

THE INTERCHANGE BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE IN  
THOMAS HARDY'S THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

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Hardy's novels deal with the dramatic interplay between man and nature. In Hardy's vision nature is the conditioning force of human existence. He views the universe as an impersonal mechanism working by unknown principles mysterious to man, and thus operating in total indifference to human existence. This cruel and indifferent law of nature is foregrounded in every one of Hardy's texts as a predominant concept - Fate. It is an impersonal force, but it plays a personal and an active role in the lives of the characters. Therefore it appears in various forms. Sometimes it is a natural force, appearing in the form of bad weather. Henchard's plans to become rich are ruined by a bad harvest in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Sometimes it is a conventional force. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, convention in the person of Angel becomes effective in Tess's destruction. It may even appear as a personal weakness as in the case of Jude, in *Jude the Obscure*. Since Jude cannot control his sexual temperament, his life is ruined. But the majestic power of Fate appears at its most impressive in *The Return of the Native* as Egdon Heath.

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In all instances, Fate is the privileged term in the hierarchy between Man and Nature. In this study I will attempt to show how it informs a deconstructive reading of *The Return of the Native*, by reversing the binary opposition of Fate/Man. This process of reversal and displacement is affected by the text's own narrative strategy to no end. In other words, I will attempt to disclose the text's logic of deferral of any finality of meaning by means of its constant reversal of binary oppositions of organizing terms which claim to settle into a unity and coherence at first sight, but transgress their inherent totality of meaning at a deeper textual level. It is this constant reversal of binary oppositions within the text that leads us to the core of Hardy's conception of Fate and character.

Dorothy Van Ghent states about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that "The subject is mythological, for it places the human protagonist in dramatic relationship with the nonhuman and orients his destiny among preternatural powers" (201). This statement applies to all of Hardy's tragic novels. Hardy exposes the tragedy inherent in the lives of the people he portrays in his novels. The dramatic conflict between individuals and the powers of nature inevitably makes the scope of his novels tragic. These novels are grouped under the collective title of "Wessex Novels."<sup>1</sup> They present the poor inhabitants of Wessex, the Southwestern area of England and Hardy's birthplace, Dorset. Their poverty passions, aspirations and their struggle in the face of disintegration of the old social and economic circumstances introduce us into a tragic aura of life. Hardy saw the underlying tragedy in the lives of the Wessex people and represented their vulnerable position within the oppressive social system and under indifferent natural law. Within this framework, human suffering is presented in a dignified clash with destiny. Moreover, the Wessex novels reflect, in a poetically resonant narrative the local coloring and the folkloric elements in the Southwestern

counties of England. Within such a thematic structure, Hardy enhanced the sense of tragedy by dealing, especially, with the fundamental problems of life reduced to their basic elements, such as birth, death, pain and passions of men and women.

According to Hardy, the novelist's task was to point out "the sorriness underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things" (*Life*, April 19, 17)<sup>2</sup> This view is certainly caused by his observations of Wessex life, and it produced painful dramas of man's apparent helplessness in a setting which is a "determinant environment viewed as physical or social causation, something over which the individual has little individual control" (Wellek and Warren 221). Hardy "preferred this setting because he thought that in such a society human existence appeared at its most elemental, with its naked structure unconcealed by the superficial trappings of more sophisticated modes of existence" (Cecil 32). In Hardy's view human existence is inseparable from the moods of nature. Man's dependence on "sun, rain, snow, wind, dawn, darkness, mist" (Cecil 65) bring him into an inevitable contact with the changing tempers of nature. And man always appears in conflict with the impersonal forces of nature which is the symbol for Fate.

