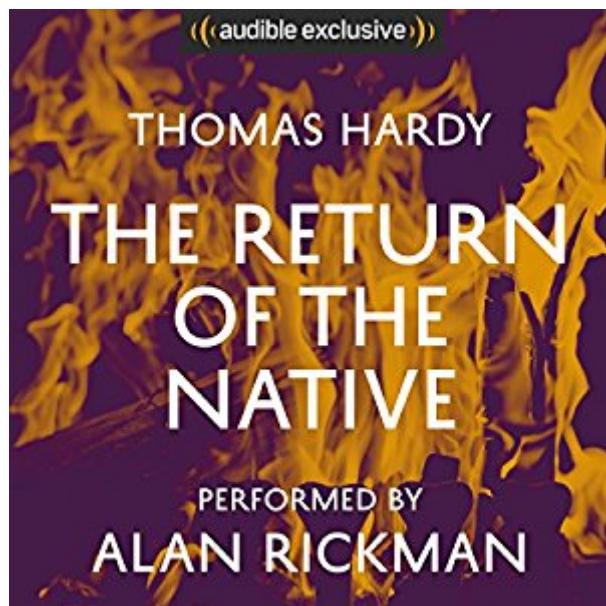


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The Return Of The Native



Synopsis

The wilds of Egdon Heath seems like a prison to Eustacia Vye, cut off from the world in her grandfathers lonely cottage. When Clym Yeobright returns from the glittering lights of Paris, he seems to offer everything she dreams of: passion, excitement, and the opportunity to escape. However, Clyms ambitions are quite different from hers, and marriage only increases Eustacias destructive restlessness. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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Version: Unabridged

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Customer Reviews

This story is set in Egdon Heath in the mid-1800s. It opens with a reddleman (reddle is a chalk infused with iron ore, making it and those who handle it red, and used to mark sheep) giving a ride home to Thomasina, who had gone to marry Mr. Wildeve, but been unable to do so, because their marriage license was for a town different from that to which they went. It is the story of Mr. Wildeve's attraction to Eustacia, who is in turn trying to attract the attention of Thomasina's cousin Clem, recently returned from Paris for a visit; the story of the unrequited love the reddleman, Diggory Venn, has for Thomasina, and of the lives of those who live in this small town. It's well written and fast paced, moreso than many books of that era. I read this with my high school senior son, for whom this was required summer reading, and we both enjoyed it (although he probably would only give it 3 stars instead of my 4)

This is very stylized for the period and way too long but it grows on me as I read it. I sure did learn a

lot of vocabulary in the process and am grateful for my Kindle Fire to look up all the weird words. It was for a book group so I would not have read it otherwise, but I am glad I did. Not an easy read but nonetheless interesting.

In Thomas Hardy's novels, natural settings are always important. However, in 'The Return of the Native' Egdon Heath, located near the south coast of Hardy's fictional Wessex area, is a brutal, abiding reminder of the harshness of the landscape and the magnetism, extending beyond its mere gravitational pull, that it exerts on its inhabitants. We get the sense that these occupants, even the ones who claim to love it, are consigned to reside on it and, to a certain extent, do its bidding. In the preface he wrote to the 1895 edition (it was originally published in 1878), Hardy imagines that this landscape might be the location roamed by that unyielding Shakespearean character, King Lear. The social level of the novel is propelled by a drama of conflicted motives and passions and, like many of his novels, involves at least one, sometimes two, romantic triangles. At the natural level, however, the characters contend with the landscape and burn bonfires to ward off the darkness. Although the culture is ostensibly Christian, the residents still observe certain seasonal rituals such as harvest festivals and maypole dances of their pagan ancestors: '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 yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such hamlets are pagan still: in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, have in some way or other survived medieval doctrine.' There is no utter villain in this story. At the center is the raven-haired beauty Eustacia Vye, who has come to live with her grandfather on the heath after the death of her parents, with whom she grew up in the slightly more cosmopolitan port of Budmouth. She yearns for passion, excitement, music and culture exemplified in her fantasy of life in Paris. The 'native' of the title, Clym Yeobright, returns from Paris where he has apprenticed as a jeweler. While she romanticizes Clym and his association with her beloved Paris, he has had his fill of the foreign capital and returned to his home territory to start a school and elevate the minds of the Egdon youth. Previously, Eustacia had been romantically attached to the local innkeeper Damon Wildeve, who procrastinated in his engagement to Clym's cousin Thomasin largely because he was so entranced by Eustacia. Clym's mother, Thomasin's aunt, feels that what was set in motion must continue to proceed and encourages Thomasin to marry Damon as soon as possible to eliminate the gossip that arose among the townspeople after Thomasin returned from a nearby town where she and Wildeve had planned to marry but were prevented from it when an irregularity was detected with the

