken at its face value. In 1878, when *The Return of the Native* was first published, ambiguity was hardly understood to be the cornerstone of the novelistic edifice. And yet, while *The Return of the Native* is formally conventional, thematically it thrives on doubt and ambiguity. With its extensive narrative description, abundant classical and scriptural references and stylized dialogue, the book adheres closely to the high Victorian style. Thematically, however, the novel is original and ingenious: not trusting perceptions, the book questions moral and ethical truths, implying the superiority of relative to absolute truth. It is an eminently unreliable novel, peopled with unreliable characters; even its narrator cannot be trusted.

It is true that the greater part of *The Return of the Native* was composed under what in hindsight must have seemed unusually favourable circumstances to Hardy: according to the largely autobiographical *Life*, the period that he and his wife spent in Sturminster Newton was “happiest time” of their entire marriage. It also seems reasonable to infer even without accepting in its entirely John Paterson’s reading of the novel’s manuscript revisions, that Hardy wrote at first with great imaginative freedom, allowing his conception of an isolated, time-warped heath-world to validate the creation of an almost witch-like Eustacia within a deeply superstitious society and perhaps even to permit an open-ended conclusion to the Thomasin-Diggory Venn relationship. But what the manuscript and surviving
correspondence make abundantly clear is that by the time Hardy actually began to submit copy for the first serial installments, his overall conception of the narrative had undergone considerable modification-evidently in response to an ever-increasing anxiety about the novel’s prospects for commercial success. (PD 84-110).

Hardy was sort of caught up between the Romantic Movement (which was on its way out), Realism (which was on the rise), and Modernism (which would be coming down the pipeline in a few years). Hardy's novel seems to veer back and forth between over-the-top romance, harsh realism, an interest in character drama, and a focus on mythology and nature. This focus on nature is definitely worth noticing in this novel. Hardy set nearly all of his novels in the fictional county of Wessex in Southwest England, where Hardy himself was born and raised.

Wessex is sort of like Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatwa country. In the fake country of Wessex, Hardy explored social issues, the impact of industrialization on the countryside, his own ideas on nature and fate, and so on. It was sort of a laboratory for Hardy's ideas. The land and nature play a huge role in all of Hardy's work, but perhaps none more so than The Return of the Native. It's also worth noting that Hardy moved from London to a more rural area before beginning to work on The Return of the Native, and Hardy's own "return" to a more natural zone may have influenced him the direction to write the novel. The Title introduces to us the return of Clym Yeobright to his native place Egdon Heath. The Heath was a gloomy wasteland in southern England. Against this majestic but solemn, brooding back – ground a small group of people were to work out their tragic drama in the impersonal presence of fate and nature.

On the fifth of November, bonfires were glowing in the twilight as Diggory Venn, the reddleman, drove his van across the Heath. Tired and ill, Thomasin Yeobright lay in the rear of his van. She was a young girl whom Diggory loved. But she had rejected his
proposal in order to marry Damon Wildeve, proprietor of the Quiet woman Inn. Now Diggory was carrying the girl to her home at Blooms End. The girl had gone to marry Wildeve in a nearby town, but the ceremony could not take place because of an irregularity in the license. Shocked and shamed, Thomasin had asked her old sweet–heart Diggory to take her home.

Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin’s aunt and guardian, heard the story from the reddleman. Concerned for the girl’s welfare, she decided that the wedding should take place as early as possible. Mrs. Yeobright had good cause to worry for Wildeve’s intentions were not wholly honourable. Wildeve was a gay philanderer and was not serious about marrying Thomasin. Later in the evening, after Wildeve had assured the Yeobrights, rather casually, that he intended to go through with his promise, his attention was turned to a bonfire blazing on Mistover Knap. There, old captain Vye lived with his beautiful grand-daughter, Eustacia. At dusk the girl had started a fire on the Heath as a signal to her lover, Wildeve, to come to her. Though he had intended to break with Eustacia, he decided to obey her summons to continue as it were his romantic hobnobbing. Eustacia, meanwhile, was waiting for Wildeve in the company of Young Johnny Nunsuch. When Wildeve threw a pebble in the pond to announce his arrival, Eustacia told Johnny to go home. The meeting between Wildeve and Eustacia was unsatisfactory for both. He complained that she gave him no peace. She, in turn, resented his desertion. Meanwhile Johnny Nunsuch, frightened by strange lights he saw on the Heath, went back to Mistover Knap to ask Eustacia to let her servant accompany him home, but he kept silent when he came upon Eustacia and Wildeve. Retracting his steps, he stumbled into sand–pit where the reddleman’s van stood. From the boy Diggory learned of the meeting between Eustacia and Wildeve. Later, he over-heard Eustacia declare her hatred of the Heath to Wildeve who asked her to run away with him to
America. Her reply was vague but the reddleman decided to see Eustacia without delay to beg her to let Thomasin have Wildeve.

