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## Echoes of the Corporeal: The Relational Ontology of Body and Nature in *The Return of the Native*

Bedenselin Yankıları: *The Return of the Native* Romanında Beden ve Doğanın Bağlantılı Ontolojisi

Başak ÇÜN\*

### Abstract

This paper explores the interaction between affect and corporeality in Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) *The Return of the Native* (1878) with an inclusion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. Defined as the dynamic relation between bodies and environments that transcends linguistic structures, affect restructures the borders between corporeal perception and external nature. The Victorian understanding of the body-mind dichotomy is reexamined through positioning Hardy's characters and nature on a permeable plane where sensory experiences melt distinctions between the subject and the object. The paper discusses the face as the primary sensory gate, while the way Hardy's depiction of characters like Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright reveals an intricate interconnection between the corporeal and the elements of nature is exemplified. Senses such as vision and hearing underscore the fluidity of perception in the novel, and the heath itself emerges to be a living, affective entity intertwined with the human existence. By framing perception as an embodied process, the paper studies Hardy's narrative as a sphere of affective exchanges that challenge Cartesian dualism. It offers a depiction of materiality and the corporeal existing within a relational ontology.

**Keywords:** *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy, affect, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, body.

### Öz

Bu makale, Thomas Hardy'nin (1840-1928) *The Return of the Native* romanında duygulanım ve bedensellik arasındaki etkileşimi, Maurice Merleau-Ponty'nin beden fenomenolojisini de kapsayarak incelemektedir. Dilsel yapıları aşan, bedenler ve çevreler arasındaki dinamik ilişki olarak tanımlanan duygulanım, bedensel algı ve dış çevre arasındaki sınırları yeniden belirler. Viktorya dönemi beden-zihin ikiliği, Hardy'nin karakterlerinin ve doğasının, duyuşsal deneyimlerin özne ve nesne arasındaki ayrımları erittiği geçişken bir düzleme yerleştirilmesiyle yeniden değerlendirilmektedir. Makale, yüzü birincil duyuşsal geçit olarak tartışmakta, bunun yanı sıra Hardy'nin Eustacia Vye ve Clym Yeobright gibi karakterleri tasvir etme biçiminin, bedensel olan ve doğa bileşenleri arasındaki girift ara bağlantıyı dışa vurduğunu anlatmaktadır. Görme ve duyma gibi duyum şekilleri, romanda algının akışkanlığını

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vurgularken, romandaki fundalık, yaşayan, insan varlığıyla dolaşık, duygulanımsal bir varlık olarak ön plana çıkmaktadır. Dolayısıyla makale, algıyı bedenleşmiş bir süreç olarak çerçeveleyerek, Hardy'nin anlatısını, Kartezyen ikiciliğe meydan okuyan duygulanımsal takaslar sahası olarak çalışmaktadır. Maddesellik ve bedensel olanı, bağıntısal bir ontoloji içerisinde betimlemektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy, duygulanım, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, beden.

## Introduction

“Encounters” in Spinoza’s terms catalyze the body’s potential to flourish– or suppress– the moment of experience. It is, also, this very moment when one “perceives others through [their individual lives], in the tension of an experience which transcends itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 27). With its momentary aspect, affect offers that outlook into the dynamism emerging within corporeal experiences. Affect theory takes precognitive and prelinguistic corporeal exchange as the reference point in explaining the individual and collective shifts upon the interaction between bodies and environments. An anti-structuration of the existent means of perceiving the world which is heavily dominated by languages and the binaries they bring about, affect marks the lines of experience that remain outside the linguistic borders. In her book *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan evokes the impact of “feeling” the atmosphere when stepping into an environment (2004, p. 1). From the perspective of affect, any apprehension that is outside the linguistic interference is corporeal. Language only follows the body, and the body not only identifies esprit but also carries apprehension into motion (from feeling to exhibiting physical reactions) much faster than language does. The line between the spoken and the non-spoken is erased due to affect because that line is everchanging, evolving, and hence, indescribable (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 6).

Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* (1878), as William A. Cohen writes, reflects on the sensory interaction between the bodily interiors and the external world surrounding them (2009, p. xiv). Bodies and the environment are a mesh, adjacent to each other and acting like a porous whole. From this standpoint, when the novel provides descriptions of the wind, heath, or marsh, what is given is more the affect(s) experienced by the witness of the scene than the entities of that scene. The novel’s landscape, whose face-like depictions critics refer to, has commonly been studied under the concept of “faciality” introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Cohen, 2009, p. 86). This paper, however, attempts to expand the scope of affect in the novel across the body, regarding the face as the door opening to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty states as perception encompassed in the body. It first provides an outlook for the Victorian notion of the corporeal, then presents Merleau-Ponty’s approach to corporeality, and investigates Hardy’s treatment of the concept in the novel. It brings together the style of affect in the novel and Merleau-Ponty’s perception of body, showing that affect, implanted by the face and embodied by the corporeal, erases the borders between the body and the outside world, rendering them interconnected with, rather than separate from, each other. The human body and the physical world do exist with-in one another, like the two sides of the same permeable entity in whose veins affect flows to and fro. Senses of seeing and hearing, when disturbed, are backed up with proper functioning of touching. This body does not provide a secure territory where senses work their ways up to cultivate a smooth experience of feeling; rather, it becomes a realm of odds for changeable ways of existing in the world. The non-alignment between the body and the subject it ought to sense suggests that the body has the capacity to unmake the human, rather than to secure its coherence and integrity, and opens possibilities for mutable ways of being in the world, in terms of materiality and identity. The body full of affect is not a psychic or sublime organ but is riddled and permeant.

## Victorian Corporeal, Merleau-Ponty, and Affect

Before investigating Merleau-Ponty’s body and the traces of affect in Hardy’s novel, the Victorian understanding of the corporeal should be visited to gain contextual insight. William A. Cohen draws on the typical Victorian notion of the human essence overwhelmed with the social, political, and medical agents – one which issues body and soul in separation (2009, p. 1). Fruits of industrialization and colonization, like mass production, urbanization, and new colonial districts intensified the problematic relationality

between the physical body and the non-physical, which led to the emergence of the modernized body, inclusive of many external factors such as labor force, ethnicity, and the new sciences. Theories of evolution and geological studies hammered the long-lived notion of a soul existing beyond the mortal flesh and controlling it; evolutionary assertions on the journey of the physical body throughout adaptive processes proved the immediacy of soul's relevance to the physicality of the body.

The history of the physical-non-physical division (oftentimes referred to as the body-mind dichotomy) and the generation of affect does not move in a linear direction. Although the overall approach toward the issue was materialistic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, there have been certain shifts, one of which is evident in the emergence of psychoanalytical theory in the early 1900s. The emergence of the scientific study of the mind, followed by the establishment of psychology, strived to position the feeling of self in the physical body, which, at last, manifested the existence of the mind as a material entity (Kearns, 1987, pp. 88-134). Darwin's theorization of the bodily survival possible only through adaptation to the outside world had already proposed the notion that the conscious is rooted outside of the human body rather than "surviving" in it. The new science of the mind opposed any philosophical or biological assumption that would put the conscious outside the body, suggesting that perceiving the mind as separate from the body and as some intangible phenomenon precluded it from being investigated the way other natural occurrences were investigated and that it was not possible to show improvement in the study of the mind unless the body was taken much more seriously (Maudsley, 1870, p. 12).

The Victorian era is abundant in the number of political, religious, and scientific figures opposing this newly emerging, supported physicality of the mind. Still, materialistic inclination toward understanding the psyche, and hence, the mind proved itself valid due to certain significant nineteenth-century physicians and psychologists, among whom are George Henry Lewes and Alexander Bain. They examined the bodily implications of abstract human features, the mind being the most prominent. Bain is, for instance, unequivocal in his assertion that body and mind are two inseparable entities (1873, p. 4). In Chapter VII of *Mind and Body*, he confronted the traditional approach to the soul as an immaterial entity, declaring that soul and the mind are corporeal, soul "[having] corporeal properties of extension and movement, [being] the moving power of the whole system" (1882, p. 148). Another critical philosopher and sociologist, Herbert Spencer sought a bodily concept of the mind. He stated that "all the functional phenomena which living bodies are. . . incidents in the maintenance of a correspondence between inner and outer actions", and "every trait exhibited by organic bodies . . . must be referable to this continuous adjustment between their actions and the actions going around them" (1864, p. 95). For Spencer, the theory of evolution made a division between the body and the soul, though not a precise one: internal texture of the corporeal, when reaching the exterior surface of the body, absorbed the features it encountered there, and the exterior, when penetrating the internal corporeal, mixed with it. The interior and the exterior were interchangeable, their surface being affordable for each other. The internal corporeal, in this case, was the material for Spencer—the only aspect it differed from the external body was its type of matter, but still, it was a psychological (as well as a physiological) matter.

