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**Prostor a jeho provázání s postavami
v románech Thomase Hardyho**

Space and its connection to characters in Thomas Hardy's novels

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V Praze dne 17. ledna 2022

Kristýna Šejvlová

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Abstrakt

Při přípravě prvního vydání sbírky svých děl zařadil Thomas Hardy své hlavní romány do skupiny nazvané "Romány charakteru a prostředí", což jasně naznačuje, že viděl zásadní souvislost mezi postavami a prostorem, který obývají.

Tato práce se zabývá souvislostmi mezi prostorem v širším slova smyslu a postavami a tím, proč má prostředí velký význam pro samotný příběh. Pro účely této práce byly k analýze vybrány tři romány Thomase Hardyho: Daleko od hlučícího davu, Rodákův návrat a Tess z d'Urbervillů. Práce se zabývá propojením postav a příslušných prostorů, které Hardy využívá pro určení jejich osudů. Tento zvláštní determinismus jako by uzamkl postavy v jejich osudech a znemožnil jim uniknout jejich společenské vrstvě, předsudkům, ve kterých jsou uvězněni, a prostředí, do kterého se narodily. Zároveň jsou kvůli tomuto pojetí determinismu některé postavy od samého počátku předurčeny k neúspěchu.

Tato práce se skládá z pěti částí. Úvod a první kapitola o Hardyho fiktivním prostoru – Wessexu – řeší, jakou roli hraje prostor při čtení a jak Hardy využívá jeho vlastností při modelování vlastního specifického prostoru. Romány jsem se rozhodla uvést v chronologickém pořadí dle data vydání – lépe tak odrážejí vývoj jak Hardyho psaní tak i jeho práci s Wessexem jako pojmem a prostorem.

Třetí kapitola se věnuje analýze románu: Daleko od hlučícího davu, který je prvním ze tří vydaných románů patřící do skupiny "Romány charakteru a prostředí". Jejím cílem je prozkoumat souvislosti mezi třemi hlavními hrdiny, Bathshebou Everdeenovou, Gabrielem Oakem a seržantem Francisem Troyem, a zásadními místy příběhu, jako jsou Norcombe Hill, Fern Dale a The Great Barn. Cílem je také prozkoumat Gabrielovo spojení s vesmírem i přírodou a vývoj hlavní hrdinky románu na její cestě za pokorou.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá románem Rodákův návrat, ve kterém Hardy představuje prostředí Egdon Heath jako samotnou postavu. Zabývá se také strukturou tohoto

specifického místa, neboť ta určuje pohyb postav jak v něm, tak v jeho okolí. Další menší kapitoly pojednávají o tradicích, symbolice, přírodě a živlech – zejména o kontrastu ohně a vody v různých scénách a jak tato symbolika souvisí s postavami románu.

Pátá, závěrečná kapitola se věnuje románu Tess z d'Urbervillů – poslední ze tří románů, kterými se tato práce zabývá. První podkapitola hovoří o dvou náboženských směrech, které výrazně ovlivňují příběh a postavy – křesťanství a pohanství, a o šesti významných místech románu, neboť Tess je jedinou hrdinkou ze všech tří románů, která doslova podniká cestu po Wessexu. V jednotlivých podkapitolách se pojednává o souvislostech mezi oběma náboženstvími a o symbolech, které Hardy v jednotlivých scénách používá.

Abstract

When preparing the first edition of his collected works, Thomas Hardy included his major novels in a group called “Novels of Character and Environment”, which clearly indicates that he saw a fundamental link between people and the place they occupy.

This thesis explores the connection between space, in this broader sense, and characters, and why the setting is of great importance to the story itself. For this purpose, I have chosen three novels by Thomas Hardy: *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* which I analyzed along with the places Hardy chose to determine the fates of his characters. This special determinism seems to lock characters in their fates, making it impossible for them to escape their social classes, the prejudices they stick to and the setting they are born (or borne) into, and how due to this concept of determinism some characters are destined to fail from the very beginning.

This thesis consists of five parts. The Introduction and chapter about Hardy’s fictional space Wessex, define what role space plays in the process of reading, and how Hardy exploits its features in modelling his own specific space. I have decided to list the novels in the chronological order in which they were published, since it mirrors Hardy’s development both of his writing and working with Wessex both as a term and as a space.

Therefore, the third chapter analyzes *Far from the Madding Crowd*, being the first out of the three Novels of Environment published. It aims to explore the connections between the main three protagonists, Bathsheba Everdeen, Gabriel Oak and sergeant Francis Troy and the critical spaces in the story, such as Norcombe hill, Fern Dale and The Great Barn. It also aims to explore Gabriel’s connection to the universe as well as the natural world.

The fourth chapter explores the novel *The Return of the Native*, which introduces the setting Egdon Heath as a character itself. It also deals with the structure of this specific place since it determines the movement of the characters around it. Other smaller chapters discuss

the traditions, symbolism, nature, and elements – in particular the contrast between fire and water in different scenes and in connection to different characters in the novel.

The fifth and final chapter is dedicated to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* – the final novel of the three chosen for this thesis. The first subchapter will speak about the two religions that greatly influence the story and the characters – Christianity and paganism and the six significant locations in the novel, since Tess is the only character making a literal journey around Wessex. In each subchapter, the connection between the two religions and the symbols Hardy uses is discussed.

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1 Introduction

In order to fully understand and be capable of analyzing the literary space and its connection to the characters, one must first comprehend the vast meaning that this term represents. When talking about literary space, one must take into account not only the actual physical space in the topological sense of the word, but also the imaginary, abstract space of literature. This entails not only where the characters live, the architecture and nature surrounding them, but also what they wear, the way they speak and the manner in which they behave to each other and the circumstances in crucial moments of the story. The space in a novel possesses a certain amount of symbolism almost to a cosmological degree. “The narrative response to these cosmologies and topologies is a symbolic geography diversified into regions where different events and experiences take place—where life, in other words, is governed by different physical, psychological, social or cultural rules.”¹ Therefore, there can be a difference in symbolic meaning to each individual setting.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen three novels written by Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*. Hardy himself divided his novels into three groups. “Novels of Character and Environment”, “Romances and Fantasies” and “Novels of Ingenuity”. The three novels chosen for this thesis are all novels of “Character and Environment”, which clearly indicates that Hardy saw a fundamental link between the characters and the place they occupy. All three of them have strong female leads and share spatial similarities in the

¹ Marie-Laun, Ryan, “Space – the Living Handbook of Narratology”, 2014, <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/55.html>

sense of the environment influencing its inhabitants, yet Hardy's description and the influence nature has on the character differs every time.

This thesis will be divided into five parts: Introduction, Hardy's Wessex and the chapters on *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. I have decided to include the novels chronologically, since Hardy's understanding of Wessex evolved with the novels. He first used the term in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, but only briefly towards the end of the novel and it was in *The Return of the Native* where he fully embraced the term and the topography of the space. The thesis aims to explore the connections between the characters and various aspects of the space and how this determines their fates and lives. It will attempt to answer the questions of how Hardy uses the aspects of religion, symbolism and most importantly natural world to influence his characters.

2 Hardy's Wessex

The term Wessex is particularly important not only for the purpose of this thesis but also for understanding the Hardy-esque universe in its entirety. All three novels discussed in this thesis are set in Wessex, Hardy's own semi-fictional space which he created and shaped to suit his characters.

At the time of Hardy's writing, it was already an existing, yet rather unknown term, derived from history of the Anglo Saxons. Hardy, being extremely well read, thought of this as a perfect place to set his novels in. "It signifies neither the Wessex of history nor an alias for the County of Dorset. In fact, it covers six counties: Berkshire (North Wessex), Hampshire (Upper Wessex), Wiltshire (Mid – Wessex), Dorset (South Wessex), Somerset (Outer Wessex) and Devon (Lower Wessex)."¹ However, Wessex came to be much more than just a fictional space. Hardy planned his fictional area so well, he even drew a map of it, to help readers make sense of the journeys of the characters. He created clear boundaries and he emphasized when a character left Wessex. "When Jude goes to Christminster (Oxford), it is carefully stated that he leaves Wessex to enter the city."²

The term Wessex was first used in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Hardy thought it was invented by him, although "William Barnes has used it in its proper historical sense in 1844 and in picturesque sense in 1868."³ Speculations whether this term was first used by George Eliot arose, since she uses it several times in her novel *Daniel Deronda*. This is however only speculation, since Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*

¹ Margaret Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 110

² Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 111

³ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 111

was published two years prior to Eliot's novel.⁴ "Since we do not know exactly when George Eliot wrote chapters 3 - 9 of *Daniel Deronda*, it must surely be impossible to say whether it was Hardy or George Eliot who first had the idea of using 'Wessex'."⁵

Though the term might not have been coined by Hardy, by creating his unique space, he had an amazing opportunity to create not only the characters and their traits, but also a community and the space that surrounded them. The nature and houses that he set his stories into were a perfect complementation of the story itself. It was his fictional world that resembled reality, so it gave the reader the feeling of familiarity, while still retaining its mystery. "Hardy had an outstanding capacity for drawing on the world of reality yet covering his tracks almost impenetrably when he chose."⁶

Since Hardy himself grew up in Dorchester, he knew the area well and could channel his own experience into creating Wessex. But he changed a lot of the original names and misplaced some of the significant monuments, so it was always difficult to trace where exactly Wessex was. He wasn't even always consistent with the names of the towns and villages, so in early works "Lower Longpuddle stood for Puddletown, or Weatherbury, but a couple of decades later a careful examination of the internal evidence results in the conclusion that Lower Longpuddle now stands for Piddlehinton."⁷ Hardy uses familiar things, such as names of larger towns which he kept or even landmarks such as Stonehenge and sets them into his semi fictional space, where certain towns are made up in their entirety, certain are just a fictional improvement of their real counterpart.