Hardy considered the novel as a serious art form through which he could express his view of life. For him a serious novel should be "impassive in its tone and tragic in its developments," and a story "must present the unusual, it must be exciting or worth telling" (*Life* 362). Hardy's love of story-telling produced stories which always dealt with the problem of balancing the uncommon with the ordinary. Therefore, his subject is always man's position in nature. When man projects his desires and aspirations onto nature expecting such human values as judgement, righteousness and reason, he realizes that nature does not respond in accord. As Hillis Miller argues, "Events happen as they do happen. They have neither value in

themselves nor value in relation to any end beyond them" (13). Human consciousness makes its emergence in nature "accidentally from the play of physical causes" (Miller 12). Human consciousness, however it may have been a part of the natural causes, is detached from nature. It is different from its source. And this dualism in life resists any attempts of reconciliation, because nature is indifferent to suffering and pain whereas man cares for all the injustices he sees. Tess cries out loud against it in protest: "Once victim, always victim-that's the law" (361). Jude is sickened when he observes that "mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another" (qtd. in Miller 13). And Eustacia rebels against it with full emotional force: "O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom..." (122). Thus we see that human response and the impersonal operations of Fate are being held in continuous tension. Man and Nature are the "warring forces of signification" (Johnson 5) in Hardy's novels as subjects of study. This dichotomy between man and nature is represented within unhappy themes which foreground joy/sorrow, good/evil, and emotional force/physical force pairings, among many others.

*The Return of the Native* opens with a poem on its title page which signals the unhappy theme to come:

To sorrow  
I bade good morrow  
And though to leave her far away behind;  
But cheerily, cheerily,  
She loves me dearly;  
She is so constant to me and so kind.  
I would decieve her,  
And so leave her  
But ah! she is so constant and so kind.

But the novel is far from bidding good morrow to sorrow. On the contrary, sorrow underlies its tragic mode.

*The Return of the Native* is concerned with the relationships of two major characters who are the main actors of its tragic

structure : Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye. They live on Egdon Heath whose presence dominates the plot as the ultimate signified. Clym returns from Paris, leaving his business in diamond trade, and Eustacia comes from Budmouth with dreams of returning to the splendors of city life. There is also Wildeve who has trained as an engineer, and Clym's niece Thomasin Yeobright who marries Wildeve after a first misfortunate attempt. Wildeve is also Eustacia's lover before he finally settles with Thomasin, and before Eustacia is fascinated by the promise of Parisian life she sees in Clym. Between Clym and Eustacia Mrs. Yeobright is placed as a social materialist and as a strong-headed figure who does her best to prevent Clym from marrying Eustacia. Amidst these characters we have Diggory Venn, the reddleman, whose "unselfish love" for Thomasin makes him interfere with the affairs and lives of all these characters like an "automation" (290). He is also the emblem for poetic existence such as found in ballads and fairy-tales.

The grouping of characters informs the text's strategy of constant reversal of binaries within: The text both invites an allegorical reading and then subverts its consistency. Positioning an opposition between two characters such as Wildeve/Eustacia, Eustacia/Mrs. Yeobright, Clym/Eustacia and Eustacia/Egdon Heath, and then allowing each character to take on the place of its opposite, Hardy constructs his plot in a constant pattern of displacement. For example, Wildeve and Eustacia are not actually contrasting characters as they are positioned in the plot. Despite their different reasons to be attracted to each other on the surface, they actually share the same attitude towards life. They share the same negative feelings towards their environment. They both hate the heath and want to escape from it. "You hate the heath as much as ever; that I know" says Wildeve to which Eustacia replies: 'Tis my cross, my shame, and

will be my death!" (139). Eustacia leads a lonely existence on the heath with her grandfather Captain Vye, and she dreams of experiencing some great love as she says in her prayer: "send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die" (122). She becomes attached to Wildeve not because she genuinely loves him, but because there is no other object of love around her to inflame her imagination and feelings. She idealizes Wildeve "for want of a better object" (123). Wildeve, on the other hand, is not an honest and devoted lover. He has deserted Eustacia to marry Thomasin, but has now come back to Eustacia because of a problem in his marriage licence. But he is not sure of his love for her either. In this context Wildeve /Eustacia opposition will be reversed in terms of constancy and inconstancy, when they assume the conduct of their opposite. Wildeve appears in the beginning as a inconstant lover and Eustacia is constant in her resolve to keep him. But they change places. Eustacia losses her interest after she hears that Thomasin is not interested in Wildeve either, and her constancy changes into inconstancy, especially when she never bothers to appear, as they had agreed, to tell him her decision about his proposal to go to America as a married couple. She lets him get married to Thomasin which turns out to be her great tragic mistake. Later in the novel, she dances with him at a festival, seems to encourage his feelings for herself, but never displays a resolved attitude.

