This paper argues that the surface narrative of Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native appears to endorse late 19th-century degeneration theories and discourse, illustrating a gender crisis. However, by decoding and laying bare the textual ambiguities, a subtext is disclosed that inscribes an alternative reading in which tradition and convention are subverted. Therefore the novel opens up a more complex interpretation of what it means to be human in an evolving universe. The narrative of The Return of the Native clearly shows that Hardy is fully cognizant of the controversial fin de siècle degeneration discourse. Yet, viewed in the context of 19th-century ideas about creative evolution and Hardy's response to these, we realize that he exposes such discourses as deeply suspect ideologies. Analysis of the structure of the novel brings to light the intersection of two opposite narrative trajectories, a degeneration and a regeneration plot. In each plot there appears to be a careful patterning of character types built along stereotypical gender and ethical binary divisions, with the final validation of regenerative values and the punishment of transgressiveness. Actually, a close reading shows that Hardy attacks the 'degeneracy' not of the human species but of the social institutions and conventions which his protagonists must struggle against. He flouts the limitations of gender divisions and gives life to characters who become signifiers of a new and powerfully disturbing view of masculinity and femininity within contexts wider than the repressive and depressive established sexual model. These observations are linked to Hardy's dual vision, the cosmic and the human, and to Henri Bergson's creative evolution. In conclusion, it is maintained, within Hardy's post-Darwinian evolving universe, all living creatures are caught up in 'neutral' processes of dissolution and transformation, changes that are inevitable and .necessary to generation

تم تلخيص النص بواسطة موقع لخصلي © lakhasly.com