

Crossing the Boundary: The Space of Hardy's Wessex Novels

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on concepts of space in Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Woodlanders*. The theoretical approach used here is centred on two general categories of defining space. One is aesthetic expression of space, i.e. how space is perceived by the narrator or the characters themselves; this notion in some ways corresponds with smooth space as Deleuze and Guattari use this term to focus on the dynamics of forces in their *Treatise on Nomadology in A Thousand Plateaus*. The other category concerns mimetic aesthetics and space representation, i.e. how space is constructed with regard to a specific "reality," a mediation which in some ways corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's category of space striation. Examples of both approaches will be shown in the essential conflict of the novels' characters with respect to the environments they occupy. Attention will be devoted to the process of the characters' assimilation into the environment, including their possible absorption by space.

KEYWORDS

space, vertical/ horizontal/ spiral movement, Deleuze, smooth space, striated space, Nietzsche, will to power/ nothingness, active/ reactive characters

The general notion of space in Thomas Hardy's novels suggests a significant turn from the 19th century conventional symbolism of space description. Hardy gives space a philosophical dimension that had occurred only sporadically in Victorian novels.¹ In spite of being centred in one particular place, the Wessex novels open up into the sky dimension and become enlarged to its horizontal maximum, focusing on distance, remoteness and isolation of the place, elements which contribute to the romantic elements of the novels.

The characters of the Wessex novels who occupy the central space are affected by two basic concepts of will. Nietzsche's will to power, and his later will to nothingness can be used to describe the majority of Hardy's characters, who do not display the life energy sufficient for a meaningful existence. On the other hand, Hardy's concept of space seems to be based on Schopenhauer's romantic notion of a general cosmic power that clashes with human existence, frequently leading to personal tragedy. In case of minor characters, what Hardy calls Immanent Will becomes indifferent and tolerates their insignificance.

As the characters move within the space of Wessex, they constantly encounter boundaries of place. As a result of overcoming these physical or mental barriers, some of the individuals try to follow the vertical, a movement towards divinity or exploring the unknown. Yet this vertical movement leads to their isolation, disrupting human communication and a sense of being connected with the desire for change or the fulfilment of duty. Examples of such characters would include Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders* and Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*. Instead of following the vertical, some of these tragic characters may be dragged into the spiral, a chaotic movement with no goal apart from escape and no hope of refuge or salvation, as in the most tragic female

1 Hardy's concepts of space may to a certain extent be compared with spatial relations in George Eliot's last novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

characters of Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Eustacia Vye as well as in seemingly dominant males, for instance in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The third, final type of movement originates in the characters' assimilation into the environment and leads to their absolute assimilation. This absorption into the space is connected to passive resignation and the will to nothingness leading towards death, as is the case with Giles Winterborne and Clym Yeobright from *The Return of the Native*).

Hardy's Wessex, the Space of Egdon Heath

Thomas Hardy projects the space of Egdon Heath both on a temporary and historical level. His concept of space-time relations may be identified with Deleuze's notion of Chronos and Aion as described in *The Logic of Sense*.

Hardy's use of the space of Egdon Heath reflects a concept of time which not only evokes the present, but, as Gilles Deleuze describes it, "side-steps" the present.² Time in *The Return of the Native* is not cyclical; it moves in a straight line and becomes limitless, especially in relation with the past as in Deleuze's Aion, in which the past divides the present at every instant and "subdivides it to infinity". Egdon Heath then becomes a space with a limited present which produces a "lengthened, unfolded experience"³ stretching to the past. It would be a simplification to label the space of Egdon as timeless. The reason why the place is immune to permanent changes, seemingly dwelling in prehistory with a minor impact from civilization, is the unlimited experience of Deleuze's Aion of the incorporeal events and effects; the present has a very limited potential that cannot absorb the past. Instead of the vast and deep present of Chronos, the present of Aion represents the instant, pure moment, which is "atopon", the "no-place", forming the frontier between bodies and language, as Deleuze puts it with reference to Plato's notion of space-time relations. What becomes essential for Hardy's concept of space and time are the incorporeal effects that are subject to destiny. The process of counter-actualization is demonstrated by the "pure empty form of time"⁴ with "no absolute hour of the day"⁵ on the heath. The past of Egdon cannot be classified as gone and long forgotten, with greater emphasis placed on present, corporeal events. With respect to the visual qualities of the heath, Hardy mentions the monotony of the colour brown, which points back to the carboniferous period. Of equal importance is how geological time can be correlated with the Celtic era, as the Celts buried in the barrow seem to watch present movement on top of it. The lives of the characters living in the present are constantly affected by a process of counter-actualization which renders it impossible for them to dwell in the present.