The opposition between Eustacia and Clym in terms of love and hate is also reversed to a disastrous tragic end. Hardy introduces Clym and Eustacia as natures opposed in certain ways. When this opposition is reversed into a union, disaster strikes them. This is overtly presented in their attitudes to the heath: "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym" (232). Their love for each other in the end turns into bitter hatred due to their totally different feelings for the heath.

Clym feels as a pure product of the heath: "He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours" (231). Yet Clym has been sent to Budmouth, to London and to Paris to take up a trade in diamonds. When he returns to the heath he discloses his desire to stay in order to do good for his fellow countrymen. He says: "But I hate that business of mine, and I want to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it—a schoolmaster to the poor and the ignorant..." (233). Nevertheless, his very presence on Egdon stimulates Eustacia to dreams of escape into the "glittering splendours" of Paris. Eustacia's formation is in reverse pattern. She grew up in Budmouth, a seaside resort of sophisticated and fashionable society, and she came to Egdon to live with her grandfather. "I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season. The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me" she says to Clym to which the replies: "To my mind it is most exhilarating, and strengthening and soothing. I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world" (245). Clym is an idealist, planning a revolutionary educational scheme. But his pride and his Parisienne past attract Eustacia's attention and she sees him as a means of escape from the heath. While Clym shares the heath's endurance and peace, Eustacia shares its indifference and primal vitality. In this respect, the aura of the heath is reflected in the temperaments of the characters. Eustacia's relation to the heath is that of a celestial divinity to that of Hades: "Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone..." (119). Thus, she consciously rebels against its darkness and its gloom. She will not be reconciled to the heath. Her rebellion to Egdon is Clym's harmony with it. This difference between them is clearly put forward when Clym says, "I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion against the gods and fate as well as you" (315). Clym is in harmony with the whole of nature. He is "an absolute stoic..." (310). Eustacia, on the other hand, is tormented with her deferred "dream of beautiful Paris" (309).

Eustacia appears for the first time at the end of chapter Two as "an imaginative stranger" (62) and she disappears until chapter Six where her presence marks a sharp contrast with the vast permanence of the heath. Unlike Clym and Thomasin who acknowledge the immanent will of nature, Eustacia rejects it and refuses to submit to it. She is more interested in "Boulevards in Paris" (245) than the timeless realities on Egdon. Thus, Eustacia is a direct opposite of Clym who appears "as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment" (339). The difference between Clym and Eustacia is also sharply emphasized in terms of personal ambition. While Clym enjoys the lack of it, Eustacia suffers because of it. "More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognizable form of progress" (254). Clym loves his fellow creatures whereas Eustacia hates them with a passion: "I have not much love for my fellow creatures. Sometimes I quite hate them" (244). Her dream is to realize her desires in the actual world of civilization: "the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for" (259). She believes that her rebellion is not actually a vain one. She knows this when she asks Wildev: "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" (345). Yet she lives on Egdon Heath and "Civilization was its enemy" (56). She disrupts the hierarchy in Nature/Culture opposition by her passionate privileging of civilization over nature. Thus, as John Goode argues, "Eustacia's dream is... mocked by the history into which it is locked-the *double cross* of the heath and her hero's *return*. Which both say no" (40). The significance of the native's return to his roots in nature is precisely to marginalize and subordinate an aspiring self like Eustacia's into an abstract acceptance of humbling of self and its finiteness. This she cannot bear and she rebels with full intensity until she is destroyed by the forces of nature. The

tempest at the end carries her to her death. Yet his cannot be finalized into a totalized meaning of Fate's final victory, because earlier in the novel Eustacia already contemplates death which "appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further" (318).