⁴ David McIntosh, "George Eliot's Debt to Hardy?", *The George Eliot Review*, 2002, 72

⁵ McIntosh, "George Eliot's Debt to Hardy?", 72

⁶ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 111

⁷ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 111

Many of Hardy's readers posed the question where Wessex is. The space he created had such success with them that Hardy decided to include a map in each of his novels, the first one being *The Return of the Native*. This novel included only the map of Egdon Heath, where the story takes place, not the whole Wessex just yet. Hardy drew the map for his readers himself, he did however indicate that it should not be taken too seriously, since it is just an approximate of what the place supposedly looks like.

But it was also Hardy's life at that time that shaped all of Wessex. "All that is most Wessex in character – its people, language, customs, traditions, architecture, landscape and far-reaching history – derived from certain regions of Dorset."⁸ Hardy lived at a time when traditions and superstitions had an imminent place in people's lives, and he was mesmerized by them. "He used them in stories to capture or sustain interest, one sometimes feels that he deliberately recorded them in the hope that they might not be forgotten."⁹ Hardy did emphasize the rural life and its daily struggles as well, not only nature but also the labour that comes with taming it. "In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* dairy farming, in *The Return of the Native* the pursuits of the heath dwellers, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* sheep and farming, in *The Woodlanders* the cider making"¹⁰ He depicts all these activities in such detail and with such precision, the reader truly gets a sense of what the rural life entails and what it meant to be a person living in the countryside, what it meant to be a farmer. "Hardy's Wessex does not consist merely of places. It consists of people and all manner of living things, but so integral to their environment that one is left convinced they could exist nowhere else."¹¹

⁸ F.B., Pinion, *A Hardy Companion*, (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1968), 130

⁹ Pinion, *A Hardy Companion*, 134

¹⁰ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 115

¹¹ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 177

A previously stated Hardy divided his novels to three groups, “Romances and Fantasies”, “Novels of Ingenuity” and “Novels of Character and Environment”. The latter is also a category most known among the readers since it encompasses Hardy’s familiar works. “The "Novels of Character and Environment" are those most likely to appear on shelves and syllabi; in initial appreciations of Hardy the ideas of Wessex, involving a character's placement in a strictly circumscribed setting, and of determinism are bound to reinforce each other.”¹²

In his preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which he wrote between the years 1895-1905, Hardy acknowledges the fact that this was the first novel that he ever used the term Wessex in and talks about the purpose of this imaginary world. “The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene.”¹³ He then proceeds to explain, that he needed “a canvas large enough”¹⁴ to set his novels in and the surroundings of Dorchester were “known but vaguely”¹⁵ therefore making it a perfect space to be mysterious enough that it would spark interest in people to look for it, yet realistic enough that it could depict the life in Victorian England.

What Hardy did is certainly not unheard of, since most authors do come up with their own fictional places, some even draw the maps to them, but very few authors seem to go to such lengths to create a whole new world within the one we already know. And while Wessex might not exist in its entirety, it is easier for the readers to identify with it, since

¹² Jonatan, Wike, “Hintock by Bicycle: Wessex as Critical Orientation“ *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1992, pp. 55–62. page 58 *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/45274074. Accessed 8 July 2020.

¹³ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 1

¹⁴ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1

¹⁵ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1

the boundaries of this space are non-fictional. It is always much easier to imagine the things that we already know and that already exist, which give Hardy's novels a certain level of familiarity, yet it is still mysterious, since there are some parts of the Wessex world that remain hidden to the readers. "Readers are blessed with potentially universal forms of knowledge, "alienated geography". They are, however, excluded from the local apprehension of the landscape, which can only indirectly be described in the novel itself, because it belongs to a milieu they no longer occupy."¹⁶

¹⁶John, Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, Chapter 5, 130

3 Far from the Madding Crowd

Far from the Madding Crowd was first published anonymously in a magazine, giving Hardy the opportunity to revise his work and see the reaction of the general public to it. The name was originally taken from a poem “Elegy” written by Thomas Gray.¹ The poem seems only fitting for Hardy’s novel, since it celebrates the rural life and the people living in the countryside. “These people, said Gray, have a level-headed, decent outlook beside which the more urgent, frantic pace of city life, that of the 'madding crowd' is seen to be fiercely vicious, 'ignoble strife'.”² This outlook on the rural life complements Hardy’s view which he shares with the readers in all the three novels chosen for this thesis, being written as a celebration of nature and the people who live their lives according to its rules.

Far from the Madding Crowd has two important differences to the other two novels chosen for this thesis. First, it is the only novel out of the three that could be classified as a love story, not only because it has an ending that could be perceived as a happy ending – at least for the two main protagonists, which is more than one could say about the endings of the other two novels chosen for this thesis, but also because of Bathsheba’s love for nature and work. Apart from this difference, the setting of the novel is also divided to the natural and industrial. Hardy manifests this through his characters, where he contrasts the rural surroundings and the purity it represents, with the maddening crowds of the city and the industrial revolution that greatly influenced the rural life and agriculture.

¹ Colin Temblett-Wood, *The Macmillan Master Guides Far from the Madding Crowd*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), 29

² Temblett-Wood, *The Macmillan Master Guides Far from the Madding Crowd*, 39

The novel is and even was supposed to be a pastoral to some extent, but it is a more realistic take on one. The most basic definition of pastoral is a “class of literature that presents the society of shepherds as free from the complexity and corruption of city life”³, which would apply to Hardy’s novel as well, but he decided to paint it more realistically, with more than just picturesque hills and romantic plotline. He depicts the hardships of the pastoral life, of the life on a farm and of living the small-town life in general.

The tone of the novel is different in comparison to the other two, since there is no journey for the characters to take except maybe for the emotional journey of Bathsheba Everdeen from a vain, spoiled girl to a businesswoman. There is not even a clash of religions or presence of religious monuments to mark the history of the places that occur in the story – there are however several historical buildings that withstood the test of time – such as the barn where the sheep shearing occurs. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy clearly shows, that the only important influence is nature and the barn is farmers’ church. The characters are partly shaped by the environment, but one could argue that they are also the ones most in synchronization with it. “These are characters who are what they see and do; scarcely ever does Hardy rationalise their actions in any depth.”⁴ Bathsheba learns to love nature and listen to the signs that it gives her – which is what eventually brings her the happy ending.

The choice of characters is not accidental, the three main protagonists are all a prototype of their environment. Gabriel Oak, being a pure, simple, and good soul, who takes care of his farm, sheep and is loyal to his work, representing nature and the traditions connected to it, sergeant Troy, who is self - centered, vain, shallow, and lazy – he represents the city and its way of life and Bathsheba, being somewhere in the middle. In the very

³The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Pastoral Literature”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/pastoral-literature>

⁴ Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy Illusion and Reality*, (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1974), 103

beginning, Bathsheba seems to be rejecting this plain world along with Gabriel's proposal, because she herself is a little vain and envisions a different life for herself. Because of this, Bathsheba is the character with the most personal growth in the book. She feels to be chained down by the simple, slow, and almost boring way of life, she wishes to run away from all the mediocrity and escape the mundane way of living, but finally learns that the rural life is where she belongs.

3.1 Characters and environment

If we were to analyse Hardy's work with characters, it could come to mind, that Hardy divides his characters into two groups – the one's that live a small-town life and the ones that live in the cities. It is quite apparent from his novels, that anyone coming from the city brings chaos and disappointment to the characters living their rural lives. That's why Troy would be the villain in this story and why Gabriel represents all that is natural and good, representing the order and balance in nature. It is not only in his characters Hardy tries to introduce the evilness of the towns. Anything that could be considered bad or inappropriate for the main protagonists happens in town.

Nature is what keeps the story moving, as a silent hand of fate, pushing the characters together or tearing them apart. It could be what Hardy calls the immanent will, which does what needs to be done for the characters to achieve their fates. Gabriel Oak would have never come to Bathsheba's farm, hadn't he lost all of his sheep and he wouldn't have earned her trust the way he did, if he hadn't have helped during the fire. Nature, although it is something that Bathsheba tries to push away for almost the whole book, brought them together and pushed them closer. In nature, everything is in perfect harmony and the people working for Bathsheba are in great contrast with people in the city. It is also suggested many times, that a female figure in a rural environment with her standing was something rather unusual. When Bathsheba comes to the market, her presence as a woman raises many questions among other

farmers, but it is still described as something not only unusual, but almost special. “She glided – the single one of her sex that the room contained. She moved between them as a chaise between carts, was heard after them as a romance after sermons and was felt among them like a breeze among furnaces.”⁵

3.2 *Gabriel, Norcombe Hill and the Universe*

The manner in which the setting and the characters are introduced is of vital importance to the story, as their introduction shows how intertwined with nature they are. The first character the readers meet is Gabriel Oak. It is certainly no coincidence that he is named after an oak tree – “in the mythological belief of many ancient tribes it was the first tree created and man sprung from it”⁶ and his first name of Archangel Gabriel only magnifies his universal connection. In his first scene he is wearing clothes that are “most peculiarly his own”, being described as “low crowned felt hat, a coat like Doctor Johnson’s and boots emphatically large”⁷.