Diggory’s visit to Eustacia was fruitless. He then approached Mrs. Yeobright, declared again his love for her niece and offered to marry Thomasin. Mrs. Yeobright refused the reddleman’s offer because she felt that the girl should marry Wildeve. She confronted the innkeeper with vague references to another suitor with the result that Wildeve’s interest in Thomasin awakened once more. Shortly afterward Mrs. Yeobright’s son, Clym returned from Paris and a welcome – home- party gave Eustacia the chance to view this stranger about whom she had heard so much. Uninvited, she went to the partly disguised as one of the mummers. Clym was fascinated by this interesting and mysterious young woman disguised as a man. Eustacia dreamed of marrying Clym and going with him to Paris. She even broke off with Wildeve who, stung by her rejection, promptly married Thomasin to spite Eustacia. Indeed Eustacia went out of her way to facilitate the circumstances prompting Thomasin’s marriage with Wildeve. Clym Yeobright decided not to go back to France. Instead he planned to open a school. Mrs. Yeobright strongly opposed her son’s decision. When Clym heard that Eustacia had been stabbed in the church by a woman who thought that Eustacia was bewitching her children, his decision to educate these ignorant people was strengthened. Much against his mother’s wishes Clym visited Eustacia’s home to ask her to teach in his school. Eustacia refused because she hated the Heath and the country peasants, but at the result of his visit, Clym fell completely in love with the enchanting yet ambivalent Eustacia.

Mrs. Yeobright blamed Eustacia for Clym’s wishes to stay on the Heath. When bitter feeling grew between mother and son, he decided to leave home. His marriage to Eustacia made the break complete. Later Mrs. Yeobright felt loneliness: she relented somewhat and gave a neighbour, Christian Cantle, a sum of money to be delivered in equal portions to Clym and Thomasin. Christian foolishly lost the money to Wildeve in a gamble of
dice. Fortunately, Diggory won the money from Wildeve, but thinking that all of it belonged to Thomasin he gave it to her as a faithful though unrequited lover.

Mrs. Yeobright knew that Wildeve had duped Christian. She did not know that the reddleman had won the money away from the innkeeper and she mistakenly supposed that Wildeve had given the money to Eustacia. Meeting Eustacia she asked the girl if she had received any money from Wildeve. Eustacia was enraged by the question and in the course of her reply to Mrs. Yeobright’s charge; she said that she would never have condescended to marry Clym had she known that she would have to remain on the Heath. The two women parted angrily. Eustacia’s unhappiness was increased by Clym’s near-blindness, a condition brought on by too much reading which she feared that this meant she would never go to Paris. When Clym became a wood-cutter, Eustacia’s feeling of degradation was complete. Bored with her life, she went by herself one evening for gipsying. There she accidentally met Wildeve and again felt an attachment for him. Seeing Eustacia and Wildeve together the reddleman told Mrs. Yeobright of the unfortunate condition of her son and the unpleasant development of circumstances. He begged her to make peace with Eustacia for Clym’s sake. She agreed to try. Mrs. Yeobright’s walk at noon across the hot and dry Heath to see her son and daughter-in-law proved fatal. When she arrived in sight of Clym’s house, she saw her son from a distance as she entered the front door. Then as she was thinking how to enter into the house such as to cause least annoyance to Eustacia, she saw another man getting into the house. She was too far away, however, to recognize Wildeve. After resting for twenty minutes, Mrs. Yeobright went on to Clym’s cottage and knocked. No one came to the door. Heart broken by what she considered a rebuff from her own son, Mrs. Yeobright started back homewards across the Heath. Overcome by exhaustion and grief, she sat down to rest and a poisonous adder bit her. She died without knowing that inside her son’s house Clym had been asleep worn out by his morning’s work. Eustacia did not go to the door.
because as she later explained to her husband, she had thought he would answer the knock. The real reason for Eustacia’s failure to go to the door was her fear of the consequences to reveal the truth that Mrs. Yeobright might find Eustacia and Wildeve together.

Clym awoke with the decision to visit his mother. Starting out across the Heath toward her house he stumbled over the body. His grief was tempered by bewilderment over the reason for her being on the Heath at that time. When Clym discovered that Eustacia had failed to let his mother in and that Wildeve had been in the cottage, he ordered Eustacia to get out of his house. She went quietly because she felt in part responsible for Mrs. Yeobright’s death. Eustacia took refuge in her grandfather’s house where a faithful servant thwarted her in an attempt to commit suicide. In utter despair over her own wretched life and over the misery she had caused to others, Eustacia turned to Wildeve, who had unexpectedly inherited eleven thousand pounds and who still wanted her to run away with him. One night she left her grandfather’s house in order to keep a pre-arranged meeting with the inn-keeper, but in her departure she failed to receive a letter of reconciliation which Thomasin had persuaded Clym to send to her. On her way to keep her rendezvous with Wildeve she lost her way in the inky blackness of the Heath and either fell accidentally or jumped into a small lake, Shadwater Weir and was drowned. Wildeve was happened to be near the lake when she fell in, jumped in to save her and was also drowned.