license. In the wake of the marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve, Clym and Eustacia marry despite the objections of Clym's mother, who distrusts Eustacia and to a certain extent shares the perception of some of the more superstitious residents that Eustacia is a witch who schemes to ensnare men that are caught in the spell of her beauty. One of them even creates a wax sculpture of her, punctures it with pins and burns it in the fireplace. Eustacia roams the hillside at night and she does burn bonfires and stands in their light by herself but they are signal fires for Wildeve to meet her. The mutual judgments and resentments between Clym's overprotective mother, who refuses to acknowledge Eustacia or attend their wedding, and Eustacia, who feels justifiably threatened by his mother's possessive hold on Clym, escalate through a series of meetings and near-meetings. Just as one of them is willing to make peace with the other, events occur that create tragedies of errors. Clym is oblivious to his wife's needs and ignores her ever present but unspoken hope that he will abandon the plans for a school and take her back to Paris with him. Caught between losing the support of his mother and the happiness of his marriage, he is further impaired by the onset of blindness. He reads entirely too much, resulting in the neglect of his wife and the onset of an optical illness that is not helped by the fact that he reads by the insufficient light of candles. Physiologically, I don't think reading in dim lights causes even occasional blindness although it does contribute to eye strain. Clym's intermittent blindness serves more of a symbolic function than a plausibly realistic one. Meanwhile, despite their desires to be faithful to their legal spouses, Eustacia and Wildeve are drawn persistently to each other. They have slightly differing romanticized visions of each other but each of them wants deliverance from the mundanity of life on the heath. Feeling judged, scorned and misunderstood, Eustacia, like Shakespeare's Lear, goes out on the heath in the middle of a torrential storm and rails against the elemental fates: 'I can't go, I can't go!' she moaned. 'No money: I can't go! And if I could, what comfort to me? I must drag on next year as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!...I do not deserve my lot!' she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. 'O the cruelty of putting me into this imperfect, 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!' Although Eustacia has been compared with two other passionate, doomed 19th century heroines, Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary, I see her as more of a forerunner to Edith Wharton's Lily Bart from 'The House of Mirth', who shares Eustacia's inflexible pride and (as she sees it) integrity but feels that doors have been shut in her face at every turn. The tragic hammer of Fate does seem to bear down on her with more indifference even then it does with the other doomed characters in the novel and is the only

character that could be considered a tragic hero. There is another integral character in the novel, the reddleman turned dairy farmer Diggory Venn. I had never heard the term 'reddleman' until I read this novel. A reddleman makes and sells reddle or red chalk made from red clay, who roves the countryside selling it to farmers for marking their sheep. Due to the constant contact with the reddle, Diggory's skin has acquired a reddish complexion, lending him a devilish appearance to the superstitious rural folk. Despite his Mephistophelian appearance, Diggory is noble, a force for good in the lives of those around him. It should come as no surprise that at the conclusion he and Thomasin form the happy couple that lives as happily ever after as one can ever live in a Hardy novel. Sometimes it seems as though Hardy is a sadistic, vengeful Old Testament god to his characters, piling one disaster on top of another. His characters often seem like a cast of Jobs who, unlike the original Biblical figure, succumb to the despair that is everywhere apparent around them. In 'The Return of the Native' these disasters may be mountains made from molehills, only if one concedes that they are comprised of billions of molehills. He is an occasionally merciful god, allowing some characters such as Diggory and Thomasin to continue on past the boundaries of the novel to live relatively peaceful, happy lives. One of the redeeming features of Hardy's fiction is that his narrative skill always makes the bleakness of the unfolding events palatable and even, to this reader, powerfully moving and enjoyable.

The CD audio book of the Return of the Native actually deserves to be described as amazing. The lyrical prose of Hardy, combines with the incomparable voice and performance of Alan Rickman, to make this a genuine treasure. Rickman, in his limited interviews, has repeatedly referred to himself as an instrument. In this product, the only part of that instrument he could utilize was his voice. It is more than enough: the pictures and action spring vividly to life. Listening to his performance is sheer joy, and it rapidly makes you realize how little his capability has been tapped by film - where the whole "instrument" is utilized. I would give this product the highest recommendation.

I love how Thomas Hardy makes the natural environment like another character in his books. This is no exception. The story is both tragic and triumphant. The characters are really well developed. After "Tess of the D'Urbervilles", this is my favorite Hardy novel.

Okay, so this is another book I should have read in high school and bluffed my way through with the Cliff Notes. I should have read the book. I was wrong and I admit it. Wonderful language and a pretty good story. If you skipped it way back when and you need a free book for your Kindle, I

recommend this one.

Repeated readings (the sure test of a great book) have convinced me that Hardy is, indeed, a great novelist. There is always something more to recognize and enjoy. IF ONLY he hadn't felt compelled to write in dialog! I don't know whether or not it's accurate but it's certainly annoying. However, it's a very minor flaw in a book whose pastoral setting is a delicious background for a work of real human passion.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Very typically Hardy....a bit bleak. Our lives being at the mercy of happenstance, the fates are in control and our deeply flawed heroine cannot escape her destiny. Masterfully written. Hardy would have preferred a much more bleak finish but succumbing to the pressures of his readers he gives us a somewhat happily-ever-after ending. I love it!

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