As Marjorie Garson argues, "Hardy's text is complicated by the splitting, displacing and doubling of characters" (75). This is most clearly represented by Eustacia/Mrs. Yeobright opposition. Mrs. Yeobright is against Eustacia from the start, and she does her best to prevent Clym from marrying her. "For shame, Clym! But it is all through that woman-a hussy" (252). For her "she is lazy and dissatisfied" (251). Despite this enmity, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright are doubled. After Clym marries Eustacia, he intends to give his mother one of the burial urns as a gift, but presents it instead to Eustacia. Also there is the incident of Thomasin's wedding day. Instead of Mrs. Yeobright, we see Eustacia giving Thomasin away to Wildeve. Eustacia replaces Mrs. Yeobright who refuses to attend the ceremony. Indeed, in their very opposition, they are presented not in terms of difference but in terms of similarity. Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright literally change places, especially in their relationship to Clym.

Equally interesting is the novel's movement of deferral of its own thematic development. The plot does not unfold itself until quite late in the first Book. This is done by Hardy's use of "unspecified observer in description" (Lodge 98). Chapter One opens with a hypothetical voice viewing the scenery, often using the passive voice : "it could best be felt" (53), "it would have been noticed" (57), etc. Chapter Two introduces an old man whom we will later identify as Captain Vye. Through the old man we see the scenery and we are introduced to Diggory Venn. It is now through Venn's eyes that we see Eustacia. She is a figure against the sky. We perceive her "Through visualized action" (Lodge 100). Chapter Three reassumes the voice of an unspecified observer

whose eyes focus on the rustics. "And now they become the observing eyes of the narrative" (Lodge 100).<sup>3</sup> This movement of deferral is characteristic of the text's narrative strategy to postpone the tale and, in John Goodes' word:

...to push the narratives, the lives of the individuals, to the side of a context which is as a whole immovable, levelling... It is to push them... against the resistance of the narrative-demanding reader who is established and thwarted at once. The novel is its own Promethean resistance to its metaphoric sublation. (41)

What the novel foregrounds is the Titanic presence of Egdon Heath in which individual life is marginalized against the vastness of the heath. For example, Clym's life is described as "of a curious microscopic sort" (312), People living on it are always described as specks, spots or pigments compared to its grand size. The individual appears only as a tiny part of the landscape. Thomasin is seen as "pale blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown" (217). Clym is "a brown spot in the midst of an expansive olive-green gorse and nothing more" (312), etc. This signifies the relative insignificance of human life in the grand scale of nature. But is it really the case that man is marginalized in this way? The novel shows the contrary: in that the human will resists this marginalization.

The importance of the dramatic relationship of the characters to one another is not in a pattern of one single reversal of the binary oppositions they are positioned in but in, a process of constant reversing of this pattern. This plot structure informs the process of deconstructive reading. The transformation of all human differences both to one another and to the heath, presented in terms of paradoxical dualisms, is caused by one predominant concept that permeates the structure of the novel: Fate in the form of Egdon Heath.

Man's dramatic and ambiguous relation to the primeval forces and impersonal machinations of nature create the most striking binary oppositions in the novel, such as conscious/unconscious, free/unfree, man/nature, Immanent Will/human will, etc. The superhuman agency of nature is presented as the ultimate signified in the text. *The Return of the Native* questions the stability of this ultimate signified-Fate. It will be helpful to view this concept for a crucial understanding of the text as a literary and critical phenomenon.

Hardy conceives the universe as an impersonal mechanism, indifferent to human desires. Hence his notion of Fate as the embodiment of a cruel force. In all his novels it has a dominating symbolic value. As he exclaims in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: "How unexpected were the attacks of destiny!" (285). Hardy believed that "where man was concerned the very nature of things was malign" (Allen 246). Indeed in nature he saw the blind struggle of man. This force of nature is always present with a will and purpose of its own:

The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being...

(*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* 103)

But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum-which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* with the departure of zest for doing-stood in the way of all that.

(*The Mayor of Casterbridge* 395)

...the blowing of these plaintive November winds... bore a great resemblance to the ruins

of human song... It was a worn whisper, dry and papery, and it brushes so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutiae in which it originated could be realized as by touch. It was the united products of infinitesimal vegetable causes...