Originally, *The Return of the Native* ended with the death of Eustacia and of Wildeve but in order to satisfy his romantic readers in a later edition, Hardy made additions to the story. The faithful Diggory married Thomasin. Clym unable to abolish ignorance and superstition on the Heath by teaching became in the end, an itinerant preacher. The story makes it clear that Hardy feels an obscure volition in the depth of things that curbs our individual destinies under a law greater than ourselves. The tragic fatality immanent in the concatenation of events heightens the dramatic unity of impression of this classical novel.
Indeed Hardy tends to shift the construction of his novel to the inner world: he writes a moral drama and shows us a conflict of contradictory wills, guided themselves by feelings. The story shows a penetrating search – light into the methods an methodology of plot – construction typically characteristic of the genius of Thomas Hardy.

The catastrophe of Hardy’s novels often depends on a number of trivial accidents. Chance exhibits planned divergences of Hardy’s tragic pattern. Mrs. Yeobright’s first visit to the house of her son is purely accidental and misconceived. She talks to Eustacia and her question is misunderstood by her in another context. This is a dramatic irony. The incidents and accidents, so simple and innocuous in themselves, spell disaster. Clym’s near blindedness is also accidental and it mars the happy consequences of his newly – wedded life. Eustacia’s sudden meeting with Wildeve, when she goes to amuse herself one evening, rekindles the never completely extinguished desire surging in her bosom, to leave Egdon Heath. Similarly, the second coming of Mrs. Yeobright to the house of her son with attitude of complete forgiveness and reconciliation, an incident with great future prospects, turns out to be the inevitable premonition of bleak despair. At last another apparently insignificant event which comes to occur because of sheer inadvertence or chance causing Eustacia to fail to receive the letter of reconciliation sent to her by Clym confirms the inevitable tragic predicament.

Further probe into the methods of plot-construction reveals that Hardy also utilizes what can be technically described as improbabilities of character besides coincidence of chance in shaping the pattern of his tragic novels. This is vividly illustrated in The Return of the Native and brings to light the Shakespearean craftsmanship of Hardy. Eustacia is abnormal. She is the raw-material for divinity but not good as a woman or as a housewife. She is moon-struck and is propelled by fathomless mysteries of libidinal impulse of which she is not always conscious. The nocturnal impulse of carnal magnetism individuates her being and is the main cause of her social and psychic mal-adjustment. She mistakenly calls
this impulse as love but it is love which transcends human limits and is symptomatic of a kind of madness. As the story continues, Hardy also admits that Eustacia is impractical and wastes her ability in an idle way. Mrs. Yeobright is a mouthpiece for him here. Throughout the novel we see Hardy’s ambivalent attitude towards Eustacia: his recognition of wasting her ability and his compassion for her imprisonment in Egdon heath and her attitude towards it. What characterizes this frustrated woman is her spirit of revolt. She ignores the social norms of female behaviour.

Clym is an abnormal visionary and Wildeve is an abnormal philanderer who is not able to understand the motivations of his ambivalent instincts. Thus tragedy results from the conjunctions of abnormal traits in the leading characters that act and react upon one another with peculiar frequencies in the novel at particular instants of space and time. In this novel, Thomas Hardy created two strong and opposing forces: Egdon Heath, a sombre tract of wasteland symbolic of an impersonal fate and Eustacia Vye, a beautiful young woman representing the opposing human element. Throughout the book Eustacia struggles against the Heath, but in vain. Of course, her failure to overcome her environment would seem to prove Hardy’s view that man is not the master of his fate. But in attempting to minimize the importance of the individual in this life, Hardy has created in the character of Eustacia Vye, a person of great strength and marked individuality. Indeed, the reader, contemplating her, feels that Eustacia herself, to a greater extent and not fate alone, is responsible for her tragic end.