Hardy's approach to the space of the Wessex region is based on a monumental concept of history in which the past in fact condemns the pettiness of the present; the presupposed historical consciousness is overdeveloped and threatens life itself. This extreme remembrance of things past is described by Hayden White as a situation in which *becoming* can be seen everywhere. Along the same lines this burden of history might be analysed in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*, the burden of an individual's past in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

2 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 188.

3 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 23.

4 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 189.

5 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1994), 150. All subsequent quotes are from this edition.

In the novels of Thomas Hardy the space-time can be divided into two types, corresponding to a double treatment of Chronos which can be either linear or cyclical:

1. Assimilation to nature: *The Woodlanders*, *The Return of the Native*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

2. Historical: with the emphasis on the burden of the past (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*). The tendency here is to romanticize the past, which can be delusive (as with Tess).

Hardy's characters occupation of space might be related to Nietzsche's will to power, a projection of active becoming as well as his will to nothingness, also a kind of power, the power of becoming reactive. This passive force of resisting life becomes significant for Hardy's characters, who often display Nietzsche's concept of nihilism and *resentiment* as the principle of human existence. Hardy's characters like Tess Durbeyfield, Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*, Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and some characters from *The Woodlanders* display no signs of active becoming. They are aware of their fate and of the harshness of life, but this recognition does not force them to struggle in an active way; their only activity is in fact the everyday cycle of labour, which makes them passive and reactive. A number of characters in Hardy's novels, however, do tend to become active and display a life energy which pushes them on, usually away from the enclosed space they originally occupied. Nevertheless, those characters' lives tend to end tragically resulting in an early death (like Eustacia Vye from *The Return of the Native*).

Hardy's social criticism would go hand in hand with Nietzsche's critical opinions on the "life-denying tendencies" aimed at both Christianity and positivist science, degrading man to a beast and dehumanizing him. Positivism sees man as an instrument of mechanical forces that get beyond human control. Hardy's characters exist under the influence of the outer forces rooted in the environment, also over which people have no control.

However, Hardy's work goes against Nietzsche's statement that "art is nature's metaphysical supplement" in order to overcome nature. In Hardy's concept of space nature cannot be overcome, a condition leading to assimilation and tragic absorption of his characters by the environment. In general, Hardy's notion of the Immanent Will stands in contrast with the Nietzschean will to power that the characters assert. Nevertheless, the majority of Hardy's main characters do not assert it, remaining passive or displaying the Will to Nothingness. They seem to succumb to a general cosmic power, pointing to Schopenhauer's romantic notion of the Immanent Will.

Victorian Territory and the Position of Women Therein - the Movement of Characters

As Tony Tanner indicates in the study "Colour and Movement in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,"⁶ Hardy's novels typically begin with an image of a lonely character moving through a scene, a position which contrasts the vastness of space with human existence. In *Tess*, different spaces represent each phase of Tess's life; Tess steps out of the scheme of being limited to one particular place, whereas the rest of the characters are usually bound within the space of Egdon Heath. Through *Tess* Hardy comments that the world is only

6 Tony Tanner, "Colour and Movement in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," in *Thomas Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, edited by R. P. Draper (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

a psychological phenomenon, Geoffrey Harvey claims that. "Her sense of guilt is the result of conventional education and not in accordance with the laws of nature."⁷