*(The Return of the Native 105)*

As can be seen in these selected passages, destiny, whatever form it may take, is a controlling agency. It appears as a power in relentless opposition to the human will. In *The Return of the Native*, Egdon Heath is the personification of the "majestic" power, and exhibits a fearsome force: "Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries... to await one last crisis-the final overthrow" (54). Man struggles against this power with his willpower despite the pain it inflicts upon him. Nature's counter-resistance to the human will is identified as the "Immanent Will" and it merits a closer examination:

The supreme power is immanent rather than transcendent. It does not come from outside the world, but is a force within nature, part of its substance. It is a version of the inherent energy of the physical world... an unconscious power working by regular laws of matter in motion.

*(Miller 14)*

This Immanent Will is a "blind force sweeping through the universe, urging things to happen as they do happen... shaping things in patterns determined by its irresistible energy" (Miller 15). This unconscious will is in opposition to the human will, because man always searches for rational explanations in nature and does not accept to be swept away like the dinosaurs. This attitude challenges the energy of the earth-its determinant pattern. This opposition between Immanent Will and human will

is explained by Hardy in a letter he wrote to Mr. Edward Wright. In this letter Hardy is talking about his dramatic epic *The Dynasts* where he states: "the will of man is neither totally free nor totally unfree":

When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all that the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he walks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them.

*(Life 334-35)*

Here Hardy explains that the human will is free only if it functions in accordance with the Immanent Will.

The binary opposition of the terms Free/Unfree is most brilliantly rendered in the metaphorical descriptions of Egdon Heath which stands for the Immanent Will. Hardy resembles the heath to a prison which signifies captivity, a closed place of non-freedom, and not to a palace which signifies openness, power and full freedom. The heath's sublimity stems from its "qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is to be found in the façade of a palace double its size" (54).

The terms "free" and "unfree" indicated in the prison/palace opposition deconstruct their own position in the hierarchy. Egdon Heath's qualification as a prison is in direct reverse of its metaphoric description as a majestic and infinitely powerful palace:

It was a spot which returned upon the memory  
of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar

and kindly *congruity*. *Smiling* champaigns of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing *majestic* without severity, *impressive* without showiness, *emphatic* in its admonitions, *grand* in its simplicity. <sup>4</sup> (54)

The choice of adjectives, "majestic", "impressive," "emphatic," and "grand," is analogous to the description of a palace rather than a prison. This verbal display of the qualities associated with palaces indicates the first textual difference within the novel. The metaphoric language is an affirmation of this difference. As Barbara Johnson argues, the "deconstruction of a binary opposition is... not an annihilation of all values or differences; it is an attempt to follow the subtle powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition" (xii). This is precisely the case in Hardy's text. This act of difference distinguishes Egdon Heath from itself. Thus it is a difference within. Again and again the language emphasizes the heath as an object of internal difference. It is not the wholeness as it appears to be, but a separation between the earth and the sky. Its Titanic fulness is subordinated to this demarkation in itself. Thus we have the negation of its immanence not only in space but also in time. Its insertion into the past on the one hand, and its ambiguous relation to history, on the other, creates a sense of development linked to the human historical process. The heath is between "The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation" (53). Moreover, Hardy stresses "The distant rims of the world and of the firmament" as a "division in time no less than a division in matter" (53). Then the heath's immanence is constructed within man's history. Yet the allusions to Titans (Atlas) and Prometheus intensify the tension as to the double perspective of the heath which imposes

its full presence as Immanent Will over man and yet represents itself in terms of its difference from itself: because in this way" it tell (s) its true tale" (53). Thus, the heath, as the ultimate signified, in the form of the Immanent Will subverts its own identity. In this respect, the domination of Immanent Will over human will as "one mode of signifying over another" (Johnson 5) is disrupted. In this way the meaning becomes ambiguous.