Spencer specifically noted that the skin and the sensory organs are transitive in that they had, in time, transformed from an external entity into passages that let the outside world flow into the internal corporeal. He thus moved forward to discussing the evolutionary phases of the sense organs that functioned as the border gate. The evolution of the eyes is rather remarkable since they are associated with a pattern of becoming the window to the soul. However, they are fundamentally based on "dermal structures" where "the double layer" of the integument have evolved (1867, p. 317). He announced the dynamic interchange between the psychic and the physical, where, upon the saturation of the relevant tension (be it intellectual or emotional), there occurred an outflow of symptoms onto the physical body. While this cathartic process helped to relieve the tension, the excitement generated by the tension resulted in a similarly affective manner (1860, p. 398). In this regard, he located sensory and digestive organs as the carriers operating to receive life in(to) the interior and release from the exterior. Studying the Victorian science of the body, when considered, is equivalent to studying the relations between the material and the immaterial perceptions of the soul.

As for the term “affect”, it is originated from Spinoza’s (1632–1677) “affectus” in his prominent *Ethics*, used in reference to a sensed shift in the body’s potential to move upon meeting another body (2010, p. 64). Our corporeal modes of existence, sharing the same material essence though being completely different from one another, get into contact and interact with each other, increasing or decreasing each other’s potential to continue “being” for the benefit of their own selves. This shift occurring because of this continuum of interactions is affect in Spinoza’s language. While high and joyful affects boost the corporeal power to move, sad affects tend to reduce it. A world full of affect is not optional; it is inescapable, just as mutual change is. Andrew Hewitt states at this point that exposing oneself to the outside world to be affected by it means, in turn, affecting the world, and an escape from or a rejection of affecting the world comes to mean the loss of one’s own power (2019, p. 113). Meanwhile, bodies from the perspective of affect range from the organic to the inorganic, meaning various beings are involved in affective exchange.

In one fundamental resource on affect, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth warn that even their identifications of orientations regarding affect do not provide an absolute account of tendencies to fully comprehend the current trends in affect theory (2010, p. 5). Still, it should be stated that most arguments on affect theory are centered on the corporeal, which constantly changes within its interactions (in ways that either accelerate or restrain the corporeal experience), and so, is a sphere of interchanging potentials. In this respect, as many affect theorists agree on, affect is inevitably a matter of power relations, issuing not the habitual superiority-inferiority dynamic but the reciprocal actions of various bodies in the world (Slaby and Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 32).

The concept of affect was widely referenced by Gilles Deleuze, too, and his translator, Brian Massumi, who, as a critic of cultural studies, refers to affect as a “prepersonal intensity” that moves between bodies and leads them to incalculable results (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi). Sara Ahmed, a significant researcher in the field of affect theory along with feminism and queer theory, explores the relationality between affect and phenomenology, underlining the fact that the dynamic force orienting us to and away from an object is “affect”. She claims that bodies are moved by the inclination they have toward something, and those inclinations, in turn, affect the relationality between bodies, which make even the distant objects close enough to “leave an impression” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 3). Conceiving the corporeal in motion while allied with other components of the external world that mingle in a constant process of shift is crucial to understanding Hardy’s literary interpretation of the internal and the external world in *The Return of the Native*.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology considers bodily encounters with the outside world from the viewpoint of perception, which is, for Merleau-Ponty, essentially corporeal. The dualistic rationalism of Descartes is invalidated by Merleau-Ponty’s subjectification of even the most immaterial entities and his placement of such phenomena in the body. The incorporation of the external world into the mind is only through sensory perception, and this must transcend the essentialist body-mind duality. Merleau-Ponty insists on the argument that the mind that perceives is merely the body in the form of matter, rooted in the corporeal, not to be found as a result of the doings of the external activities to the body; neither is perception a mere product of consciousness (1964, p. 3). Perception, after all, amalgamates the corporeal with the external world, a sensory process hosting affect meanwhile. The corporeal, its sensory organs included, is the unit drawing knowledge of and from the external world. Since Merleau-Ponty assumes that the workings of the mind, i.e. knowing, and of the sensory organs, i.e. feeling are both incarnate phenomena, the bodily subject sensing the environment turns out to be an embodied object at the same time. In his detailing of the interchange of the corporeal and the world, Merleau-Ponty refers to the visual perception, for instance, stating that “he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them- he who is one of them” (1968, pp. 134-135). Merleau-Ponty’s main concentration is on vision and visual sense probably because it is the most discursively elevated sensory device.

In Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the eye, we see what Laura U. Marks defines as haptic visuality, that is, the type of seeing based on the sense of touch, and even on the senses of smell and taste, which makes it quite different from the optic visuality (2000, p. 163). He suggests that for the eye, vision is the means of touching, and such an approach disturbs the typical affiliations with the eye as a sensory organ.

He further claims that seeing and hearing are two senses opening the furthest gap between the corporeal and the outside world in that these acts do not always indicate their doer: the body is able to see without itself being seen or hear without it being heard. By associating sight with the properties of the haptic, Merleau-Ponty dismantles the distant eye from its conventional place and locates it on a sphere where there is mutual exchange between the corporeal and the exterior. The sense of sight is deposed from its throne where it had long remained disembodied so long as eyes function bidirectionally- by both letting the exterior be absorbed by the body and making the body a visible object for the exterior. Merleau-Ponty asks, "How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough?", and responds as follows:

Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. (1968, p. 133)

He continues by informing that this does not apply differently when it comes to sight, stating, "as. . . every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the 'tactile qualities'. We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible. . ." (1968, p. 134).

Merleau-Ponty refers to the concurrent interaction between the body and the external world as the corporeal. In other words, he conceptualizes the body, the flesh, as a process. The idea that the corporeal is a process is mostly recognizable when the sensing entity realizes themselves to be sensed at the same time. While such relationality declares that the interaction is mutual, it does not promise the syntypicism of the two sides— indeed, they should remain different since both the sensing and the sensed may exchange roles on the condition that they "are" apart. The framework of interactive functioning of the sensory qualities, and the attribution of the haptic to the sight as well as to hearing and touching is, as this paper argues, the very formulation of the sensationalism underlying Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. The senses being the principal component of the self, the body is the playfield of experience and exchange, rather than being a simple performative corpus. Merleau-Ponty's such conceptualization of the corporeal as a "process" is embodied on the face, the territory where major sensory organs pervade. In a way, the body is dominated by the existence of the face and facial sensations, making itself apparent in the novel. Hence, the common reference to face in the novel corresponds with the reference to the corporeal. Hardy shows this very fact when he depicts the territory of the face both as a portal for the entry of physical sensations and as a meta affiliated with the outside world.

Face, seeming separate from but belonging to the body, is the agent through which many senses are absorbed into the body, and in this way, are "embodied". This feature underlines the insufficiency of a definition of the face as a canvas reflecting human emotions. His depictions of the face should be read as the embodiment of the interior and the perception as a material entity.

### **Affect and the Corporeal in *The Return of the Native***

Investigating Hardy's writing under the light of affect and Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body, we arrive at how Hardy takes the body's position away from one of a subject and locates it as an object, an area for the affect to show itself off. The corporeal in *The Return of the Native* never physically oversteps the external world, which allows Hardy to move beyond the humanist, Cartesian understanding of the body. Embodiment of the perceptive experience reaffirms Hardy's subjectivity-bound bodily references to senses.

In the novel, Hardy's prioritization of the corporeal is initiated by his reference to the face as the realm that both senses and is sensed, a display of how he repudiates the analyses equating the face with the expression of an intrinsic, deep psychological world. Senses and their perception are certainly physical, of which face constitutes the primal category for Hardy. *The Return of the Native*, therefore, should be read as the fictional enactment of the process of perception, and of the interconnection of the senses in various



affective ways. Another significant aspect of Hardy's narrative in terms of affect is that it reflects how the corporeal experiences an uninterrupted relationality with the external world, which, in turn, renders the external world, the landscape, the environment a porous body, another corporeal that lies at the body's elbow and is in constant communication with the body. He does this by bringing together the corporeal and the nonhuman, and thus, eradicating the sharp separation of the two. Contributing to the construction of the human as contingent with the body, the body which is infinitely porous to the world through its sensations, he underpins the subjective embodiment of the corporeal, using the face as the gate to the bodily experience, as a meta.