For the description of his appearance, Hardy uses similes of nature, much like in *Tess of d’Urbervilles* with Tess - wrinkles around his eyes “extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of a rising sun.”⁸ He is set to the space of Norcombe Hill, which is properly introduced in the second chapter. Its description is similar to that of Oak, being rough but durable and solemn. The reader meets Oak on a December day, sunny and mild. But “it is in winter and by night, in storm and wind, that the country yields up its intimacies; then alone reveals itself to those who actually live in its bosom, to those who

⁵ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 101

⁶ Ernst and Johanna, Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers Plants and Trees*, (New York: Tudor Publishing Company), 1960, 42

⁷ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, p 6

⁸ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 5

must meet the elements in person, and cannot take shelter in the securities of the walled town.”⁹

The movements of Gabriel around his flock could resemble a kind of dance – just like when Troy dances around Bathsheba while showing her the sword exercise. Gabriel’s dance comes from a place of responsibility and connection to his flock, whereas Troy’s mating ritual comes from a place of vanity and egoistic need to charm Bathsheba. The description of Oak’s hut is fitting to his personality and work. There is no mention of the superficial look of things, it is small and practical, with utensils and even a flute, the light of the fire making the atmosphere nice and cosy. Everything about Hardy’s description of Gabriel Oak suggests, that Oak is a favoured character. “Oak is the central of the pictorial composition. We are interested in the emotional history of Bathsheba, but Oak is the indispensable and characteristic figure in those rural scenes which form so large a part of the design.”¹⁰ He tends to the sheep with so much care and love, knowing that this care could not be given to them by any beginner, he saves Bathsheba’s farm from the goodness of his heart, not knowing whom he is helping. He knows instantly what to do in the rural situations, less in social interactions, but with patience, even his wish to marry Bathsheba comes true.

The place where Gabriel Oak lives, seems only fitting for his character, since it is a hill surrounded by the universe from all sides, the bushes rustling like a choir – even Hardy admits, that it would be impossible not to stop and listen to its songs – therefore suggesting that that is partly why Gabriel has such a deep connection with nature. He lives in a place where he is forced to listen to its voices and songs. “Norcombe Hill was one of the spots which suggest to a passer-by that he is in the presence of a shape approaching the

⁹ Joseph Warren, Beach, *The technique of Thomas Hardy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2012, 64

¹⁰ Beach, *The technique of Thomas Hardy*, 66

indestructible as nearly as any to be found on earth.”¹¹ The description resembles the features of description of Egdon Heath, the place that never changes, timeless and solemn, with its highest hill Rainbarrow, reminding the inhabitants of its past. However, it does not have such a historical connotation to ancient times of Celts and Druids or to Roman times. It suggests it has been there long before the humankind existed. This could be where Gabriel’s fascination of the universe comes from, since he lives in an environment so close to it, he can better understand and appreciate the vastness of the universe and one’s mortality.

Oak is tied with the universe not only by the place he lives in, but also with two of his attributes - watch, and flute. “Mr Oak carried about with him by way of watch what may be called a small silver clock”¹² gives him the sense of time and perhaps connection to his ancestors and that way a connection to the universe as well. The proximity of Norcombe Hill to the skies reminds the reader of the proximity of Rainbarrow to the moon in *The Return of the Native*. The night at Norcombe Hill is clear and the comparison of the stars and their twinkling to a body with a pulse only magnifies the connection of humans to the universe. The night is so clear, that one can even see the difference in colour of the stars – a phenomenon not seen across England very often, according to Hardy. It cannot be a coincidence that such connection to nature can be perceived at the place of Oak’s residence. “After such a nocturnal reconnoitre, some men may feel raised to a capability for eternity at once.”¹³

On this night, Gabriel begins to play his flute, but the tones are not disturbing the peaceful night, they are complementing the pulsation of the universe. His hut is so close to the skies that it resembles “a small Noah’s Ark on a small Ararat”¹⁴. This may suggest that

¹¹ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 11

¹² Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 6

¹³ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 13

¹⁴ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 13

Oak would be worthy of saving both him and the animals, in case of any natural disaster, since he would be the one to see it coming – which he eventually does later in the novel with the storm - being in accordance with nature.

3.3 *Bathsheba and the Great Barn*

Bathsheba's introduction is different from that of Gabriel, as she is set into his world, rather than the other way around. She is introduced through Oak's eyes, which gives the reader the sense of just how beautiful she is. Even the weather corresponds with her beauty that day. "It was a fine morning, and the sun lighted up to a scarlet glow the crimson jacket she wore, and painted a soft lustre upon her bright face and black hair."¹⁵ And in the scene, where he sees her but is not aware that it is Bathsheba he's looking at, it is described that he saw her as when "Satan first saw Paradise"¹⁶ She is a representative of both the rural life and the urban life, more so at the beginning of the book, when her vanity and pride place her more into the urban world. As the story progresses, she becomes more and more acquainted with the life on the farm and what it truly takes to run such a place and comes to a better understanding of nature. Oak first sees her from Norcombe Hill, establishing the dynamic of their relationship for the rest of the novel – he has the moral and literal high ground and as he sees her on the road, it is the literal journey that Bathsheba is taking towards a character that would come to realize the importance of the universe with Oak watching over her.

If one would look at the characters in terms of their objects, the object characterizing Bathsheba the most in the first part of the book would be the mirror that she takes out of her pocket. It is this scene that introduces her as a vain person, but also sets the contrast between her and Gabriel – in the beginning, Bathsheba belongs far more into the city and on the outside than on the inside. This is also why Bathsheba cannot be placed neither as a rural nor

¹⁵ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 8

¹⁶ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 17

a city character. The mirror blinds her and clouds her judgment, just like the sword of sergeant Troy would later in the novel.

Their other important encounter is during the storm – an environmental disaster. When the storm comes, Gabriel is surprised, that Bathsheba was so perceptive to the weather conditions, that she awoke with the first lightning. Gabriel was prepared for the storm long before it came, since he sensed it from the shifts of the wind – another sign of his universal and natural connection, but he didn't expect Bathsheba to be awake for it. She is ready to help in any way, not minding that it could be dangerous or not suitable for a lady. "She bore its dazzle without flinching, thunder and all, and again ascended with the load"¹⁷

In their different perception of the storm, one could see that Oak does not rely on nature only for its practical features – he is fascinated by it. Bathsheba fears the storm but knows she must stand up to it but Oak, Oak admires it. Troy is not even awoken by the terrible thunder, being asleep through the whole thing. The description of the storm is put in such a way that the reader must sense the tension and magnificence of it all, imagining the beauty and danger of a storm on a summer night. The situation seems pressing and yet the two main protagonists are the only ones there, since no one else bothered to listen to the calls of nature. "It was a perfect dance of death."¹⁸ Bathsheba is properly rewarded for her ability to listen, since they saved her ricks that night.

The Great Barn shows its significance to the story, since it is the church of rural life, it is where people get together, and it is a piece of architecture that cannot be seen anywhere else. When the sheep-shearing occurs, it is a "first day of June, and the sheep-shearing season culminated, the landscape, even to the leanest pasture, being all health and colour. Every green was young, every pore was open, and every stalk was swollen with crowding currents

¹⁷ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 279

¹⁸ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 280

of juice. God was palpably present in the country and the devil has gone with the world to town.”¹⁹ Hardy reminds the reader, that town is where the devil resides, and countryside is where God is. He even compares the barn where the shearing takes place to a church, since the shape resembled it.

“First he treats the four-hundred year old building as an instance of that continuity between past and present which typifies the rural mode of life; then, in a separate paragraph, he contrasts the relative immutability of Weatherbury and its ways with the rapid change, the discontinuity between past and present, which characterizes London or Paris; and he comes out finally with the flat statement that " the barn was natural to the shearers, and the shearers were in harmony with the barn".”²⁰

The description of the barn itself takes two pages, just to make the reader aware of its importance. No other architectonic place has so much space dedicated to its description, probably because no other space is so closely connected to the rural environment. What is worth noticing is how the barn withstood the test of time, since Hardy describes it as a medieval building that has been in use for centuries for the same thing. It is obviously not as old as the natural environment surrounding it, but it supports the illusion of timelessness and endurance. It creates the same sense of history and its connection to people as Bathsheba’s house. She changes the purpose of the house to serve as a farm, but Troy wanted to renovate it – bringing the new, while disrespecting the original function of the buildings.

In the barn Bathsheba sees Oak in his element – therefore the barn being a very important place in the course of their relationship – he is skilfully shearing sheep while organizing and monitoring others. “The clean sleek creature arose from its fleece – how perfectly like Aphrodite rising from the foam should have been seen to be realized – looking

¹⁹ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 162

²⁰ Babb, Howard. “Setting and Theme in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.” *ELH*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1963, pp. 147–161. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2872087.

startled and shy at the loss of its garment which lay on the floor in one soft cloud.”²¹ It is a “formal celebration of work seen in its particularity”²² which is also an important part of the story for Bathsheba – realizing her place at the farm and in the rural life. This also proves, that Oak is of great value to the farm, and Bathsheba does admire him for his hard work. “So, when Bathsheba and Gabriel finally come together it is not in a blaze of passion. Their union has a strength that comes from shared experience, a common commitment to a working life and the sense of good fellowship derived from this.”²³ The scene in the great barn could be a turning point in the novel for Bathsheba, but then she meets Troy, and her progress towards her rural life is held back.