Immanent Will has full presence in the text and human will is secondary in the hierarchy. The human will, however, threatens to contaminate the Immanent Will's sublimity first by its absence and then by its presence:

In the valleys of the heath nothing save its own wild face was visible at any time of day; but this spot commanded a horizon enclosing a tract of far extent, and in many cases lying beyond the heath country. None of its features could be seen now, but the *whole made itself felt* as a vague stretch of remoteness.<sup>5</sup>

While the men and lads were building the pile, a change took place in the mass of shade which denoted the distant landscape, red suns and tufts of fire one by one began to arise... (65)

This hierarchy between the privileged term (Immanent Will) and the secondary term (Human will) can be easily reversed. Both wills are signifying processes linked to each other in an endless reversal pattern and thus they create both textual and contextual ambiguities in the novel.

When the human will comes as a supplement<sup>6</sup> to the Immanent Will it adds something inessential to it and thus disrupts the very harmony it exhibits in its full presence. In other words, human will tries to take the place of the privileged term. This means a reversal of identities, and at this crucial point textual difference occurs. The privileged term is now substituted by the secondary term. Let us examine how this is achieved.

The novel expresses the idea that Fate *preceeds* human will, and it asserts a violent hierarchy in which pure presence rules over a supplement. But, all human activity, mental or physical, involves supplementarity. Against its own logic, then, the text shows the opposite of what it asserts: that Fate is always already contaminated. The initial descriptions of the heath suggest the pure presence of Fate and absence of the human will:

...to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence... The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers... yet Egdon remained.  
(56)

This is the description of nature in terms of a metaphor of expansive timelessness before the existence of man. This description suggests that man has not yet evolved to witness this wide expanse of landscape. So, human will seems to be absent and the heath is the pure presence, Humanity, however, is present in the language itself. First, the very description of the full presence is realized by an observer here. Second, the presence of man is openly implied by sentences like; "looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work" (53), "a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it" (54), "the most thorough-going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon" (55), "it was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature" (55). "Had a looker -on been posted in the immediate vicinity of the barrow, he would have learned..." (65), and so on. Hillis Miller presents the same argument concerning the presence and absence of man:

It would have been noticed, if anyone had been there to notice, but no one is there. Yet someone is there: the narrator. It is precisely

his vision of things, his ambiguous presence in the world and absence from it, which is expressed by the chapter in its continual references to a spectator who is there and not there. (89)

Man appears with his resistant willpower, as a counter - emotional force. There is evidence that man made some imprint of his existence in nature:

This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday. His condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness- 'Bruaria.' Then follows the length and breadth in leagues; and though some uncertainty exists as to the exact extent of this ancient lineal measure, it appears from the figures that the area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished. (55)

As can be noticed from the passage above, man's presence, although the "exact extent of this ancient lineal measure" is uncertain, does not in fact follow the presence of Nature in the hierarchy. There is no original moment of Fate except as a Myth. In other words, Fate originates with myth which is a man-made explanation and fictionalization of the powers of nature. Then Fate has the origin of fullness of being only to that extent. This is first suggested by the white road, the red glow of bonfires, and the burdened figures who are "the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies" (67). Man's presence in nature is projected to it, not at first, as a conscious power to change nature, but as a presence of simple existence expressing itself in harmonious motion perfectly in tune with nature. Likewise, nature's presence is "like man, slighted and enduring" (55). As Hillis Miller makes perfectly clear, "The personifications are projected into nature by man's presence in the world" (80-90). Man personifies nature as Fate. Miller continues to argue that

By a paradoxical interchange between spectator and scene which is easier to feel than to express, the personification of nature arises most intensely when the spectator most effaces himself and looks at nature as if he were not there to disturb it from being itself... When a man has withdrawn himself from engagement in a particular social role, his perspective, in its neutral embrace of time and space, coincides with the neutrality and enduring persistence of nature and can give a voice to nature, or can hear nature speak...

Though the heath has waited in vain through innumerable centuries for the awakening of the Immanent Will to consciousness, man has in the interval appeared on the scene... (90)

Man's relation to nature, then, can be in perfect accord with it before the Immanent Will awakens to consciousness and exerts its full power on the human will in order to become pure presence. But, as the opening pages demonstrate, Fate originated because of man's conscious desire to create myths. Thus, the binary opposition of Nature/Man is reversed by the text itself.