In *The Return of the Native* there is an attempt to erect the structure of norms and ideals which forms the rudiments of Hardy’s social philosophy frequently reiterated in later novels. Marriage in the scheme of Hardy’s ethics is divined of as an institution which should create conditions for the realization of love conceived as a value both for the individual and in the broader context of society. The marriage of Clym and Eustacia is ill conceived, ill-planned, sudden and almost impetuous. They have not known each other
completely. Eustacia thinks Clym will take her away from the Heath; so she yields to his Solicitations. For Clym it is the mere outburst of spontaneous erotic emotion that he proposes to Eustacia even at the risk of antagonizing his mother. This marriage proves unhappy due to unfortunate turn of events as also to the vacillating temperament of the lovers who had got married without complete understanding of each other’s conditions and circumstance. Similarly the marriage of Wildeve and Thomasin ends in despair. Both of them married hastily and shakily and without being convinced of the necessity of their happy union. The happy conclusion of the story provides the necessary corollary to Hardy’s attitude towards marriage and love. Diggory is a sincere lover. He is patient; calm and calculating. His attachment remains unchanged. His devotion is unaltered. Thomasin and her aunt made a mistake to disappoint this humble yet sincere adorer of Mr. Wildeve earlier. Constancy in love makes it a permanent value which can be intrinsically relished. The individual and the social aspects merge origenismically in the happy union of the two souls. The marriage of Thomasin and Diggory becomes sacrosanct by time. It is no more the emergence of frivolous passion but the intuitive recognition of life-long devotion seeking consummation in mutual co-existence and co-partnership that unites the two loving hearts in the end. They laugh and make other laugh. The rustics dance in the merriment and it appears for a moment that Hardy has solved the problem of matrimonial mal-adjustment. Thus The Return of the Native is the organ of Hardy’s social philosophy. This demonstrates that both forms of social authority operate in The Return of the Native, and that both are bound up in Eustacia Vye’s life and death. Eustacia’s suicide particularly exemplifies the destruction enabled by internalized social judgment, as well as the text’s preoccupation with physical suffering. The spectacle offered by the body of the condemned coincides in Hardy’s text, with the operation of internalized authority indicates how the body is itself a sign, a manifestation of the power operating within this structure. Yet this juxtaposition also illustrates how Egdon is
representative of a primitive society on the verge of modernity, one in which more modern methods of judgment and punishment finally prove more devastating in their capacity for emotional and physical destruction. (SM 147-164)

All Hardy’s novels deal with the problems both of adjusting to changes in society and of coping with its failure to change in response to the individual’s needs. His treatment of character emphasizes that individuals as well as society are in a process of change and the novelists’ methods of exploring character must change in order to reflect this and to take into account new insights. Clym, Knight, Fitzpiers, Angel, Sue and Jude are all examples of the problems of “advanced” thinkers in a world which adamantly resists any challenge to its attitudes and preconceptions. These “advanced” thinkers are themselves hampered by these same preconceptions which they share, often unconsciously, with the society they criticize. In them Hardy finds scope for examining the psychological, social and cultural effects of being ahead of one’s time while at the same time attacking “the inert mass of crystallized opinion”, which he tried to undermine in all his writing. (FEH 284)

From Far From the Madding Crowd, or even earlier, to Jude the obscure, we can see Hardy’s interest in complex, tormented, maladjusted and alienated beings. Irving Howe suggests that in The Return of the Native, “a new kind of sexuality, neurotically willful but also perversely exciting makes its appearance” (IH 58). This vividly describes the quality of Eustacia’s passions, but it is not true to say that such passions appear here for the first time; the sentence could be applied to Boldwood, and even to Miss Aldclyffe in Desperate Remedies. In this respect, The Return of the Native is not a new departure, but a continuation in the line of Hardy’s development which was to culminate in Jude the Obscure.

In The Return of the Native, Hardy is following up some lines of thought about psychology and about sexual relationships which he has already tentatively introduced in earlier novels. The famous opening chapter of the novel, “A face on which Time makes but
little impression‖, initiates the theme of estrangement even before the appearance of man in
the novel. Most critics think highly of this remarkable chapter. It is the prelude to a sad
symphony dealing with the pathetic fate of man. This barren and dreary waste land called
Egdon Heath seems to symbolize the indifference of nature to man and his activities. The
sense one gets from contemplating the ideas that Hardy evokes both by his description and by
his allusions, is similar to that evoked by T.S. Eliot in The waste Land, even darker and
clearer. Egdon Heath is not just a stage for a handful of characters to strut and fret, nor is it
background or a setting for the novel. Egdon Heath is portrayed as a gigantic living creature.
It is “everything man is not, as well as what he is”. (PV 125) The Heath actually binds the
structure and the theme and encompasses all other elements of the novel. Everything
ultimately relates to this nodal point. Within the Heath, Hardy unfolds his vision of reality.
The Heath is the world.

Though Hardy has created the world of Wessex in fiction almost all his novels
take place in that rural environment in the south west of England where, he creates a special
landscape for each novel to suit the theme. The commercial world of Casterbridge, the
agricultural world of the Weatherbury Farms, the social life of the village in the woodlands
are all different landscapes portrayed carefully to suit the different themes of their respective
novels. The Return of the Native is the world of Egdon Heath. Hardy intentionally tries to
give us a limitless picture of the Heath; we do not know where it is situated, or where its
outer limits are. Hardy does his best to obfuscate the picture of the Heath to maximize its
psychological influence on the readers as well as on the characters of the novel. The Heath is
an entity pulsing with life and whose voice is the wind. It is a self-contained, powerful,
awesome, influential landscape that makes man feel small and petty. The Heath “was found
to be the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely
felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster” (RON 35). This
identification of the Heath with the unconscious at the beginning of the book establishes its significance in Hardy’s portrayal of the human psyche. Through his use of the Heath, Hardy suggests great depths in his characters; the unconscious remains unknown, though we are aware of its existence. Eustacia’s affinity with the Heath, and her antagonism to it, gives complexity and depth to her characters. Whole areas of her consciousness remain mysterious, unanalyzed, but we are made aware that they exist.