3.4 *Troy and the Otherness of Places*

Sergeant Troy represents the life in the city, the outer life, and as once already said; the town is where the devil resides. The reader meets Troy sooner than Bathsheba herself. The contrast between the two scenes of meeting Oak and Troy couldn’t be more evident. The narrator introduces both men in winter, yet Oak is presented on a nice and sunny December day and Troy on a night “when sorrow may come to the brightest without causing any great sense of incongruity.”²⁴ It is not even a proper meeting, since Troy never leaves the quarters. This shows his convenience, not wanting to go out into the snow, which is cold and dreary. He doesn’t think about the future like Gabriel does, only acts on the things that suit him at the moment. “Trapped so completely in the present, Troy can have no sense of an act's consequences, is therefore incapable of a moral decision. And nowhere in the story

²¹ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 166

²² Gregor, *The Great Web: the Form of Hardy's Major Fiction*, 66

²³ Temblett - Wood, *The Macmillan Master Guides Far from the Madding Crowd*, 52

²⁴ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 95

does Hardy permit him to be governed by anything except impulse, making even Troy's self-condemnation following the death of Fanny Robin a mere fit of remorse.”²⁵

The first meeting of Troy and Bathsheba happens at night, as do many other important events in Hardy's universe. It is important because it foreshadows their relationship in the future. The path that Bathsheba decides to take home was “a vast, low, naturally formed hall, the plummy ceiling of which was supported by slender pillars of living wood, the floor being covered with a soft dun carpet of dead spikelets.”²⁶ This resemblance to a hall of a house made the path seem safer, if one considers that it led right to her door, just like a hall made of stone would. Their meeting occurs in the darkest spot of the natural hall, with something “forcibly pinning”²⁷ Bathsheba to the ground. She is unable to move, as she is trapped. But it is too early in the story for Bathsheba to recognize the warning signs her environment has been giving out, she is infatuated by Troy's looks and flattery. She was supposed to marry Boldwood and live a rural life, yet “in marrying Troy she broke away from that life. It is significant that the marriage itself takes place not in Weatherbury, not within the locality', but in a distant city. Bath is not just some way away - it represents a different world.”²⁸

Even though this scene is the first time they meet, it is not where Bathsheba falls in love with Troy. Their meeting in the valley of ferns resembles a mating ritual of sorts. Fern is an ancient plant with many magical aspects ascribed to it. The legends say, that fern had the ability to make one invisible²⁹ which would be perfect for the secret meeting of Troy and Bathsheba, hidden out of sight of others – Troy even remarks, that he could hear Bathsheba

²⁵ Babb, “Setting and Theme in *Far from the Madding Crowd*,” 153

²⁶ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 182

²⁷ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 183

²⁸ Temblett - Wood, *The Macmillan Master Guides Far from the Madding Crowd*, 27

²⁹ Jessica, “Fern Symbolism and Meaning,” <https://symbolismandmetaphor.com/fern-symbolism-meaning/>

before he could see her and that gave her arrival away. Fern was also believed to be a symbol of young love – perfect symbol for the mating ritual. The hollow is not far from Bathsheba’s house, yet its geographical qualities make it secluded, seemingly setting it apart from Weatherbury. The chapter is called the Hollow amid the Ferns – if taken literally, it could be seen as symbolism of not only love because of ferns, but also the hollow promises and personality of Troy.

Bathsheba’s falling in love with Troy may seem irrational, since she is aware of his characteristics and she knows the tales of him are true, yet she seems blinded and enchanted by Troy that she gives in to the feeling anyway. Troy tries to impress her with the thing he is most familiar with – his sword. The blinding qualities of Troy’s sword share them with Bathsheba’s mirror from the beginning of the novel. Bathsheba herself remarks that swords are “weapons glistening like stars”³⁰ – however very different stars from the ones that Gabriel looks to. The resemblance to the glistening of the universe might be there, yet the sword is made by man, created to do harm.

Every important scene of Bathsheba’s and Troy’s relationship seems to be taking place away from the rural life. They do not share the same environment as Bathsheba and Gabriel, who constantly meet in rural environment. They even get married in Bath – in the city, away from the countryside. It almost seems that every time Bathsheba goes to meet Troy, she is seduced by the environment be it of the magical ferns or of the city and makes irrational decisions. Hardy constantly reminds the reader, that Troy’s presence is not welcomed by nature and his manners that he learned in town will not be tolerated. “For the pouring of the cloudburst through the gargoyles to wash out the flowers that Troy has planted on Fanny's grave is an act by which nature rejects him absolutely from its community and

³⁰ Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 204

rebukes him for his belated effort to atone for his treatment of Fanny”³¹ The ending of Troy is expected, since he is the only character without any growth and any connection to nature. Apart from Oak and the minor characters, all three other major characters have in one way, or another sinned against nature, but they learned from it eventually. They receive a lesser punishment; Bathsheba’s being having to endure all of what her actions have caused and Boldwood’s becoming insane.

³¹ Babb, “Setting and Theme in *Far from the Madding Crowd*,” 158

4 The Return of the Native

The Return of the Native came out in 1878 and had a slightly different concept to Hardy's other novels, since it first came out in a magazine. This resulted in the novel first coming out not as a whole but on a monthly basis. The story itself takes place over the course of one year and one day, so the fact that it ran from January till December was a welcomed addition, even though the story itself starts in November. Since this literary piece is a part of the Novels of Character and Environment, the descriptions in *The Return of the Native* are thoroughly detailed and thought through. The landscape descriptions are far more extensive than in the other two novels chosen for this thesis. The year's seasons gave Hardy an excellent opportunity to depict Egdon Heath precisely as it changes with nature and to show how important it is for its inhabitants to live their lives in accordance with it.

4.1 Egdon Heath

In contrast to the other two novels chosen for this thesis – *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Return of the Native* is set in one place and has a very specific time frame of one year. Hardy emphasizes the importance of the place by introducing the space as a character itself, making its introduction a significant part of the story. Egdon Heath is a special location, untouched and never changing, not by time, not by its inhabitants, quietly shaping the environment for the people who live in it. And while it may seem hostile and unwelcoming, Hardy manages to introduce it so well that it creates a feeling of a familiar place, almost a home. This might be due to the fact that Hardy himself grew up in a place very similar to Egdon Heath, therefore being able to give the place a familiarity that no one else could. "The heath is not just so much scenic background to the action, it is all-pervasive; without it, the novel would be unimaginable, for the heath provides it with the especial dimension in which it has its being. The heath holds the action of the

novel and its characters as though in the hollow of the hand.”¹ Without the heath, the story would not exist, it is the place where the characters either thrive or are captured, and it is the place where our story begins and ends. The novel does mention places far beyond the border of the heath, but people rarely seem to leave it and when they do, it ends in heartbreak and tragedy.

The importance of Egdon Heath lies not only in it being the sole place depicted in the story and in the first chapter being dedicated to it with as much detail and precision as if it were the first character of the novel. It also lies in how the description is carried out. The name itself suggests something unpleasant since a heath is defined as “an area of uncultivated land, typically on acid sandy soil, with characteristic vegetation of heather, gorse and coarse grasses.”² The raw, naturalistic description, such as the “oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal,”³ makes the heath something terrifying, even disgusting.

Hardy familiarizes the space with the people that live in it, giving it the warmth that the place needs, even comparing it to a tent, stating that “overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.”⁴ This description makes the unforgiving place feel safer – at least for those who seek safety. The fact that Hardy personifies the heath only supports the fact that he thinks of it as just another character, since he presents it as powerful, as if it were a living human being, especially emphasizing opposites like night and day, shade and light, fire and water, and the dull yellow ground in contrast to the green grass. “The heath is everything a man is not, as well as what

¹ Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy Illusion and Reality*, 125

² “Definition of Heath,” Oxford University Press, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/heath>

³ Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 364. All future references will be to this edition.

⁴ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 3

he is; its powerful impact within the novel is less in its personification than in its epitomizing of opposites which exist in infinite time.”⁵ It can be imagined to the last detail, with Hardy using opposites to draw out a place that is both terrifying and safe. “Nobody could be said to understand it who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn: then, and only then, did it tell its true tale.”⁶ This is not the only case where Hardy decides to use opposites to accentuate the contrast between the dangerous place and safe environment. He describes twilight and sunrise, the bright heaven and the darkest of nights. “It is more than merely a fine description; in essence it predicts the pattern of the novel. Nothing is as it seems.”⁷

The mentions of “the face of the heath by its mere complexion,” “stretch of rounds and hollows rising,” “the heath exhaling darkness” along with the fact that the heath appears to “slowly [come] awake and listen”⁸ indicate that Egdon is omnipresent and pays attention to the actions of everyone living in it. If not another character of the story, it is definitely a silent observer, holding the secrets of both the people living there and the people who have been long gone, given the architecture of the space with the barrows and burial grounds and ancient Roman roads. “The heath is thus not a moving force but a symbol of these human qualities; it makes a comment on man’s nature rather than giving its qualities to man.”⁹ It carries the fates of the characters in its hands, silently waiting for their stories to play out. “It was at present a place perfectly in accordant with man’s nature – neither ghastly, hateful

⁵ Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy Illusion and Reality*, 125

⁶ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 3

⁷ Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy Illusion and Reality*, 129

⁸ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 3

⁹ Charles Child Walcutt, *Man’s Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1966), *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv90d.

nor ugly, neither common-place, unmeaning nor tame, but, like man, slighted and enduring and withal mysterious in its swarthy monotony.”¹⁰ This personification is more thorough and elaborate than in the other two novels, where – although the setting does play an important role – it is not as descriptive and inclusive as in *The Return of the Native*. The heath gives people a safe space to live, but for some of them, it becomes a prison since many of the characters never actually leave it. “The heath is in effect a witness of human existence, but it also helps to shape its progress and destiny. At the same time, it provides a constant stable force against which these fluctuating lives can be shown in their true perspective.”¹¹

What is truly outstanding is the fact that Hardy is so focused on the connection of human to nature that he doesn’t let the outside world into his fictional one. The story unravels in the 19th century, which was a thriving period for the British Empire. During the reign of Queen Victoria, the country made various advancements and brought to light some magnificent inventions. It experienced growth not only in the inventions department but also where its economy and the arts were concerned. None of these things, however, reflect in *The Return of the Native*. It is almost as if Egdon Heath was some secluded space in the middle of nowhere, where it can’t be reached by any progress. When in fact, according to Hardy’s map of Wessex, Egdon Heath is nearly in the centre of everything. The special universe of *The Return of the Native* feels different – in *Tess* the reader can follow her on her journey and see the changes the places bring, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, we see people roaming freely from town to town, mimicking rural and small-town life perfectly. But Egdon Heath is a world of its own, it is in Hardy’s Wessex and even though it is a “vast

¹⁰ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 5

¹¹ Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy Illusion and Reality*, 130

tract of unenclosed land,”¹² it seems enclosed from the outside world, from the places where time has not stopped.