Thematically, the face in the novel operates as the body's primal territory of perception, the door of entrance to and exit for the physical affect. The narrative's sheer focus on the materiality of the soul and the feelings is correlated with its surrogation of sensory organs for one another, and such surrogation is mostly to serve for a closer interaction between the interior and the exterior. The narrative abounds in the instances when the face both absorbs and projects the incongruous meanings on different strata. The most apparent moments of the corporeal mingling with the external world are probably the ones led by Diggory Venn, the reddleman in the novel. He owns unique features, one of which concerns his affiliation with the red dye. His occupation is told to transfer from the previous century, and he belongs to a group prone to extinction. He does not have a reason to be on the heath even though he is involved in agriculture since no agricultural activity could exist on this arid territory. In the following lines, we see that Venn is not on the heath to perform his job at all; he is there to watch over Eustacia and her lover. Also, the narrative perspective implies that he is there due to his startling red face. Just as a red dye "spreads its lively hues over everything it lights on" (2018, p. 83), Diggory is spread across the landscape, existing as a part of it, watching over the others surrounding him. His skin color indicates that he is a member of the Terra. While affect finds comfort on his face, like on the face of other characters, evident in his face becoming rigid with thought (2018, p. 84), his porosity is on a more material level than the others'. His physical countenance is the focal point in the narrative.

Another scene is when Thomasin Yeobright, whose marriage ceremony failed, is transported by Diggory Venn on his truck. While Yeobright sleeps, Diggory lightens up her face that "repos[ed] in a nest of wavy chestnut hair" with his lantern (2018, p. 39). Her closed eyes are not free of the light standing as the pinnacle of the illuminating craftsmanship, and over the hopeful face lay "a film of anxiety and grief" like a foreign substance (2018, p. 39). In the following lines we read a demonstration of her facial components such as the intensity of her scarlet lips getting more visible with the absence of "the neighbouring and more transient colour of her cheek" (2018, p. 39), in a form of visual arts. Both the face and the affect it hosts are active, which, as they move, initiate solid change on the face as well. Hardy tells that hopefulness forms the base of her face, and anxiety, together with grief, arrives on it to coat the surface. The emergence of an invisible affect on the facial exterior is materialized in the shape of mobile shades, symbolizing that even shadows, initially serving to color the face, ultimately pours into the cracks of the face it sweeps.

In his examination of Hardy's novels and their connections to visuality, J. B. Bullen states that characters in *The Return of the Native* are first incorporated into the chain of events via the way their faces look. The various ways the characters' faces appear work to affirm the emergence of those characters in that certain setting, and the exotic setting in which they appear only increases the wish to urgently demystify the setting and make the faces visible (1986, p. 99). All facial components including the hair are located on a surface where material entities meet and mix the comprehension of the mind into the feeling of affect. The face is a fluid base where the bodily sensations are shaped into the structure of a material entity. Hence, it should not be a bodily component from which certain signs of the soul could be read; it is, rather, that porous floor where mental and bodily echoes, and the external unite and reformulate the body. This is evident in the depiction of Clym Yeobright's face; it inhabits the minds of the other characters referring to him as a dubious meta. It is encompassed by "legible" messages- products of the mind feeding on the exterior surface: A bright mind must be nurtured by "the oil of life". This, Hardy writes, is a physical need, and in Clym one sees the "mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh" (2018, p. 146). Clym's body hosts the clashing *opposites*- flesh and spirit. Since these two are rooted in the same space and connect

to each other, whatever is witnessed in the external world injects itself into the interior, the body. In calling to mind Merleau-Ponty's bodily perception, Hardy showcases the interior shifts on the exterior through Clym's face, on which sorrows made changes- but these sorrows, Hardy states, are internal, and Clym has a "wrinkled mind" (2018, p. 405). Hardy's subjects, in this sense, are also objects whose internal existences are profoundly physical. While hosting affect, the face also gravitates toward the external world through the senses. The face is not different from the way skin functions in this sense (Spencer, 1867, p. 296). Although Clym's face is decorated with decipherable meanings, these are not fixed, stable, or single.

When Eustacia Vye enters the stage in Book I, her sense of hearing dominates all her pregiven features long after we read her stand on the heath, all alone and tense, in an audial interaction with the external world. It initially feels as if every duty a human face is expected to perform is subsumed by her ears. The way she is narrated here is untypical of any depictions of bodily features- her manners and appearance feel unique to herself but unclear, disturbing and discrete, all of which mark her as an entity belonging in, or even being a joint of the nature. In her initial introduction as the "queen of solitude" (2018, p. 13), and later, as the "queen of night" (2018, p. 76), she is depicted as a "figure" indiscernible from the wind blowing the hair, or one whispering to the ear. Rather than the narrative explicating the environmental setting, nature serves to explicate the existence and appearance of Eustacia: "Her nerves extended into those tresses, and her temper could always be softened by stroking them down. When her hair was brushed she would instantly sink into stillness and look like the Sphinx" (2018, p. 70). The novel's protagonist is not as much a physical body as she is a transitive being in and of nature. She has "pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries", through which her soul's "flamelike" color is visible (2018, p. 70). Her lips are depicted as a living object, given as making a range of movements apart from speaking, whose shape exceeds the sharpness of the edge of a spear (2018, p. 71). All those movements of the mouth, denoting impulsion and sexuality, imply the exchange of affect over the face.