Apart from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the other settings of Hardy's novels seem to display a kind of self-centredness from which the characters hardly ever escape. Moreover, they do not even think of leaving the place, but simply succumb to it and subordinate their lives to its rules. Under normal circumstances even Tess would have no reason to leave her home but, as the first step, she is sent away by her parents, whereby her natural beauty, innocence and youth is exposed to the lust and moral unscrupulousness of Alec d'Urberville. From this point on Tess's wandering begins, finally reaching the tragic summit of the stone altar in Stonehenge. Through her nomadic existence, Tess is the only character in Hardy's novels who displays a definite curve of movement, overcoming distances and on a seemingly linear trajectory heading towards her tragic ending. Before she reaches Stonehenge, however, the trajectory of her movement gains speed, becoming a spiral whose energy cannot be stopped until Tess's tragic death. In comparison to other Hardean characters, Tess moves on a much larger scale and generally the space she occupies is, in Deleuzian terms smooth.⁸

To a certain extent Tess's existence resembles the trajectory of movement of the main character of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, though the latter novel concentrates on the specific region from which the main character disappears and returns again. Henchard constantly crosses the boundary, stepping out of and back into the region. In his movement the most important role is played by fate, which throws the character back into the tragic events that are to follow him until he dies.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* may thus be seen as the studies of displacement, as described by G. Harvey. Similarly as in the works of George Eliot, the landscape of these two novels may be seen as generalized, non-specific and timeless. This is in contrast to Hardy's *The Return of the Native* or *The Woodlanders*.

Tess's closeness to nature leads to her deterritorialization.⁹ In her original innocence Tess is led by instincts and by the power of nature into the woods, where she is seduced by Alec when half-asleep in the woods one night. Nevertheless, she takes responsibility for her part, even when her behaviour was rather unconscious and perhaps caused by her passivity and lack of education. A discrepancy exists between her instincts and rational behaviour: she is aware of Victorian morality and religion, which she does not want to transgress, thus she becomes reactive (in Nietzschean terms) and chooses the fate of infinite rambling, finally heading towards her death. Throughout her life she passively resists the men who harm her either by breaking Victorian moral codes, like Alec d'Urberville, or accusing Tess of doing so, as in the case of Angel Clare. Whenever her life collapses, she changes the place which was supposed to become her home, and her existential feeling of deterritorialization becomes intensified. On her life journey she heads upwards from the fertile Froom Valley to the bare, infertile fields of Flintcomb-Ash. Reaching the final point of a personal crisis from which she does not see the way out, she decides to commit a crime to get rid of Alec, who has been pursuing her persistently. The rationality of her decision is again questionable: similarly to her original sin of seeking

7 Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 13.

8 Deleuze and Guattari define the category of smooth space as the one of a number of the dynamics of forces. Smooth space concerns mainly the aesthetic expression of space, i.e. how a space is perceived by the narrator or character.

9 Deleuze and Guattari mention the term deterritorialization in connection with a group of nomads or a tribe. Tess's movement of a lonely wanderer figures the existential conflict of an individual with society, a relationship highlighted in the poetics of Romanticism.

nature, she may be led by instincts when she murders Alec even though she knows that her solution could last only a few days before she was caught by the police.

As pointed out by Michael Parkinson in *The Rural Novel*,¹⁰ Tess is separated from the village community not only because of her social status, her family situation or her illegitimate child. Her most apparent distinguishing feature seems to be her self-accepting passivity which predestines her to set out on the long journey towards her doom. In accordance with the conventions of Victorian society, Tess is absolutely dependent on the help of men in search for the support of her family. Nevertheless, when she accepts the men's offer to provide for her, she does so with a great amount of the mentioned passivity and impassive reactivity.

According to Parkinson the self-containedness of the place as a rural topos is bound to the isolation of characters. Even when they have the chance to become valuable parts of the community, they search for solitude, as do the reddenman Diggory Venn in *The Return of the Native*, Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders* and Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Clym Yeobright, whose future was to be bound to the intellectual life in Paris, voluntarily becomes the furze cutter to express his strong bond with the soil of the heath. However, in Clym's case the incentive for social isolation may differ from the motivation of the majority of characters whose passivity is grounded in emotional failure. Gabriel Oak, the shepherd in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (like Giles Winterborne and Diggory Venn) has to face the decline of his marriage proposal, thus in drawing back from the community he deepens his already strong bond with the open space he occupies. Tess seems to be the only woman who steps out of the self-enclosed space and changes her environment in order to attempt to escape her initial fatal mistake, an attempt which brings on further transgressions. On her journey she avoids towns, and thus deepens her social isolation.