4.2 *Structure of Egdon Heath*

The space in the novel has a very specific division which influences the way characters travel through and around it, as well as its connection to the life outside of the heath’s borders. Within the first chapter, the two main spaces of Egdon are introduced, both put there by the hand of man but so integrated into the space that in time they almost “crystallized to natural products.”¹³ The two opposites, the highest point – Rainbarrow – and the lowest point – the highway (“the highway traversed the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another,”¹⁴) – play an essential role in the space of the novel. The road brings people into the heath, but also symbolizes the journey that can be made from it, representing not only the beginning of the story, but also new beginnings as a whole. Both the other novels start with the introduction of a road which represents Hardy’s traditional topic – the journey – be it a symbolical one as seen in *Far from the Madding Crowd* or an actual one as is the case in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

In *The Return of the Native*, the first character to walk the highway is an old man, the grandfather of Eustacia, but what’s important is that he sees a character that is crucial for traveling around the heath – he spots the reddleman, the person to whom it may seem no rules apply when it comes to moving in and out of the heath. However, the highway is not the only road in the book, the whole heath and its inhabitants are interconnected by roads that lead from one house to another, enabling the characters to visit and meet with each other. The meeting of the main protagonists and their fates is an essential part of the novel since

¹² Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 10

¹³ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 6

¹⁴ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 6

their travels rarely provide them with the desired conclusions to their journeys. The only person gaining from their journey is, again, the reddleman, who seems to be exempt from all the rules of the heath and who, by finding Thomasin in distress and helping her, ties their fates together and becomes the only one to get a happy ending; as if the fact that he is the only character free to move around as he pleases was the reason for why his fate is a happy one at last.

The other significant place – the barrow – is seen through the reddleman’s eyes as he looks around the heath and sees “hillocks, pits, ridges, acclivities, finished by a high hill cutting against a still light sky.”¹⁵ This moment is of importance not only because it reminds the reader of the history embedded in the heath, but also because it introduces another character and the proximity of the barrow to the heavens and the universe: “Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.”¹⁶ It is not the only time the barrow serves as a connection to the cosmic spheres. When Clym and Eustacia meet at the barrow, there is an eclipse of the moon, a celestial event that Clym goes to watch wishing to be someplace else, perhaps in a different world where things could have been different for him. Clym’s attachment to the universe is, however, different to the one of Gabriel Oak. Gabriel sees the universe as part of nature and uses the sky to tell the time, whereas Clym is more aware of his own small role in this world and that weighs down on him. The Rainbarrow is connected to the celestial because of its history and because of its height. “She turned and faced the heath once more. The form of Rainbarrow stood above the hills, and the moon stood above Rainbarrow.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 11

¹⁶ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 11

¹⁷ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 148

The characters always seem to be aware of the heath and its landmarks, constantly moving and looking around, as if they were keeping track of what is changing around them. Whenever a character sets out on a journey through the heath, they seem to look over the landscape, trying to find the slightest changes and maybe finding comfort in the fact that even though everything changes, everything also stays the same. The only person actually looking at things clearly is, again, Mr. Venn, who spies on Wildeve and Eustacia and notices the slightest changes in the landscape – all of the times that Eustacia lights a fire and goes up on the barrow - waiting for days to uncover their infidelity.

There are five more places in the novel that the characters visit and travel in between and then there is the outside world, a world full of color and fantasy, Eustacia's hometown, and the promise of a better tomorrow. The places depicted are mostly people's homes, such as the house of Mrs. Yeobright, the Inn that Eustacia keeps looking at with her telescope – another tool to see beyond the borders of the heath and escape it, even if just for a second and in her mind only, the house of Eustacia and her grandfather, and the house of Eustacia and Clym later in the story. Then there is, of course, Paris, which, just as much as Budmouth, represents the good life, glory, and glamour offered by big towns and, most importantly, freedom.

4.3 Traditions and symbolism

In Hardy's universe, traditions, superstitions, and symbolism are a very important part of the narrative. They only emphasize that people of the heath live secluded lives, away from the industrial revolution and away from city life where no tradition has its place. Traditions and superstitions were for the common people and while their popularity declined in big cities, in rural places like Egdon Heath they were what held the small-town community together. In *The Return of the Native*, they bear a slightly different meaning than religion does in *Tess*, but no less an important one serving to illustrate the lives of the inhabitants.

The whole story begins on Guy Fawkes night, also known as Bonfire night, when people all over Great Britain light bonfires to commemorate the failure of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.¹⁸ Since King James I was a protestant king, this tradition could be seen as anti-Christian, which is exactly why the people of the heath would be celebrating it, since although they were Christians, they did not attend Sunday sermons – even Eustacia remarks that “she has a tenth of a chance that Clym will attend the sermon on Sunday.”¹⁹

Fire celebrations aren't only part of one religion or one country. Around the world, different occasions are celebrated by bonfires, such as Walpurgis Night, which is a Christian tradition celebrated throughout Europe, but in Britain and Ireland, fire-worship was historically also assigned to Druids, therefore making it a Celtic tradition – “fire was construed as both protective and purifying, it was connected to a number of festivals. Neglecting the fire would mean fish would not come into the rivers, nor field bear grain.”²⁰ While none of these traditions collided with Guy Fawkes Night since Druids celebrated and gave thanks for the harvest on the first of November, one could see the resemblance. It almost seems that there is no religion in the heath, with Christianity, old Druid and other pagan traditions combined. The people choose the traditions and superstitions they want to believe, regardless of the religion they are associated with. Celtic mythology is apparent not only in the traditions of the people but also in the landscape. In the first few chapters, the land is filled with barrows and burial mounds, even the already mentioned celebration of Guy Fawkes Night takes place at one of the barrows, the Rainbarrow, the highest hill in all Egdon Heath. The burial mounds symbolize death, both literally, since bones that can be seen there,

¹⁸ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Guy Fawkes Day,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Guy-Fawkes-Day>

¹⁹ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 141

²⁰ Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 195

and metaphorically, since death seems to be present everywhere around the heath. This is not only because nothing can survive there, but also because of the deaths of relationships between the characters and their actual deaths at the end of the novel.

Most pagans believe had many similarities since they all found the purpose of life in natural things and believed in the power of nature. Pagans believed in witches, Druids, superstitions, and the powers a person can possess. These beliefs escalate to characters believing such nonsense as Eustacia being a witch; they test out various theories on how to prove it, such as stabbing her with a needle and seeing if she bleeds or believing that a human being would float in water, but a witch would drown. Other superstitions depicted include braiding one's own hair on their wedding day into seven braids or some of the characters' belief that Diggory Venn steals children, although he is a kind and honest person. And while some of the old day's traditions, such as singing, dancing, making a maypole, serenading newlyweds, and other community activities, can be nice and bring the people together, it is superstitions that keep Egdon firmly rooted in place, making the time stand still even though the world is everchanging.

4.4 Nature and elements

Hardy uses the four elements to amplify the power of nature, showing that everything can be both mild and so strong that it can have life-giving abilities and the power to destroy at the same time. The same concept works for heath as well, since it can be a tame place where people can peacefully live their lives, but it can just as well be a place of destruction. Although all four of the elements are present in the novel, fire and water are the ones that stand out the most, being direct opposites. Fire occurs on multiple occasions in all its different forms, including on the first night of the bonfires when enormous fires are lit on top of the barrows, the same night Eustacia meets Wildeve, but also in the form of small bugs lighting the scene when the men gamble. Another powerful image of fire is tied to

Diggory Venn, as the people of Egdon Heath are superstitious and believe old sayings. Venn is a reddleman and it is believed that reddlemen steal children. In one scene he lifts the lantern to his face and resembles the devil himself, thus supporting the ridiculous accusations. Mrs. Yeobright dies because of the power of the sun and heat – according to the *Encyclopaedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, fire can be imagined as existing in the sun, and so there is evidence that the Celts connected the earthly and solar fires²¹ – therefore taking the reader back to the Celtic heritage around the heath. Another fire related superstition is the effigy Susan Nunsuch mad of Eustacia is burned in a fire. Eustacia also walks past a fire before she dies, going into the darkness again, just slightly lighting her silhouette.

Even though Eustacia is mainly connected with fire, in Hardy's universe, nothing is just black or white, and in *The Return of the Native*, he plays with contrasts such as night and day and light and shade and speaks of Eustacia using both elements, fire and water. In the same scene that we see Eustacia standing on top of the hill, Hardy calling her the "Queen of Night" and letting all the fires burn around her, she disappears "with the glide of a water-drop down a bud,"²² which establishes Eustacia's connection to the heath but also her connection to the elements. The water can be as gentle as a water-drop, but it can be so powerful that it can drown you, which eventually happens to Eustacia at the end of the novel. This could also be a contrast to Mrs. Yeobright's death since the two quite literally die in an opposite way. On the day of Eustacia's death, she lights a candle and then swiftly puts it out – a parallel to her own inner fire. When she wants to step out, it is raining – she contemplates turning back, but eventually does not, resulting in her death. In the scene where she looks into the pool, "outside was a ditch, dry except immediately under the fire, where there was

²¹ Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, 195

²² Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 12

a pool. In the smooth water of the pool the fire appeared upside down.”²³ The two elements combine when she sees the fire mirrored in the water – it is the same fire that she uses as a signal to Wildeve on more than one occasion in the story to do something wicked, to call on an engaged man, to summon him with the power of fire, both the one that he can see and both the fire that represents the passion that she holds for him. The two contrasts of Eustacia combine perfectly in the scene beside the pool.