This remarkable life that Hardy gives the Heath made some critics believe that Egdon Heath is the most important character in the novel, other think it “overpictorialised”. In *The Return of the Native*, and indeed in all his novels, Hardy is much more intimately concerned with the portrayal of human dilemmas than with the documenting of social conditions. The importance of Egdon Heath in the novel lies mainly in the way Hardy uses it to enlarge our concept of human nature. Hardy saw man as dwarfed by the universe, but at the same time he showed him as a central feature of it. Hardy subjects both his characters and landscape to subtle and sensitive scrutiny. By observing meticulously the external manifestations of emotion, Hardy wants to suggest that these observable “expressions” reveal only the surface, and that there are vast and invisible depths of the psyche; he is thus moving towards the view that human beings are inexplicable. This is the beginning of Hardy’s exploration of that aspect of human beings which was his central concern as a novelist.

Hardy lived sixty years in the nineteenth century and twenty eight years in the twentieth. A cursory look at the chronological tables of the second half of the nineteenth and the first three decades of the twentieth makes it abundantly clear that Hardy’s problem is that he lived in two widely different worlds. Hardy was brought up in Victorian England. Hardly had he begun to imbibe the Victorian outlook in matters of religion, thought and politics when the earth began to collapse under his feet. Hardy felt a sense of bewilderment and
melancholy brought on by the ebbing of the Sea of Faith, a sense of being stranded between epochs.

Hardy’s work could be interpreted as a serious attempt to find his balance in a world that was violently shaking before him. The dilemma which Hardy found himself in is correctly diagnosed as “the emotional price of modernism: the sense of psychic dislocation and alienation, of wandering in an unmapped no man’s land between two worlds”. (DDL 380-381) These two worlds seem to be symbolized in a passage in which Hardy describes Egdon Heath. The bright sky and the dark Heath seem to be bold images of two shapely distinguished worlds. The glowing sky stands for the hope, the dark Heath for the forces of character and fate that defeat them. *The Return of the Native* and, indeed, Hardy’s other novels, oscillate between these two worlds.

In *The Return of the Native* Eustacia Vye is a beautiful woman with higher demands for happiness. She is “the raw material of divinity”. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which made a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman” (RON 93). Her appearance suggests the utter zest for existence at its brightest. But she has been living in suppression because she has to live in a place that does not harmonize well with her longings. Eustacia’s first appearance on Egdon Heath clearly represents the elemental urges of human consciousness which have broken harmony with nature. She moves upon the immobile Heath, cries for happiness and turns herself into an exile. Hardy stands detached in helpless compassion while he observes her little might at strife with her inexorable fate.

Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness and they shady splendor of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her. (RON 94)
Eustacia could not be reconciled with Egdon Heath. She had not learnt, was not even willing to learn, to temper her longings. Upon the heath where “she was forced to abide”, revolting against her situation, dreaming of her imaginary home – land symbolized by Paris, “she felt like one banished”. She had learnt that “love was but a doleful joy. Yet she desired it, as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water”. Eustacia was hardly aware that love was only a small part of the sensuous luxuries she wanted. She had looked upon her love towards Clym as a means to material happiness and conductor into the realms of Parisian splendour. She fell in love with Clym at first hearing about his expected arrival and soon forgot inconstant Wildeve. But she was mistaken about Clym; he had decided never to return to Paris. He had even explained to her plainly during their period of courtship that he was determined to live out his ethical system and teach it to others upon the Heath. Yet she cherished the fond hope that somehow he would be prevailed upon to return. So she married him, only to be disillusioned soon that he was not to be prevailed upon, that he loved his ideas far more than he loved her, and that she herself did not love him so much as she loved her dream of Paris. Clym sees her agony later and says:

I Suppose When you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes – a man who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes – in short, an adorable, delightful Distracting hero?

Yes’ she said, sobbing. (RON 278)

She confesses this still more clearly to Wildeve, while at the same time justifying her desires and also appreciating Clym’s worthiness:

But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life – music, poetry, passion, war and all the
beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world? That was the shape of my youthful dream; but I did not get it. Yet I thought I saw the way to it in my Clym.

And you only married him on that account?

There you mistake me. I married him because I loved him, but I won’t say that I didn’t love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of that life in him. (RON 303)

Hardy is of course sympathetic with her spontaneity which urges for “what is called life”. (RON 279-280) Hardy, in spite of his sympathy, does not approve of her thoughtless force of longing which proves destructive. It is clear in the passage quoted above that her feeling would “almost seem reasonable”. There is no reason why the desires of such a beautiful girl languishing upon the Heath should not be satisfied. But the universe is irrational, and her condition is irremediable. In view of this, her struggle for an escape amounts to sheer madness. The disharmony of existence grows in exact proportion to the intensity of our impossible demand from the world. Eustacia fails to understand that her own frantic quest for the homeland after heart’s desire has estranged her in the only place where she is condemned to live. Her self – estrangement blinds her to her right way of establishing harmony by turning the bitter divorce of existence into a peaceful with nature.