Tess can definitely be seen as a romantic character facing Victorian conventions and occupying the smooth space of the "landscape beyond landscape, till the horizon was lost."¹¹ Parkinson sees her romantic attitude to reality in her dignity and earnestness when she speculates about human life and universe,¹² in the pride and bitterness with which she bears her fate, and in her sense for the loneliness and solemnity of place. As an isolated itinerant, Tess does not say much, but when she speaks about "nothing but the sky above my face,"¹³ her words focus on "a functional quality,"¹⁴ one which stresses the existential importance of the vertical dimension of space and points towards the absolute. Parkinson further reflects on the aristocratic stance of the heroine, an attitude which he considers as only suggested and which may have been granted to her by the origin of the d'Urbervilles. Tess's sense of honour (as she does not give in to Alec) as well as her feelings of responsibility and guilt may spring from her sense of being different, the other, and from her "existential self-awareness."¹⁵ Tess's character is further formed by Hardy's grim fatalism, by which one mistake can never be compensated for, and finally brings on tragedy. As G. Harvey claims in his study of Hardy's novels, Hardy's

10 Michael Parkinson, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," *The Rural Novel* (Bern: European University Studies, 1984), 164-200.

11 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 1891 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1994), chapter 59, 507. All subsequent quotes are from this edition.

12 Michael Parkinson, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," *The Rural Novel* (Bern: European University Studies, 1984), 56.

13 Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, 50.

14 Parkinson, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," 174.

15 Parkinson, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," 177.

outlook is rooted in the fatalistic attitude of country people. The theme of coincidence is, according to Harvey, derived from rustic folk ballads and folktales based on local superstitions.¹⁶

With respect to the movement of characters, the plot of *The Return of the Native* focuses on the two opposing characters of Clym and Eustacia, whose anticipated movements are rather contradictory. Clym has experienced staying away from Egdon, so for Eustacia he is the embodiment of her dreams of getting away from the heath and into the world. The movement out of the heath, however, brings potentially deadly results.

In contrast to Tess whose movement can be associated with an uncontrolled spiral, in *The Return of the Native* Eustacia is often confronted with the vertical dimension of space. The latter heroine is frequently connected to the highest point of the heath overlooking the place; this is the space above the routine life of the folk, which bores her. Eustacia's penchant for leaving the region is supported by her vertical movement towards the barrow where the pagan ancestors of the Egdon people are buried. Her figure is consistently projected against the sky, yet paradoxically enough her life ends in the deep waters of the Shadwater Weir. The pressure of the place becomes unbearable for her, as she dies trying to escape across the boundary of the region which seems to hold her in.

Both the characters of Tess and Eustacia seem to be in perfect balance and assimilation to nature and the environment they live in. It is Victorian morality that pushes them on to take steps that lead to their destruction and personal tragedy. The two women's motivations for their deeds are, however, dissimilar. Tess becomes a social outcast when she reaches maturity, patiently accepting the fate of a rambler who can try to escape but can never be free, her destiny being embodied in the devilish Alec who will find her wherever she goes. Tess thus becomes a lonely wanderer, one without a specific aim in life who occupies whatever space is offered to her. In a few lyrical intermezzos, Tess experiences days of happiness with Angel Clare at the Talbothays in the fruitful From valley. Finally, for a few short hours she finds peace in an abandoned luxurious house, as right before her capture the illusion of a life spent together with Angel is offered to her.

As one of Hardy's natural characters, Tess spends most of her time outside, assimilated to the space she occupies. Inside buildings she seems to be pursued by Victorian conventions and morality. However, it is exactly in the interior of the expensive lodgings called The Herons where Tess breaks the law and commits the most serious crime in her murder of Alec. Surrounded by luxury and comfort which Tess ignores, the place plays an important role in the naturalistic scene of the murder, an act which is soon discovered when the landlady notices a red blood stain dripping from the ceiling.