Since the story unravels over the course of one year, the reader sees the seasons change for Egdon Heath as well as for the characters. Hardy uses a similar concept as he did in *Tess*, as the seasons mirror the events in the characters’ lives, such as the spring for young love and fall and winter for death. In his work *The Great Web*, Ian Gregor suggests that *The Return of the Native* is paralleled to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, that each of the characters was merely swapped for one with a different name. One has to wonder if that really is the case. In *The Return of the Native*, the characters live less rural and agricultural lives, they live their life in the heath and never leave it.

As with the other two novels, Hardy connects its characters to the environment. However, he chooses to do so differently – in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, there is a clear parallel between a natural person, a good person who lives according to the rules of nature, and a city person, a person who is not compliant with the natural order and only creates chaos. In *The Return of the Native*, almost all the characters live in and come from the same place, so the connection to nature isn’t as apparent at first sight, but it is definitely there.

The character most connected to the heath is Eustacia, which is ironic considering how much she despises the place and wants to run away from it. We first meet her standing on a hill, looking like she is one with it, but during the course of the novel, as she gets further and further away from the natural side and wishes to escape more and more, we see her

²³ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 54

wither away, up until the day she meets her end in the waters. With that, she remains trapped in Egdon Heath, the place she dreaded the most, forever. “She ascended to her old position at the top, where the red coals of the perishing fire greeted her like living eyes in the corpse of day.”²⁴

²⁴ Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 45

5 Tess of the d'Urbervilles

5.1 Christianity and paganism

On the back cover of the Penguin Edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess is described as a “poor country girl”. With closer reading and understanding of the book, the reader discovers that the depth of this character far precedes this simple description. Tess perfectly completes Hardy’s image of a pagan country girl, because she and nature are one; unlike Eustacia and Bathsheba, Tess allowed Hardy to fully connect her to the natural environment. The other two novels show male characters more in touch with the natural and women more attached to houses and homes, but in *Tess* it is different. “Tess’s fundamental purity – according to the system of nature – is, according to social law, blemished by actions both sinful and unforgivable and Hardy must portray her both as she is and as she is seen.”¹ This is why the character has the unexpected depth, since the image of her as seen by others gives the reader the real sense of injustice and intensifies the hypocrisy of the people calling themselves good Christians. To comprehend certain passages and motifs in the novel, the two major religions must be discussed first. Religion and its different aspects and symbols have had a significant impact on literature throughout the centuries, therefore it must be an essential part of this thesis as well. Hardy placed emphasis on religion and its connection both to space as well as his characters. In *Tess of d'Urbervilles*, it is especially visible, the clash of two religions takes place throughout the novel. Not only in the sense of nature and the customs, but also in the main heroine, Tess.

Christianity was in its prime in the era of Thomas Hardy, both Catholicism and Evangelicalism. The novel can be seen as a criticism of Christians, or more so a tool to

¹ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 170

point out the flaws of the people believing in this religion, yet praise the religion at the same time. Hardy himself was brought up in Christian religion, although he remained agnostic for the rest of his life. “The inability to accept the Christian religion on intellectual grounds never prevented him from responding to the purely aesthetic side of Christian liturgy, in particular to its word and music.”² He was an intellectual but understood that people need “to make sense of the universe in humanly understandable terms, a need that ran counter to Hardy's own intellectual understanding of things.”³ He used Tess to illustrate how interconnected society and religion truly are and how big an emphasis is placed on the connection between the two.

The novel clearly illustrates that while Christianity brings certain rules into people’s lives, setting the moral code and guidelines, paganism connects people to the natural world, to their roots and to the circadian way of life. This conflict of religions is set throughout the whole novel, as we see Tess struggling with her natural side and the Christian rules that she is expected to follow. The society around her does not make it easier for her since they place these unbearable expectations on her by enforcing the Christian rules. So, when she recedes from the picture of a good Christian girl that she should be, she is ostracized and feels even more like a failure. The priest even refuses to bury Tess’s baby, preventing it to find peace in the afterlife since it is an illegitimate child. The people of the village become so hostile that Tess does no longer feel welcome in

² Jan Pawel Jdrzejewski, “Thomas Hardy and Roman Catholicism,” *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, Thomas Hardy Society, 1993, 31

³ Charlotte Bonica, “Nature and Paganism in Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles”, *ELH*, Winter 1982, vol. 49, The John Hopkins University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872901>

coming to church, which should be a safe place for the ones who believe.

This is almost paradoxical since the Bible itself clearly states to have mercy and to love thy neighbour, to help the ones in need, to not judge and to forgive. Yet, in the entirety of the novel, no good Christian steps forward to offer aid to the lady in distress. They praise themselves on their qualities and traits, yet not one of them fulfils their Christian duties. Even Angel himself, a man of Christian upbringing, condemns Tess at first without a chance for forgiveness. Even though she explains the situation and he tries to understand, he simply cannot forgive. The prejudice causes them to live their lives apart and Tess to finally meet her bitter end because of this.

The two religions intertwine from the very beginning of the book, when Tess and Angel first meet, during a “pagan ritual”,⁴ as Angel calls it with his friends. He is mesmerized by the ladies dancing on the meadow and although he is a man of Christian upbringing himself, he succumbs to the pagan religion more than he would ever admit to himself. When he talks about Tess, he feels her strong connection to nature and even feels compelled to compare her to things of nature, such as flowers and animals.

Paganism is pictured differently than Christianity in the novel. Although Christianity was the dominant religion in the Victorian era, paganism offered a certain calmness and such connection to everything natural that it made sense for the rural people to believe in it, especially when the superstitions kept coming true. One needs an explanation for the order of things and paganism simply offered them. “Hardy may even be implying that, in comparison with Christianity, paganism may represent an ethic more nearly suited to

⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 25

human desire.”⁵ It is very important to acknowledge that just like nature, paganism also has its dark side, perhaps because of the deeper connection to the natural world; it can be both uplifting and hostile.

Hardy however does not use nature to enhance the characters, which is uncommon for Victorian novels, since the natural is usually in synchronization with the spiritual. Pagans can interpret certain things in a more mysterious way, such as when one has sorrow, it starts to rain, but Hardy did not use the natural as such. He was not afraid to be more realistic, to depict nature as an individual entity, not responding to the characters, but more so the other way around. “For Hardy, nature operates according to laws that are not only independent of but at times at odds with human desire and the human sense of order.”⁶ This can be seen in various scenes, that life simply goes on as it normally would, it does not stop, nature does not wait on anyone, the birds chirp after Tess’s horse dies and they even sing after the fateful scene in the Chase. As Penelope Vigar noted in her book *Illusion and Reality*, Hardy uses birdsong, or the absence of it, to mark different occasions and scenes.⁷ One can almost be reminded of Snow White and her relation to the birds and all animals, her connection to nature, with the difference that the natural does not only work in Tess’s favour. The animals are also connected to the pagan world and its many superstitions, such as the rooster symbolizing that something bad is coming. “This does not necessarily suggest that Hardy, the educated man, believed in local superstitions.... On the

⁵ Bonica, “Nature and Paganism in Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles”, 852

⁶ Bonica, “Nature and Paganism in Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles”, 854

⁷ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 172

other hand, he certainly did believe in the possibility of reading nature's signs very closely."⁸

The importance of religion lies mainly in the fact that Hardy does create a clear difference in between the two worlds, trying to separate them at time, when at other times he combines them together. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the only one from the three novels chosen for this thesis, which takes the reader through the whole Wessex. Since Tess's journey is literal, she wanders through the places of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, connecting the spaces of the three novels. She takes the reader through different places that Hardy divided into Pagan and Christian ones, clearly giving them the attributes of the two religions, and depicting the clash that they represent.

5.2 *The Significance of Places*

Tess, being the latest novel to be published out of the three chosen for this thesis, has one major difference. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* and in *The Return of the Native*, the setting is somehow restricted to one or two areas, it's usually one town and its surroundings. Of course, the characters do move around in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, but most of the story happens in one place. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* however, we see the heroine move from place to place, searching for a home, connecting with every part differently. This is especially important in relation to the characters, since Tess is the one moving around, she has to be the sole heroine of the story by default. The two male characters of her life are not shaped by the environment to the same extent that Tess is. This concept is what majorly influences her sense of displacement, since she has no home she could be tied to. "She does

⁸ Drabble, *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, 167

not belong expressly to any society or to any time in history, she belongs simply to the country, which is timeless.”⁹

No other character in the novels is a part of their environment so much as Tess is. Whether it was Hardy’s intention to contrast the fact that she is one with nature or that she is a true country girl or not, he truly connected her to the environment. “Hardy shows her responding to life with the spontaneous, instinctive volition of an animal.”¹⁰ The constant reminder of the things she does and is being nature-like – she is constantly compared to a rose or a cat, a bird, or a wild animal - the allegories never seem to stop in comparing her to the natural world. “The wealth and diversity of the imagery by which Hardy accentuates her affiliation with natural processes of the world has purely the effect of emphasizing her intrinsic being.”¹¹

This culminates in the pagan ritual of the dance at the meadow, where she first meets Angel. Their meeting during the dance is brief, yet important, since it illustrates yet another clash of the religions, Angel being dissuaded by his Christian friends to join the pagan ritual. Tess’s life in Marlott was mostly represented by pagan rituals and symbols, yet the arrival of Angel brings not only the religion itself, but sadly also the prejudice that comes with it.