Hence, while Clym's sense of seeing is prevalent in the first stage, it is the sense of hearing on Eustacia's side. One scene depicting the interconnectedness of the sensory perception is Eustacia's secretly listening to a talk among three, including Mrs. Yeobright and Thomasin. On the one hand, she is not able to see them; on the other hand, "it seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing" (2018, p. 122). The narrative then gives the example of Dr. Kitto (referencing Herbert Spencer's work, where he discusses the evolution of the eye as an organ from the skin), who claimed such sensation in his body that he had been able to perceive the exterior through the body the way he would through the ears. Hearing replaces touching well enough in Eustacia's sensing the exterior. This compensation serves to stress the absolute bodiliness of sensations- her ears act as the nerves strolling around the complete body. Or one might visualize the interior canal of the ear burst out and become the coverage of the body- the skin. Operating as the fundamental apparatus of feeling, face is located back into the body here.

Clym's senses operate in the same way as Eustacia's when his sight is lost in the following scenes. The narrator declares that Clym, at this instant, senses "the life" of the ones around him, namely, Thomasin, the maids and the baby only in the form of sounds; however, his ear tangles with the noises those make such deeply that he can almost see their visual existences (2018, p. 406). When the sensory perceptions leave the stage, neither Eustacia nor Clym hesitates to switch to other means of sensing on the list, and those means, for Hardy, enable a much more straightforward exchange between the internal and the external than sight does. This, again, resonates with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological argument where sight abandons the remote positionality it has been granted for centuries, and takes closer place across the subjects.

Regarding the juxtaposition of the sensing and the sensed, it should be noted that Thomasin's face as the object is observed by Diggory and Mrs. Yeobright through the illuminating lantern. Hence, the observing subjects are also the ones that objectify the face. Like the position of Clym's face, Thomasin's face operates like a surface porous on both sides, whose modes as a subject and an object shift to one another. Even while Thomasin's eyes are shut, the light inside them is visible. Then, the narrative is led toward the way this meta, the face, functions as a sensing subject. As the narrative continues, this fact only becomes more factual, evident in the scene when her eyes open. Hardy tells the reader that Thomasin's eyes are not made to be looked at, something both Mrs. Yeobright and the reddleman are aware of; as she parts

her lips “with something of anticipation”, the several “fractions of thought” are demonstrated by the facial changes, all of which are “exhibited by the light”. This is also the moment Hardy informs that her “transparent life was disclosed” and “the flow of her existence” was seen “passing within her” just like an entity (2018, p. 39). The sensing, life in this excerpt, takes over the role of being sensed.

In *The Return of the Native*, the lack of one sensory perception means not a “lack” but reaching an alternative conscious other than the one opened by the lacking sense. At certain moments, one may not have a clear knowledge of things- instead, they may clearly command the relationality of those things, and that is called “intuition” (2018, pp. 202-203). The novel removes the separation between the corporeal and the external world during the process of forming meaningful connections. The blowing wind is another embodiment of this endeavor when it enables to “view by ear” the characteristics of the landscape, making audible the beginning and endpoint of the heath to Eustacia and Damon through the “acoustic pictures” coming from the dark view; all the natural features carry voices that do not fall behind the visible aspects of the landscape, such as colors and geographical formations (2018, p. 91). The natural scenes being acoustical necessitate reconceiving the connection between the sensing and the sensed, which molds vision into hearing, meanwhile rendering the environmental setting the carrier of the affect through hearing, and the ear, merely an inactive receiver of a vision. As Gillian Beer states, eyes and ears are proximate in Hardy’s calculation of the senses (2000, p. 221). Hardy’s presentation of the heath as “a place perfectly accordant with man’s nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring” (2018, p. 5), in other words, as a living organism that shapes the lives of the characters corresponds to his naturalist pen. Among many instances of Eustacia uniting with the external world through audition, we find the scene where she stands alone on the barrow while waiting for her lover, and how the wind, meanwhile, gets into, out of, and through her sensing of it. The wind flows all around and through the corporeal, penetrating it like a piece of music emerging from the desolate heather-bells, themselves also depicted as small ears creating affect in Eustacia’s ears. To her, the individual sounds are so faded that even the cumulated sound of hundreds scarcely breaks the silence, and the infinite number of sounds of the whole heath reaches her ears as a thin, fluctuating murmur. Still, each distinct sound is truly and differently evocative, being able to arouse deep thoughts about their origins (2018, p. 57). One could almost bring to their vision the intense plurality producing this harmoniousness by imagining how each “tiny trumpet” (2018, p. 57) resonates with the blow of the wind as though they were altogether a vast crater.