In comparison with Tess, Eustacia's freedom is limited by the boundaries of Egdon, a setting where she has the possibility to spend a relatively happy life in her marriage to Clym Yeobright. Her position seems in comparison with Tess more advantageous, yet her constant existential discontent and restlessness lead to her final disaster.

On the one hand, Hardy's novels focus on romantic imagery, for example projections of the dark figures or silhouettes of the characters in the sharp contrast against the sky above the vastness of the smooth space of the heath. On the other, vertical lines balance the oppressive horizontality of the heath in *The Return of the Native*

16 Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84.

and in *The Woodlanders* the vertical lines of trees the characters climb become significant as a connection with the heavenly dimension.

One of the crucial scenes of the novel introduces Winterborne cutting the branches of a tree. His vertical movement shifts him further, away from the civilized world on earth, disconnecting him from the communication with his beloved Grace as he is

climbing higher into the sky, and cutting himself more from all intercourse with the sublunary world. At last he had woked himself so high up the elm, and the mist had so thickened, that he could only be discerned as a dark grey spot on the light grey zenith [...]. Thus he remained till the fog and the night had completely inclosed him from her view.¹⁷

In correspondence with the personified space of the wood, the tree Giles climbed was shivering and heaving a sigh when Winterborne was supposed to communicate with Grace about the crucial development in their relationship and possibly to hear her love confession. Such communication is made impossible, which may refer to the fatalism reflected in landscape. Giles is predestined to become one with the natural world without human contact via social relationships, similarly to Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*. Winterborne's work and his nearly uncontrolled movement upwards sweep him away, into natural assimilation/ absorption, similarly to Yeobright's labour on the heath.

In *The Woodlanders*, Hardy makes further use of the misty image of the setting of the "gloomy Niflheim¹⁸ or fogland," with the elements of motionless and silent space. His descriptions seem to be grounded in Norse mythology, connecting the Wessex region with the ancient past of the Vikings, possibly with a relation to Aion, pointing to the infinite past dwelling in the present.

The connection of Norse mythology and the space of the woodland bears symbolic meanings: Giles's movement up the tree in fact takes him to the world of the dead, it is the beginning of his spiral movement through which his life ends. We may consider Winterborne a character who uses Deleuze's vertical "line of flight," a term which signals estrangement with the people who remain down on earth. The movement upward breaks the communication between characters who were supposed to become life partners, contributing to the characters' absorption by the smooth space they occupy. The line of the horizon then functions as the line of earth's striation, the difficult-to-cross borderline out of the heath.

The characters' assimilation into the space of the heath or of the forest is another aspect of the smooth space Hardy has constructed. The essential assimilation of characters can often lead to their absorption by the space they occupy. This remarkable aspect of the characters' movement in space, heading towards their death, is explored in *The Return of the Native* (Clym Yeobright and Diggory Venn), in *The Woodlanders* (in the character of Giles Winterborne), and finally in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Tess).

In Nietzsche's terms, assimilation in *The Return of the Native* can be distinguished as active regarding Diggory Venn, and reactive with Clym Yeobright. Giles Winterborne and Diggory Venn represent outcasts who are pushed out of the social structure to adhere closely to nature, which forms a counterpart to conventional society and village

17 Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*. 1886-7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1994), 111. All subsequent quotes are from this edition.

18 Old Norse Niflheimr, in Norse mythology it is the cold, dark, misty world of the dead. Situated below one of the roots of the world tree, Niflheim contained a well from which many rivers flowed. In the Norse creation story, Niflheim was the misty region north of the void (Ginnungagap) in which the world was created. „Niflheimr.“ Accessed May 23, 2003. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414727/Niflheim>.

community. Assimilated characters in general display positive human qualities (honesty, bravery, kindness, devotion, in Giles's case leading to self-sacrifice). Diggory Venn further embodies a higher moral order, corresponding with the heath. His attempts to re-join the local community fail because of the stigma of the colour red, which represents his assimilation to the environment of the heath; when he wants to come back to the homestead way of life, he is rejected both as a proper member of the folk community and a potential husband of Thomasin. His nomadic existence shows the smooth space that is occupied by the locals who do not have any specific goals at the space striation; their dwellings are scattered across the heath as is usually the case regarding the space of Hardy's novels. The open landscape thus displays a huge amount of energy that can absorb the characters who do not assimilate to the environment of the heath.