5.3 *Marlott and Trantridge*

This chapter will discuss the various places in the novel and their importance to the main character and the story itself. “It is a commonplace by now to say that at every stage – or phase – of Tess, Hardy employed region and landscape as a means of communicating feeling and states of mind.”¹² In different stages of Tess’s life, she goes through different

⁹ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 175

¹⁰ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 175

¹¹ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 173

¹² Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction*, 178

places. The first two places that are introduced is Tess's hometown Marlott and Trantridge – Tess's first place of work. Although Marlott is mentioned on the first page, it doesn't get more than one sentence at first, which is almost comical compared to the one-chapter long description of Egdon Heath. It gives the reader a sense of how important Marlott is to the story. The full description is given in the second chapter and with closer reading, it must remind the reader of Tess, since Hardy's choice of words clearly indicates the parallel. "An engirdled secluded region" "this fertile and sheltered tract of country, in which the fields are never brown and the springs never dry."¹³ The land is untouched and full of colour, yet still undiscovered by others. A similar description of Tess comes just two pages later: "Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience."¹⁴ Hardy described her with the same colour as he just did the landscape, paying a special attention to the description, using natural comparisons, such as "peony mouth"¹⁵. The situation in which Tess is first introduced is more than fitting for a young, fresh, pure girl, dancing in a white dress with flowers, the sun shining on her beautiful skin and hair.

"The sweet birds sing, the sun shines, flowers and grass grow luxuriantly, the milk from the cows oozes forth and falls in drops to the ground. This is nature at its most luscious and kindly, its most beautiful and generous, and this idyllic scene exquisitely complements the picture of Angel and Tess meeting and falling in love."¹⁶

The only scene where Marlott is portrayed in a dim light is when Prince dies. Even though Tess rides through the woods, nothing seems to indicate that a tragedy is bound to happen. The night feels calm and not terrifying at all, with the talk about stars being worlds and the choice of words such as serene made the journey bearable.¹⁷ The incident comes as

¹³ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 12

¹⁴ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 13

¹⁵ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 12

¹⁶ James, Gibson, *Macmillan Master Guides to Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1986)

¹⁷ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 33

a surprise, just as Hardy describes it, “like an arrow”¹⁸ and suddenly changes the life of Tess’s family and Tess herself forever. The surroundings change in that same instant. “The atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges; the lane showed all its white features and Tess showed hers, still whiter.”¹⁹ And even in this horrid situation, the “million prismatic hues”²⁰ suggest, that there might be beauty in the catastrophe after all. We might assume that she lived in her own beautiful bubble, where she didn’t know anything apart from home, so this could be a way for her to leave her home and learn more about life. She however doesn’t perceive the incident this way, since she feels as a disgrace to her family and with this, her destiny is determined.

To make up for her sins, Tess leaves the family home and the scenery changes for the first time. The surroundings are similar to the ones she was used to in Blackmoore, yet so different. “Its [Trantridge] description simplifies the meaning of Tess’s move from Marlott to Trantridge and it simply becomes a journey from Innocence to Experience.”²¹ The land around the mansion is mysterious and old, especially given the fact, that it is surrounded by the forest, “where enormous yew-trees not planted by the hand of man grew”²² and the mansion is new and beautiful. The luxury can be felt from the description and is linked to the new beginning Tess is hoping to find, Hardy himself says, that “everything looked like money”²³. This scene could be seen as the previously mentioned clash of the two religions, since the house is all new and shiny, but the natural world is still there, it surrounds it, much like paganism was the thing people still looked to at that time. The conflict of the two

¹⁸ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 34

¹⁹ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 34

²⁰ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 34

²¹ Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction*, 180

²² Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 40

²³ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 41

religious systems culminates in the picture of a mansion that seems wonderful, yet with the wrong interpretation brings only sorrow to Tess.

Her first meeting with Alec is less than desirable, although the surroundings are supposed to make an impression on Tess, as is Alec. "Nature does not often say 'see!' To her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing, or reply 'Here!' To a body's cry of 'Where?' Till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome outworn game."²⁴ This meeting and everything about it left Tess doubting if she should leave her home and had she listened to her intuition and the signs that had been given to her, she might have never left and her fate could have been entirely different.

5.4 *The Chase*

The fact that Hardy chooses the woods to be a source of Tess's tragic downfall and a source of her further disappointment in life shows just how much he paid attention to the connection between the story and where it takes place. As mentioned before, he tried to soften the harshest scenes by setting them into a mysterious environment. The woods are and always have been a mythical place where only the bravest dare to enter. Even in fairy tales, the woods are a source of the plot of the story. It is where the little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf, where Snow White meets the seven dwarves, and where Hansel and Gretel find the Gingerbread House. In Tess, it is where she also meets her fate, however sad it might be.

The Chase clearly represents a pagan place in the novel – it is mysterious, there are no rules to this space, it seems timeless and has a sense of otherness about it, since there are no actual inhabitants of the space, apart from the animals. It is secluded, yet it is right

²⁴ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 46

in the neighbourhood of Alec's house. But that is not the only thing that suggests that the place is more of pagan nature than Christian. The mistletoe in the forest was a "druid's most sacred plant, it was harvested on the sixth day after a new moon."²⁵ It is a plant so powerfully connected to the druids and Celts, that to this day, it is considered blasphemous to bring it into Christian church.²⁶

According to Michal Peprník in his work *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, there is more to the woods than meets the eye. And even though he speaks about the woods in American literature, the characteristics of the place can be applied to Hardy's concept of the woods as well. It is very important to acknowledge that the woods are a space that can represent both space and time. Which according to Peprník was mostly used in art but can be used when talking about forest as well. It can also be seen as a "place with a memory"²⁷, which is a concept that will be talked about later in this chapter. The woods represent a certain mystery, which Peprník calls "here and there"²⁸ – what is here I know, what is there is mysterious and unknown – the woods in the fairy tales are just next to the castle. Even in the novel, the Chase is right behind Alec's home, it is near, yet would categorize as "there", since our heroine has to make a journey and wander into it, not knowing how vast or dangerous it really is.

The woods are seemingly endless, yet according to Peprník, there are several dominants to be seen. First, one must acknowledge the border of the woods and its entry and then see the various outer places, such as houses, lakes, and a clearing in the middle.²⁹ The clearings are usually the space where the hero or heroine of the story gets initiated or

²⁵ Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, 334

²⁶ Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*, 334

²⁷ Michal, Peprník, *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, (Brno: Host, 2005), 13

²⁸ Peprník, *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, 19

²⁹ Peprník, *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, 21

tried somehow, however in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* this is the purpose of the woods as a whole. The initiation process can be anything from a trial or a wedding to a fight or an initiation process into adulthood – the change of a person from a child to an adult, which in Tess's case is represented by the loss of her virginity to Alec. This initiation happens, covered in mist and mystery, in the depth of the Chase, where there is no human in sight. "There was no answer. The obscurity was now so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulosity at his feet which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing... She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears."³⁰

Tess is also asleep in this scene, as well as in the scene at Stonehenge, the difference being, that here she does have a tear in upon her eyelashes, suggesting uneasiness and restlessness, in contrast to the peace that brings the Stonehenge and the fact that she is finally rid of her usurper Alec. "Hardy deliberately evokes an atmosphere of unreality. In both cases the starkness and grimness of the situation are highlighted by and contrasted with almost fairy-tale like quality of the surroundings."³¹ The contrast yet the complementation of the two scenes mark a beginning and end to the next stage of Tess's story, where she endures the hardships of life, to finally being captured at Stonehenge.

5.5 *Talbothays and Wellbridge*

The time that passes between the incident in the Chase and the final scenes at Stonehenge can be viewed as a road to Tess's recovery, as she needs to heal not only from being raped, but also from her child dying, from the seclusion she felt from the society, from the hurt that her baby could not even get a proper burial, because it was an

³⁰ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 80

³¹ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 187

illegitimate child and her trying to find a place and peace in this world. Something is different about Tess, she is no longer the cheerful young girl, she feels more detached, as if distant from her own emotions, from her own fate. It is however also the part where she meets Angel again, where she is reunited with her one true love.

When she leaves her home in Marlott again, “the season developed and matured”³², much like Tess, who is prepared to start over – “she became what would have been called a fine creature”³³ The description of the land around her is surprisingly alive and full, in bright colours with the waters being lively and clear, the wind blowing in her hair. She begins her new life at a dairy farm and could not be more content. While milking the cows and living on the farm, she feels content in living her ordinary life, almost forgetting her past. Although Hardy did not only use the weather as a mirror of the characters’ soul, the chapters in which Angel and Tess are falling in love are set in spring. Therefore, the imagery is rather sexual, as everything blooms and is fertilized.

But even the romantic scenes such as the one where Tess sneaks into the garden to listen to Angel play his harp, do have a certain rawness about themselves – as if Tess was Eve and the garden was the Garden of Eden, yet spoiled already with the worldly sins. The garden is “uncultivated and damp, with tall weeds emitting offensive smells” and Tess “stains her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime”³⁴, which is a very unusual way to portray a scene that should otherwise be seen as a romantic one. “In a sense, as we have seen, Tess belongs to the uncultivated garden, but she passed through it, stained certainly, but only on her skin.”³⁵ This could be symbolic of her way to Angel, the road she has taken

³² Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 55

³³ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 120

³⁴ Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 140

³⁵ Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction*, 187

and that has stained her, but she walks through it towards Angel. It is a magical part of the novel, where Angel and Tess get to know one another, where their love is blooming, “the imaginative drive has been to create a state of intense feeling, cut off from the past. Outside of that feeling, the world loses clarity in the half-lights, mists and heat hazes.”³⁶ The time leading up to their marriage and to Tess’s revelation is the happiest time and the surroundings mirror it perfectly. They are living their lives influenced by pagan traditions in peace, away from all the Christian judgment.

