

# Vying and dying to leave



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John Gardner once said that there are only two types of stories: someone leaving home or a stranger coming into town; *The Return of the Native* meets both of these in a way. Eustacia wishes to leave, while Clym returns, but seems to be almost a different person. Hardy's work offers a unique insight into the plight not only of a man trying to return to the heath that highlighted his youth, but also the attempt of an ambitious young girl to outgrow her meager surroundings. A particularly interesting passage is the section immediately before Eustacia Yeobright's flight, and ultimately, catastrophic death. The episode is made more tragic than a simple accident because of her wish to leave the heath as her low-vaulted past. These pages not only serve to blame fate and nature in the foreshadowing of Eustacia's death, but also portray it as tragic and disillusioning because of the narrator's attempts to raise sympathy for her. From the outset, it is made clear that this death is not only fatalistic, but also naturalistic. "The gloom of the night was funeral (345)," foreshadows the soon-to-be tragedy. On her walk, she is "occasionally stumbling over twisted furze-roots (345)," showing how close Eustacia is to disaster, and this occurs before the weather is completely set against her; at this point, the narrator has let us know that this high-hoping debatably-heroic is doomed. Also, "weather and isolation (346)," are referred to in the context of what someone may pity her for, showing not only the author's naturalistic leanings in setting man against nature, but also the idea of modernism, showing Eustacia as detached from everything. The narrator also parallels these events to famous occasions of contemplation and death Christ's meditation and prayer at Gethsemane, the plague that ravaged firstborns in Egypt, and the fall of the Assyrian Great, Sennacherib. Christ was a sacrificial lamb whose outgrew his

contemporaries; Sennacherib could be described as a great warrior and leader that fell by his sons' hands; the plague in Egypt was prophesied by Moses, so in the hours before midnight, the Egyptians waited nervously to see if the God of the Jews would truly bring down vengeance on them. All of these stories are Biblically linked, a great contrast from the paganistic relationship Eustacia has with the world. There is, however, foreshadowing in this passage Sennacherib had a link with his killers, as Eustacia was connected to the heath and nature. Christ was in contemplation about what course of action would be best, until he was interrupted and arrested (which lead to death). The mention of the plague simply furthers the feeling of foreboding that has been instilled so far at the appointed hour, death will come. To stir more emotion into Eustacia Yeobright's death, the narrator attempts to make the reader identify her as a sympathetic character. Using Wildeve for money was "impossible to a woman with a shadow of pride left in her (346)," which is out of character for Eustacia. She had always seemed to have no qualms using men for what they could give her, but this implication evokes questions of a dynamic Mrs. Yeobright — has she changed, or does the reader simply not have a good understanding of her until this point? Regardless, this passage serves to build sympathy for Eustacia; although she needs money, she will stay true to her standards. The narrator adds to this concept by later stating that, "Anyone would have pitied her...for the other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings had imparted to her movement(346)." By stating this, the speaker claims that people would pity her not only because of his words, but by simply looking at her, you would be moved. It was so bad that, "Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her (346)."

Eustacia began the work as a beautiful and driven individual, self-assured of her future successes — by reading the end of this passage, however, one would never gather that. The narrator states “ the wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her (346).” Not only is she symbolically stuck in the heath (she no longer has wings to fly away), but she is held by force — Egdon Heath will not let her out. This adds to the isolation concept, as she is alone because she cannot go anywhere to find people. The speaker goes on in speaking of Eustacia’s lowly position by explaining that she was talking and sobbing to herself, and “ when a woman in such a situation, neither old, deaf, crazed, nor whimsical, takes upon herself to sob and soliloquise aloud there is something grievous the matter (346).” This once-pillar of self-centeredness and confidence has fallen to the lowest depths: that of the aged and insane again, the narrator attempts to direct pity toward her. Although at some points in the work one would scoff at pitying Eustacia Yeobright, this scene would change nearly any reader’s mind on the subject. While very selfish, Eustacia is one of the only truly ambitious characters in the book she wants more than her lot. By turning her into a sobbing shadow of a woman, the narrator marginalizes her former confidence, leaving one to question, why aim high...I will simply fail. Nature and fate both assailed this young lady, making her death even more tragic, as it is of no fault of her own by the time weather hit, it was too late to turn back. Even though it seems hard to pity this woman, the combination of forces against her coupled with her collapse of confidence and narratorial sympathy make her death both tragic and disillusioning.