This depiction of the heath music like a “touch”ing experience generates the internal vision. Capturing Eustacia’s body, these sounds do not move reciprocally with the porous body of Eustacia but substitute it. They are corporeally perceivable most probably due to the similarity between the corporeal’s own music and themselves. The “treble, tenor and bass notes” in the gulf, “the baritone buzz” of a tree included, the “linguistic peculiarity” of the heath, and the notes of the wind greatly resemble the residuals of a human song (2018, p. 58). The audial nesting given here is enacted in touching as well. The notes resembling the human song are so faint, dry and paper-like that the physicality of its origins could be felt as if it is touched (2018, p. 57). The sound here, hence, is a meta raising the heathbells from the soil and thrusting them into the corporeal, i.e. inside Eustacia’s ears which are already in the appearance of a sensing surface, rather than being two passive holes awaiting the audial penetration. Again, there does not exist a perceptible separation of the sensing and the sensed, of the internal and the external, or of the subject and the object.

Elisha Cohn declares that “fugitive and impersonal” states of affect occur outside the individual, and cannot be simplified as to refer to emotions one may feel about them (2018, p. 563). These states locate the body in a process where it is an “intimate public” that soaks up the things outside of itself. The term, in this sense, offers an individualistic way to apprehend generated knowledge. In the novel, Eustacia resembles the November winds she hears to a “worn whisper” which is “dry and papery” and which “brush[es] so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutiae in which it originated could be realized as by the touch of the multitude of last summer’s dried heath” (2018, p. 57). The sound of the gusts, the narrative declares, is the reason for Eustacia’s tenseness, where the reader rightfully thinks that the world around her penetrates her porous layers. At this setting where “combination of hundreds” rather than



an individual sound “just emerged from silence”, (2018, p. 57), Eustacia utters a sigh which, Hardy describes, is only “another phrase of the same discourse” as the “combined multitudes” mingling around (2018, p. 58). Her articulation becomes one with the others, flying away with them (2018, p. 58). The wind, the bushes, the heather-bells, breaking the silence as Eustacia does, are sewed on a common ground, and this ground is in constant motion, whether on a small or a large scale. In these lines, affect is introduced through this intertwined meeting of the corporeal and the heath, out of which both parties emerge having shifted in several forms, and ready to lean toward their upcoming encounter. Eustacia’s sigh is depicted as a sound blending itself so organically into the other sounds that where it starts and where it ends are barely distinguishable: her utterance is only another phrase of the nature’s discourse (2018, p. 64). In the following sentences, Hardy declares the sigh to be a “spasmodic abandonment” that her brain organizes when it cannot regulate the encounter. This sigh renders Eustacia the co-pilot of the wind, not someone being exposed to it- all these refer to the unity of the body and the nature surrounding it, the corporeal and the external world being one inseparable producer of the sound.

In the novel, therefore, depictions of nature are intertwined with the human body, regardless of the means of senses being referred to. Hardy’s portrayal of the landscape signifies a deep relation to corporeal perception. While the elements of the natural world obtain their meanings through the existence of a human body, the processes of the human body, mind and soul turn out to be the constituents of nature. Starting out with the face as the gate opening to the sensational experiences of the corporeal, the novel expands the bodily territory onto the natural landscape. Jane Bennett’s discourse on all bodies’ capacity to act and to leave impact, whether gross or light, finds absolute meaning in the narrative (2010, p. 5). It can be rightfully assumed that all bodies in the novel, ranging from the physical setting to the corporeal, from any geological object to the weather, exchange affect in their interaction with one another. In other words, in the novel’s setting, there is not a single substance which does not partake in the generation of affect.