Presented largely from an external view point, Hardy creates a passionate, fascinating, yet neurotically maladjusted personality. Even when she is seen in close – up, it is stressed that his view is that of an outsider, She is only able to guess at what is taking place in her mind. Yet, while emphasizing that the view of her is external, Hardy creates an intense interest in what is going on in her mind. Hardy’s position of critical detachment in describing
“The Queen of Night” creates mixed feelings in the reader and contributes to our sense of her tortured and conflicting emotions.

Eustacia is an isolated character, rarely seen is company on the Rain-barrow when he is first introduced to Eustacia. She is “Queen of night”, “Queen of solitude”, “Queen of love” her associations are with loneliness, alienation, despondency, anxiety, uneasiness, glom, desolation, suicide, drawing, Frustration, rebelliousness, etc. The list of associations could be extended. We acknowledge the ultimate irreconcilability of the contradictory forces in Eustacia’s nature. Her family conditions seem to have aggravated her excruciating sense of isolation. With both parents dead, she is living without brothers or sisters with her old grandfather in “the loneliest of lovely houses” on Egdon Heath, an isolated “vast tract of unenclosed wild”. What intensifies her sense of isolating is that she does not love the people of Egdon and always keeps away from them. This social isolation deepens her non-conformity to society. To emphasize Eustacia’s disharmony with society, Hardy surrounds her with air of witchcraft and represents her not as one of the local inhabitants of Egdon Heath, but rather as a mysterious supernatural creature.

Eustacia’s marriage to Clym may be the happiest event in her life. This marriage certainly shows absolute rashness on the part of both of them. They see each other as instruments and opportunities for realizing their dreams. The moment Eustacia realized her marriage would not fulfill her dreams of living in Paris, she becomes an intensely alienated character, alienated form herself, her husband and from Egdon Heath. Nothing is actually in common between them to substantiate a happy or even an ordinary marriage. Clym’s over – spirituality and lack of sexuality, might have been a contributing factor in her estrangement from him.

In a state of utter despair and frustration after the disappearance of enchantment, Eustacia contemplates suicide. When Charley saw her holding the pistols and contemplating
them, he took them away and furtively locked them up in the stable away from her. Just before this scene in which she blames Charley for hiding the pistol away from her, we see Eustacia in the utmost degree of frustration and despair. Almost mad she wanders through the storm. Just as Boldwood’s murder of Troy and Tess’s murder of Alec are treated dramatically, so here Eustacia’s drowning in as dramatic occurrence, shown from a distance in a scene of great dramatic power. In this episode, Hardy combines the psychological and the dramatic, and its effectiveness derives from the explorations of the tormented mental state which lead up to this moment. All we know of the fall into the water is what Clym knows. We are left to speculate whether it was accidental or suicidal. This question of Eustacia’s ambiguous death has long been a subject of discussion among critics.

Clym is the earliest of Hardy’s “modern” characters, who suffer from the “ache of modernism”. There are complexities and inner contradictions that confront us in the character of Clym. Hardy states clearly that Clym’s mind is not “well-proportioned”. In the course of the novel he shows how he veers towards madness on several occasions during his nervous breakdown, after his mother’s death, when he is overwhelmed by feeling of guilt, in his insane rage with Eustacia after discovering about the closed door, and in his preaching at the end. But Hardy does not present Clym simply as an unbalanced personality, but chiefly as a representative of the problems of “modern” man’s difficulties in adjusting to new ways of thinking and feeling, especially those arising from the loss of religious faith. These difficulties of adjusting to new intellectual insight occur in A Pair of Blue Eyes, where Knight’s intellectual development is seen as emotionally inhibiting, and later in Angel, Jude and Sue. Clym is portrayed as a modern tragic hero, whose convictions lead him to renounce the pleasures of civilization and return to his native Heath, only to be ultimately defeated by Nature’s indifference to man’s idealism. The idea of Clym’s a modern man, with the ravages of profound thinking on his outward appearance, is the driving force in his character. Clym is
the central character of *The Return of the Native*, and in conceiving him, Hardy seems to have allowed a certain “bifurcation” of character to mar his aesthetic sensibility. (IG 108) Clym’s dissatisfaction with the diamond business, his hope of improving the minds of the dwellers of Egdon Heath and his conversations with his mother suggest a philosophical turn of mind. That Clym embodies modern man’s estrangement is the central issue of the novel.