To understand this constant process of displacement and reversal of opposite terms, we must consider the organizing concepts of the novel: Fate, Nature, Willpower, consciousness, etc. As John Goode argues, "the novel organizes these terms in order to expose them, to see them as negations" (39). These concepts are in a process of infinite deferral of privileged meanings. If we insist on tracing one concept in a backward motion to find its original purity of presence without the secondary term, we discover only absence of origins. For example, when Fate was without human will it was in a state of regression. If we trace its retrograde motion we never reach any original moment of pure Fate. Was Fate before the Universe? Was it before the creation? What caused it to emerge? Instead of discovering any uncontaminated state of Fate, we find that it is

always already reversed, and that Fate can never operate without the human will. Thus, Fate comes after man. Human will operates when it is given a chance to clash with Fate. So, human will comes first. It is the concept of Fate which is both addition and substitution to the drama of man in nature. This binary opposition cannot be hierarchised in either direction without violence. It is this very impossibility of either concept occupying a privileged position that the text focuses on. This leads to a continual clash of Fate and character. Therefore there is equal emphasis on Fate and on Man.

Moreover, the dramatic narrative of the opening pages immediately establishes the most remarkable binary opposition of light/darkness which echoes the Prometheus myth in brilliant poetic lines. Critics mostly refer to this reference to myth. J.R. Brooks, for example, argues that the novel "is concerned with the Promethean struggle of conscious life against the unconscious 'rayless' universe from which it sprang" (178-79). Douglas Brown writes: "... this ritual of spontaneous resistance to the dark fiat of nature, ends the movement that began with haggard and deserted Egdon" (57). According to Bert G. Hornback, the act of lighting bonfires suggests "a Promethean gesture, ritualistically indicative of the size of the spirit of man" (20).

The act of lighting the bonfire, analogous to the Promethean challenge of gods, indicates the first conscious interference of the human will. Here the human will appears as a symbolic signifier in the form of the red glow of bonfires which clash with the entire majestic darkness. Thus, the opposition of light and darkness is established. Darkness symbolizes Fate as the continuous, totalizable and natural signified whose fullness of being is reflected in its mythic resonance. While Fate is thus the "decidable" signified, eternal and unified into a coherent whole ("the whole made itself felt") (65), with its "darkness, tempests and mists" (55), human will is the infinitely plural free play of

signifiers and of difference which resists Fate's decidable and totalized meaning. Thus, it performs a heroic challenge to the hierarchy:

Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against the fiat and this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, let there be light. (67)

Against the stability of the Immanent Will, the Human will brings change, play and difference: "All was unstable, quivering as leaves, evanescent as lightening" (67). The play of the human will is suggested by the group of people who "changed shape and position endlessly" (67). The text reverses the binary opposition of Immanent Will/Human Will when the immobile, unified and eternal Immanent Will changes places with the restless and mobile Human will. A new hierarchy appears with Light/Darkness opposition. But the new term cannot settle into a new hierarchy in the opposition. It cannot remain as the privileged term for too long, because the privileged position of the once secondary term (Human Will) resists a unified meaning due to its own difference within itself. Thus, the meaning is infinitely deferred. It would be impossible for man indeed, at this stage of civilization, to remain as the only privileged master of nature. So, he cannot. This shows itself in the form of character weaknesses.

As soon as human will marks its new position, it starts to operate against itself. Therefore, the second chapter is entitled as "Humanih, Appears upon the the Scene Hand in Hand with Trouble." The privileged state of the human will is disrupted when we encounter the weaknesses of the characters contributing to the operations of Fate. Usually, their passions,

arrogance, passivity or ambitions manipulate them towards their doom. The battle between man and Fate is resumed. Hardy's characters do not take enough "trouble to ward off the disastrous events" (*Life* 120).