5.6 Stonehenge

Even though this monumental tribute to paganism can only be seen at the very end of Tess story, it quickly became a staple for the novel. As established earlier, there are no coincidences in the places Hardy chooses for his characters to appear in. Stonehenge is a mysterious place, even today, when thousands of people visit the majestic stone circles each year, just to get a closer look at the mystery and grandness of the place. In the novel it is a place where Tess’s Christian background fades away completely and she is surrounded by paganism, in which she feels safer, since this religion always made more sense to her. Paganism explained the connections to nature and all the seemingly supernatural things, the energies that can be felt and the behaviour of animals and people in certain situations. Tess in contrast to Angel was always closer to this religion in her mind, so it made sense for the Stonehenge to be her resting place. It ascribes human qualities to natural objects, which enforces Hardy’s philosophy that the environment shapes the characters who live in it.

According to Michal Peprník “places connected to a story”³⁷ are a very specific sort of place, usually connected to history, legends or stories. These places are meant to create associations for the reader, because they have heard about them before. There are two types

³⁶ Gregor, *The Great Web: The Form of Hardy’s Major Fiction*, 190

³⁷ Peprník, *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, 13

of associations that a place can create: either specific ones – connected to one specific story or historical event, or in this case the more abstract association such as a forest, a mountain³⁸ or Stonehenge. It is a very important part of the story because it represents Paganism, all the legends about it were very well known and are known, even now, for the current reader. This ensures that everyone who reads the book will have some association with the place, unknowingly ascribing various traits to the place itself. Without the reader's knowledge the place itself would become insignificant, as it could not bear the whole meaning on its own. The reader has to give it its meaning, which makes it even more powerful. This is also why every reader reads the book a little differently, noticing different nuances and having different experiences, therefore understanding the places and their meaning differently.

When Tess and Angel come to the mysterious place that Stonehenge is, it opens up before them in its astonishing monumentality. "The fact that Stonehenge is 'starlit' opens it out even further. It could also suggest that Hardy was aware of the theory that Stonehenge had some astronomical significance."³⁹ Hardy was well aware of astronomical significance of many objects and symbols and throughout his novels ascribes different qualities to astronomical objects, such as the stars, the sun, sunrise or midnight and full moon.

"Throughout the novel there is this same suggestion of mysticism, of things appearing to be something other than they are... At the beginning and end of Tess's story, Hardy deliberately evokes an atmosphere of unreality."⁴⁰ Both the final and the fatal scene in the Chase happen in a mythical environment suggesting a certain level of unreality. As if

³⁸ Peprník, *Topos lesa v americké literatuře*, 14

³⁹ Clark, Indy, 'The Misfortune of Ruins': Hardy and Stonehenge, *The Hardy Society Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2005), 21

⁴⁰ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 186

Hardy tried to soften the harshness of the scene by setting it into environment so poetic, that even the reader would be confused as to what just happened. There have been more than enough debates about what actually happened in the Chase, whether Tess was seduced or raped, and the opinions of this matter differ as much as possible. It comes as no surprise, since “throughout the novel there is a continual tension between an objective and a subjective view, as Tess herself is torn between a knowledge of material truth and her own imaginative conception of it.”⁴¹

Together, they arrive to the final destination, the Stonehenge. “The wind, playing upon the edifice, produced a booming tune, like the note of some gigantic one-stringed harp.”⁴² It reminds the reader of how they met in the garden, Angel playing his instrument, it takes the story back to the beginning of their relationship, when they were happy and safe, just like now, when the pillars of stone offer comfort and safety. Angel wanted to continue with the journey, but Tess felt finally comfortable and safe among the enormous stones. In the final scene, Tess is lying on the altar and although it is a pagan place, it seems sacred for everyone there. The men let Tess sleep, even they must feel the energy of the place and perhaps think that to take a life on the altar would be blasphemous. She leaves content, on a sunlit day, as a part of nature. Everything around Tess suggests that

“Tess is a fragment of the natural world, naturally seeking the proper environment for the moments of her life. She is purely and naturally a woman, desiring understanding and satisfaction, meeting male violation of her body and mind, and coping with it, barely, so painful is it; taking in the end a violent remedy out of nature, and finding relief and joy in a momentary union.”⁴³

⁴¹ Vigar, *Illusion and Reality*, 187

⁴² Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 467

⁴³ Simon, Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, (Macmillan UK, 1993), 105

6 Conclusion

The analysis of the three “Novels of Character and Environment” has revealed the connections between the characters and the spaces they occupy. It has brought to light several common features that the novels share, as well as their differences. The novels are all set in the space of Wessex - based on the real places in Victorian England to which Hardy lent his imagination and created a semi-fictional space with clear borders. He created a world that unites all his works together, yet every story and its characters are different - which makes his works stand out from any other author.

All three of Hardy’s novels chosen for this thesis share the theme of journey, be it a literal journey that Tess makes through Wessex, metaphorical journey of Bathsheba from a vain selfish person to a humble and selfless woman or the multiple smaller journeys of the characters in *The Return of the Native* through Egdon Heath. In each novel, the highway or the main road is an important topographical aspect of the place, since it serves as a device to introduce new characters into the story as well as it enables the movement around Wessex.

Christianity and paganism are present through all three novels, although in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* the contrast is the most prominent, since Hardy uses the historical and religious places and symbols to enhance this contrast. These two religions are also what majorly shapes Tess’s story, since she has to endure the prejudice of the Christians and it is because of this prejudice that she meets her bitter end. In *The Return of the Native* paganism – in this case the Celtic beliefs and Druids - has a more symbolic meaning than the one in Tess, it only represents something of the past, to remind the reader of certain historical events and traditions, also explaining the superstition of the people. Christianity is mentioned in both *The Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* but it does not play a significant role in either of these novels – in the sense that people occasionally go to church,

but other than that, they live their rural lives, with their holy ground being the barn or farm or other rural places.

Hardy categorizes characters according to their inclination to nature and the rural life. The people living in accordance with nature are depicted as good and humble souls, whereas the characters that come from the cities or the ones that long for the life away from the rural world are evil and bring chaos to the story. This phenomenon can be seen through all three of the novels, where the chaos is represented by sergeant Troy – who enchants the main heroine Bathsheba and leads her astray – she is therefore unable to form a proper connection with nature which would help her in tending to her farm. In *The Return of the Native*, it is Eustacia who wishes to escape to the city, far away from Egdon Heath and she pays the price in the end by drowning in the river. In the third novel, Alec represents the city life, the new and exciting chapter for Tess. He is the source of her pain and the connection to him is what determines Tess's fate.

Hardy works with each space differently, since he ascribes different meanings and qualities to each of them, based on their historical or natural characteristics. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, every place has its religious connotation, whereas in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the places represent far simpler, yet equally important meaning. *The Return of the Native* has a very specific structure of the space, which determines the movement of the characters as well as their fates in Egdon Heath. In setting his characters into spaces with different meanings – be it religious, historical, or structural ones - he determines their fates and therefore the outcome of their story.

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Appendices

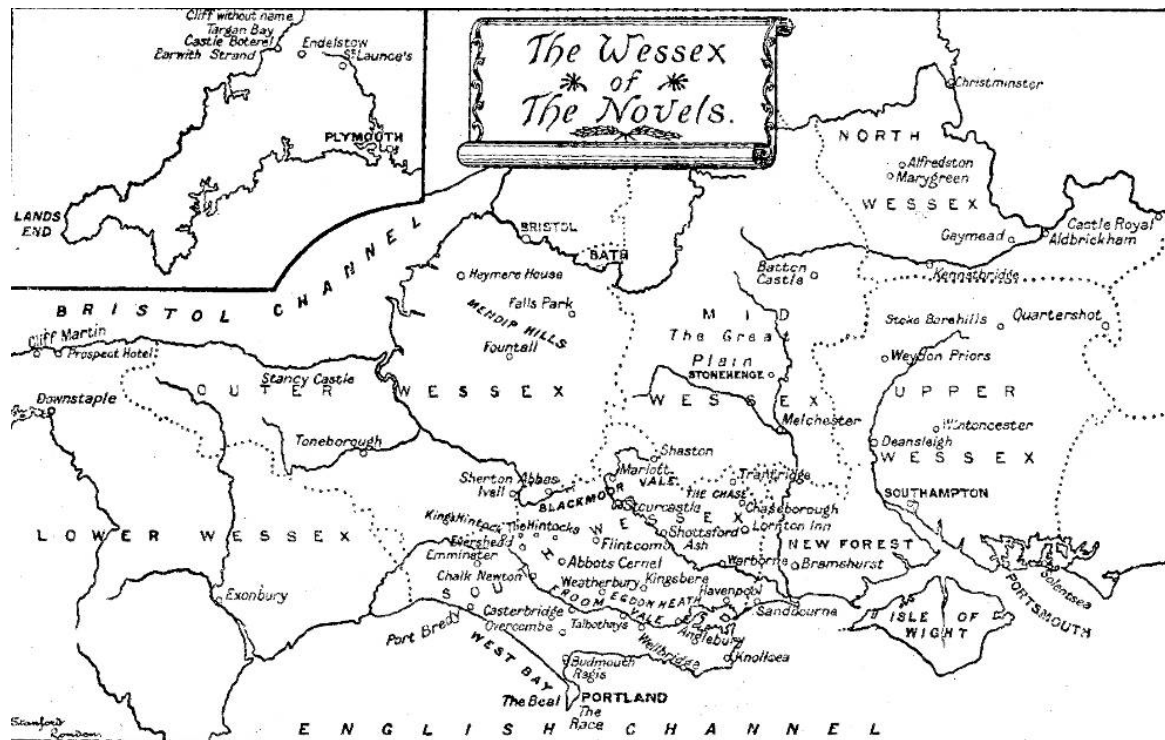


Figure 1 Map of Wessex¹

¹ Thomas, Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, (New York: The Modern Library), 2001, digitalized version via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Thomas_Hardy%27s_Wessex_1895.jpg