The opening chapter of Book Third is very important in understanding the character of Clym. The chapter bears the significant title, “My mind to me a kingdom is’, which is the first line of a poem by Sir Edward Dyer. Hardy’s bitter irony in citing this line cannot escape the reader. It alludes to Clym’s insistence on educating the Heath men. Clym registers in his face the cost of self–awareness, and for Hardy, this is an inescapable part of the evolution of human consciousness. Of all Hardy’s novels, with the exception of *Jude the obscure*, *The Return of the Native* is “the most preoccupied with a social consciousness”. (IG 99) He returns home in order to teach his people “knowledge of a sort which bring wisdom rather than affluence” (RON 196), and self–discipline that could ease the anguish of the human situation. Clym explains his decision to remain in Egdon and not return to Paris by saying,

My business was the idlest, vainest, most effeminate

Business that ever a man could be put to. That decided

me: I would give it up and try to follow some rational

occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I

could be of most use. I have come home …. I shall keep

a school…. (RON 195)

When Clym wants to teach his people “knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence”, he wants his class to learn how to raise themselves above others ethically rather than materially. Clym could not see the importance of material prosperity as
the first stage towards spiritual development. His notion that what Egdon needs, above all, is knowledge is Clym’s real limitation hinted at by the chapter’s title “My Mind to me a Kingdom is”

Clym does not understand that Knowledge, ‘aesthetic effort’ is not something that can ever be aimed at in isolation, that intellectual development goes hand in hand with social and moral development, that knowledge is itself part of the total consciousness of the age. The people of Egdon are not yet ripe for him because of the domination of the Heath over them. Clym is trapped between two experiences, his insistence to ‘keep a school’ and his fellow-countrymen’s negative response, and when he is made to feel the conflict between them, he becomes radically self – estranged. To the extent that Clym lives immoderately far ahead of his times, he is a prophet misunderstood by his people. When Clym pursues his chosen course of action, Hardy describes his mind as ill-proportioned.

Estranged first from his mother and then from his wife, Clym retreats into himself, so that he becomes virtually inseparable from the Heath;

This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognizing him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive – green gorse, and nothing more…. His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiaris wee creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band.(RON 273)
Despite the harmony Clym finds himself in with the natural life of the Heath – bees, strange amber–coloured butterflies, tribes of emerald–green grasshoppers, dell–snakes, huge flies, and litters of young rabbits, all flock fearlessly around him – yet he remains morose, morbidly self–righteous and self–pitying. Nowhere in the novel do we see a spectacle of the struggle for existence, of life feeding upon life, of mutual hostility in the realm of Nature which anticipates the woodlanders.

It has been argued that the collapse of Clym is only a stage in his progress and that, after the tragic deaths of his mother and wife, he recovers. This is, of course, true. He does overcome that impassivity that the Heath induces in him and emerges from the life of a furze–cutter to become an itinerant preacher. Despite the uncertainty in the final stages of Clym’s career, it seems to be the important point that Hardy wants to stress is that Clym should continue living as an embodiment of evolving contemporary consciousness of the “ache of modernism”

Not only should we understand Clym as the embodiment of modern man’s predicament in a hostile world, also the presentation personal relationships probe his personality at considerable depth. It is in this area that we see the effects of the “not well-proportioned mind”. Hardy describes Clym’s personal relationships with his mother and Eustacia thus:

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 so he could hope to preserve. Though his love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura, it had made fetters of what previously was only
a difficulty. A position which was not too simple when
he stood whole – hearted had become indescribably
complicated by the addition of Eustacia. Just when his
mother was beginning to tolerate one scheme he had
introduced another still bitter than the first, and
the combination was more than she could bear. (RON 223)

When Eustacia has lost all hope of Paris and her disillusionment with her
marriage is complete, she bursts out crying she finds him singing:

I deserve pity as much as you…. I think I deserve it
more. For you can sing! It would be a strange hour
which should catch me singing under such a cloud as
this! …Even had you felt careless about your own
affliction, you might have refrained from singing out
of sheer pity for mine. God! If I were a man in such a
position I would curse rather than sing. (RON 276)

Their attitudes are thus contrasted. She imagines and curses God for his
heartlessness, evokes our pity and assumes the grandeur of a tragic heroine. She deserves the
fulfillment of her wishes, and yet she perishes for want of wisdom. Clym, on the contrary,
only sings, but would neither pray nor curse. He has realized the futility of revolt and
surrenders to all the workings of Fate. His answer to Eustacia fully reflects his resignation:

Now, don’t you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I
cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the
gods and fate as well as you, I have felt more stem
and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But
the more I see of life the more do I perceive that
there is nothing particularly great in its greatest
wells, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine
of furze – cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings
vouch safed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel
it to be any great hardship when they are taken away?
So I sing to pass the time. (RON 276-277)

His contrast with the rebellious characters is clear, he has known to revolt and to
overcome it. Temperamentally, they are poles apart, and Clym has blundered seriously in
deciding to marry her. Mrs. Yeobright could clearly see his folly and advised him against the
marriage.