Hardy's point is that Fate and character weaknesses combine to create disasters for man. Therefore, man's condition is a precarious one in nature. J. Chandra Dave states that men "are virtually prisoners in the world of Nature which does not accord with their wishes" (35). But Hardy does not marginalize man to such a degree; instead he emphasizes human consciousness as the highest form of awareness which can resist submission to the Immanent Will. Yet man cannot escape his own nature and submits half-blindly to his weaknesses. As a result of their tragic flaw, Hardy's characters arrive at a dead end, and it becomes impossible to control the course of the events. In this respect, a tragic end is inevitable. Their fall into misfortune, however, should not be considered as the final victory of Fate over human will. This hierarchy is always reversed. This is best exemplified by the descriptions of Eustacia with allusions to the omnipotent deities echoing the former descriptions of the heath as an all-powerful presence:

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity... She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. (118)

Eustacia can be perceived as the embodiment of the human will which challenges the position of the Immanent Will in the hierarchy, and substitutes it for a while until her character flaw displaces the hierarchy of the human will. Eustacia's rebelliousness dethrones the human will's position.

In the beginning of the novel, Eustacia is seen wandering freely across the heath, especially at night. In her first conversation with Clym she says she hates nature. To Venn she admits that the heath is a jail to her. Right from the beginning she is in conscious rebellion against nature. Yet, Hardy creates the illusion that she is a natural part of Egdon Heath. She is associated with its topography. She listens to the wind attentively, moves along a "faint foot-track" (107) without difficulty, and when "a bramble caught hold of her skirt" (108) she "yielded herself up to the pull, and stood passively still" (108). Hardy describes her motions as "the ebb and flow of the sea," and she appears as one of "the higher female deities" (119). Eustacia displays a calm image in harmony with the objects of the heath. Egdon Heath initiates her sense of dignity and superiority; and yet to be superior in a prison makes her passionately desperate and violently rebellious. Thus, her harmony with nature is only an illusion. Hardy writes about Egdon that "the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend" (55), the very qualities with which Eustacia is also associated in her attempts to force her will upon nature. Yet these qualities bring her "curse rather than a blessing" (318). This is presented as a character weakness on her part contributing to the operations of the Immanent Will. Eustacia is too self-indulgent and moody. "Yet, instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot" (361). Thus the new hierarchy of human will/Immanent Will is reversed when Eustacia is driven to her death by the tempest at the end of the novel.

As J.P. Brooks observes, "Hardy creates a fundamental persistence from the tensions between the two kinds of stability; the eternal recurrence of the natural cycle and the recurrent finiteness of man" (18). This is remarkably presented in

Eustacia's case. She acts against the "eternal recurrence of nature" while Clym, Thomasin and Venn act in it. Therefore, no other character is caught in the intensity of nature's plotting more dramatically than Eustacia Vye. She defies the finiteness of man in the face of Fate, and gets destroyed. However, it is important to note that as a character Eustacia is not the only destructive agency in her fall, nor is it Fate that crushes her as she declares. Eustacia's death is a result of the combination of both factors. She triggers the destructive powers in nature by her own violent and unyielding temper.

*The Return of the Native* demonstrates a protest against man putting himself foolishly into a helpless position. But, for all man's helplessness Hardy exhibits his dignity and willpower in the face of an indifferent Universe. His vision of man's greatness in spirit and his littleness in the Universe keeps the tragic balance between Fate and character. Therefore, the interchange between man and nature continues without either one occupying the privileged position in the hierarchy forever.

NOTES:

1. Hardy states in "The General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912" that, "In the classification of these fictitious chronicles... the name of 'The Wessex Novels' was adopted" (*The Return of the Native* 475).
2. My page references are to: *The Life of Thomas Hardy* by Florence Emily Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1962) which brings together *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* originally published in 1928 and 1930 respectively; hereafter called *Life*.
3. I have summarized David Lodge's reading of the novel in *Working with Structuralism* (London : Routledge, 1982).

4. Italics are mine
5. Italics are mine
6. See M. H. Abrams's "Construing and Deconstructing" in *Deconstruction : A Critique*. Ed. Rajnath. (London: Mac millan, 1987). Here Abrams explains "supplement" as "both something added to what is itself complete and something required to complete what is insufficient" (42).

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