Because of the reflexivity between the corporeal and the external world, we read in Hardy a seamless interface between the heath and the physical bodies of the dwellers. After a careful reading of Eustacia’s position, where hearing becomes inseparable from the wind blowing across the heath, one should take a second look at the beginning of the novel, where Hardy not only introduces the heath as a desolate setting in which human bodies only rarely come in sight, but also enacts it as a substantive character in the narrative. Cohen explains the various references made to the physicality of the heath (2009, p. 163). However, any depiction given falls behind providing an objective description of the landscape- they rather give nominative representations of the nature that postulate the existence of the corporeal as the observer of it. At the beginning of Chapter I, the sky and the earth are stated to meet at a sharply defined horizon line. A furze-cutter, looking above the sky, would continue their work, but looking down, they would give it up and go home (2018, p. 3). Besides that, the dark face of the heath, Hardy writes, intensifies the evening, while it could “retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread” (2018, p. 3). Here, the narrative attributes all features a face can possibly exhibit to the landscape. The reference to the furze-cutter (originally Clym) also matters here since they are a figuration of the corporeal ready to transmit the external into themselves through their sensory perceptions. They are there to absorb the sensational implications of the nature, just as the darkness of the earth adds to the darkness of the evening. Even in this prosaic introduction of the furze-cutter to the scene, the atmosphere is completely dependent on sensory perceptions- the heath encloses the corporeal. Hardy’s sentences on the features of the heath linguistically demonstrate the landscape as the agent of actions in the sentences, but indeed, they allude to a potentially existent body in the setting, which can tremble (“shaken”) or get into horror (“dread”). Portrayed in the form of a countenance, the landscape in the novel is much more than the embodied shape of a face; it involves all faces potential in the narrative, and as such, is a concrete area of abstract perceptibility. Hardy, therefore, embodies the landscape and introduces it as a playfield of sensational experiences. The heath fulfills a role much more than being the area where the corporeal ravel out for sensory experiences. The narrative declares that the landscape in the novel is in total accordance with human nature: it is, like the corporeal, “slighted”, “enduring”, “singularly colossal”, and “mysterious in its swarthy monotony” (2018, p. 5). There is also solitude read on its face, as on the face of many humans. The heath’s humanlike

characteristics imply the relationality between the corporeal and the external based on exchange. The two attend one another; they exchange, and generate affect through the existence of each other.

The heath is best felt when it cannot be seen clearly, the narrative states, and its thorough explanation lies beneath this environment of invisibility. Through frequent insistence that the heath is to be sensed rather than be seen in the narrative, Hardy presents a cocktail of sensory perceptions, generated only by the corporeal presence, to absorb the scene completely. Such analysis, however, is not limited to the claim that touching is more influential as an agent of affect; rather, in the novel is a homogenous union of the subject and the object, both of which lose their borders to each other without becoming the same. Like the case of the furze-cutter, the reference to the nonoperating sense of sight in Clym foreshadows his corporeal union with the landscape– the narrative tells in Chapter 2 of Book III that he, indeed, is like an organ of that body: “He might be said to be its product” (2018, p. 185). Also, the blend of Eustacia’s sighs with the blowing wind was a proof on how hearing leads to an internal collapse in her; later, the relation between her and the heath becomes more physically discernible. Rather than a passive recipient of the external world, the eyes are the carriers of her eyedrops: the sounds of her tears dropping onto her lips are like the repetitions of the drips of the rain onto the earth, dripping off her mantle (2018, p. 377).

## Conclusion

In *The Return of the Native*, the corporeal and the external world do not stand for each other but engage in a reciprocal relationship in that they actively intertwine via the senses and are interconnected through the affect generated during those sensational experiences. These two elements shape, use and adapt to each other in a continuum. Eustacia and her two lovers, Wildeve and later Clym, reserve the elements of nature as tools to signify their existence to each other. While Wildeve denotes he is there by splashing a pebble into the pond and making sound (2018, p. 362), Clym’s presence is signified by a distant celestial event, which is the lunar eclipse (2018, p. 209). As the landscape is both sensed and sensing, so are all natural phenomena in it– they are adjacent to the corporeal, overloaded with signs typically associated with the body, arriving at the protagonists’ senses of vision or hearing. From the merge of the corporeal and the external world in the narrative, one does not elicit the takeover of the material in the deep tunnels of the soul but the corporeal relationality with the world through affect. The soul may own the throne as a Victorian psychic inducement; however, Hardy takes the body as a canvas and paints the soul on it through affect. Presenting the body and the surrounding world in a continuum, the novel encompasses time, place, and action included in– and including– the corporeal where sensory experiences generate affect, enabling the employment of a contemporary lens in understanding Hardy’s unique perception of the senses.

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