It is from his relationship with his mother that violent and unbalanced emotions
arise. Hardy depicts very powerfully the intensity of their relationship and the close affinity
between them that Clym’s breakdown after his mother’s death is almost inevitable. There is
something unusually morbid about this relationship. Some critics interpret Clym’s decision to
leave Paris and return to Egdon as being not so much for humanitarian and altruistic purposes
as for the desire to be near his mother. This seems true, for her influence on Clym is
incalculably great. The crucially formative influences on him are his mother and Egdon
Heath. Mrs. Yeobright secretly supports him over the diamond business. She has criticized
his abandoning his job in Paris particularly when he was “doing well”, but she is forced to
ease her criticism when she fails to answer his question, “Mother, what is doing well? The
dissension between them is entirely on account of Eustacia. To a person like Clym, to whom
his mother is everything, the decision to go against her and marry Eustacia is almost self –
destruction.

Mrs. Yeobright is not only a doting and domineering mother but jealous as well.
She wants to impose herself on her son’s choice of a career and a wife, her opposition to his
choice of a wife is greater than her opposition to his choice of a career. When he decided to marry Eustacia, the jealous mother felt directly threatened and was “prepared to challenge the fitness of any woman to usurp her place” (EM 151). Because she is a self-assertive and possessive woman, she is the main source of her son’s problems. Mrs. Yeobright’s possessive jealousy is such that she would have been antagonistic to any woman who interested her son.

Clym’s response to this is very violent:

Whenever any little occurrence had brought into more prominence than usual the disappointment he was causing her it had sent him on long and moody walks: or he was kept awake a great part of the night by the turmoil of spirit which such a recognition created. (RON 223)

Mrs. Yeobright’s death is tragic. She is a victim of human cruelty. There is a parallel between King Lear with his fool in the wilderness and Mrs. Yeobright with Johnny Nunsuch on Egdon Heath, and Hardy succeeds in drawing this parallel to which he refers in the 1895 preface to the novel. Feeling superior to other people, and living in isolation, Mrs. Yeobright also dies in isolation without nobody around her except Johnny Nunsuch who reported later to Clym that “she said I was to say that I had seen her, and she was a broken hearted woman and cast off by her son”. (RON 323) After her death, neither Eustacia nor the Heath could save Clym from a life – in-death existence. In her life, she was a main cause of his miseries, now in her death, she has become a harrowing nightmare reminding him constantly of a sense of guilt. Clym adequately rises up to the lofty status of Oedipus:

Cast off by my son!’ No, by my best life, dear

Mother, it is not so! But by your son’s your son’s ----‘

May all murder stress get the torment they deserve!’

with these words Yeobright went forth from the
little dwelling. The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine: his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. (RON 342)

After his mother’s death, Clym tortures himself with guilt, and Hardy very effectively indicates that he is now grossly disturbed and on the edge of insanity. Hardy is creating a picture of an obsessional neurotic. Clym now becomes wholly possessed by the idea of his mother as “a sublime saint”. Clym’s personality shows many of the qualities which Freud, in Civilization and its Discontents, associates with the Oedipus complex. Freud emphasizes the part played by a strong sense of guilt in the Oedipus complex. Generally, Hardy, in a theoretical as well as an imaginative way, is concerned with the psychological effects of “civilization and its discontents” by showing the changes which he felt were occurring in modern man.

There are many conflicting views on Wildeve: he has been described as a “victim”, “an adult philanderer”, “a villain”, “a quixotic young man”, and “a masochist”. Hardy describes him thus:

To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near; it was Wildeve’s nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though wildeve’s fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. He might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon. (RON 237)

Wildeve cannot be acquitted of his dubious way in handling the affair of the licence of his marriage to Thomasin. Most critics see him guilty of something more serious
than a naïve failure to get the right license. This assumed failure looks, in fact, more intentional than accidental. This “man of sentiment” with “fevered feeling” must have understood that he was jeopardizing Thomasin’s reputation and the whole Yeobrights. Mrs. Yeobright’s angry reaction and the unfriendly attitude she took towards him during the rest of her life are understandable.

Wildeve is specifically guilty of another moral failure when, in the gambling scene, he was informed that at least half the money he had won was not his own. Had it not been for Diggory Venn’s intervention, Wildeve would have taken all the money for himself. Wildeve’s presence in the novel undoubtedly intensifies the unhappiness which most of the characters suffer from. His presence, for example, with Eustacia in Clym’s house at the time Mrs Yeobright has come to seek reconciliation with her son, is a main reason behind Eustacia’s refusal to open the door.

Ian Gregor calls The Return of the Native “his dialogue of the mind with itself”, and so it is; the problems of Egdon Heath emanate from the ache of modernism. In introducing Clym, Hardy has introduced a contemporary consciousness into Wessex, and it is this which takes The Return of the Native beyond the range of anything in far range the anything in Far from the Madding Crowd. When Hardy goes on from here to explore his Wessex world, by presenting varieties of modes of being and making discoveries about ways of feeling and behaving, consequently extending our awareness and our acceptance of human diversity, he will explore it rather more deeply than extensively. The entire world of this novel of Hardy is a very lonely one. It is both isolated and isolating. One who reads the novel will get a strong sense of distance from the outside world. Estrangement is a root source of emotional turmoil and of very modern ennui, or dissatisfaction and sadness.