Diggory Venn can be associated with Fate. His assimilation with the space enables him to hide on the heath to watch and overhear others to prevent harm and reveal trickery. His association with Fate becomes most apparent in the dice game scene when he takes advantage of the darkness to win back money for his beloved. Venn embodies a romantic character occupying the smooth space who, like Heathcliff, mysteriously disappears from the region after he witnessed Thomasin's secret wedding:

"From that instant [...] the reddleman was seen no more in or about Egdon Heath for a space of many months. He vanished entirely [...] and scarcely a sign remained to show that he had been there, excepting a few straws, and a little redness on the turf, which was washed away by the next storm or rain."¹⁹

Nevertheless, Diggory Venn is the only assimilated character whose activity can be associated with fate manipulation. In Geoffrey Harvey's essay on *The Return of the Native* Diggory Venn is "rendered symbolically", as an "extension of the heath", displaying the "profound affinity to the place."²⁰ In this extreme interpretation his affinity with Fate projects him as a discontented, destructive figure censoring human behaviour, namely in relation to the marriages of characters from the heath. However, Venn can be seen merely as a displaced character or one of stoical endurance, patiently waiting for his time to come.

In comparison to Venn's assimilation to the space of the heath, other characters in Hardy's novels, for instance Giles Winterborne, Clym Yeobright, the Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess, go even further toward natural assimilation, becoming reactive characters continuously absorbed by the space they occupy. Clym as well as Tess are at some point compared to insects, figuring a biological determinism related to the element of naturalism.

As he becomes reactive, Clym seems to be permeated by the heath and is considered a product of the space. His desire is to live without ambition and to concentrate on hard labour; he displays an intellectual passivity which is caused in part by his illness. His contentment comes in being limited in his daily routine:

"The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath..., entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss."²¹

Clym's attitude towards the heath is the counterpoint to Eustacia's hatred of the place. Clym is one of Hardy's most transparent examples of absolute unity with

19 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1994), 194.

20 Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

21 Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 326.

place. Having experienced the life in one of the most developed cultural and intellectual modern centres of Europe, Clym becomes aware of the contrast with his native region to which he returns. In his preference of physical contact with the landscape of Egdon Heath the powerful potential of the place of his birth is to permeate his senses. Through the character of Clym, Hardy expresses yearning of civilized man to return to the primeval values of human existence. This essential theme of his novels is closely connected to the notion of time perception as well as the concept of Deleuze's Aion.

The substance of Being is in Hardy's characters based on passivity, reactivity and on the ignorance of the space they inhabit. In moments of harmony the lovers dwell in "delightful monotony,"²² which foreshadows future catastrophe:

"The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes for the present. They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light."²³

Giles Winterborne represents a character whose assimilation to the environment degrades him in the course of *The Woodlanders* to a mere shadow absorbed by the woods. The life energy of "Autumn's brother" soon vanishes as Giles is shifted deeper into the woods. He becomes a romantic character suffering from an unachievable love relationship; in connection with Giles's deterioration the concept of space in the novel shifts from romantic elusiveness towards naturalism.

As a part of this shift of *The Woodlanders*, the phantasmal aspect of the forest is stressed as the trees "rose as haggard, grey phantoms whose days of substantiality were passed."²⁴ Winterborne then seems to be "[...] diminishing to a faun-like figure under the green canopy and over the brown floor"²⁵ and the bleak, romantic atmosphere approaches the aspects of naturalism when the forest bears human aspects in strangely deformed, ghostly shapes, demonstrating metamorphosis:

The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak, lidless eyes: there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity; while now and then low peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of boughs sat faint cloven tongues.²⁶

However, the ghastly atmosphere and the hostility of the space of the forest have little effect upon the female character walking through the place. At this point Grace Melbury does not seem to perceive the grimaces of personified nature as she proceeds on her journey of escape from her husband, seeking the help of Giles Winterborne. The humble cottage Grace looks for in the heart of nature can be compared with the dwelling of Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Both male characters Oak and Winterborne display a similar balance with nature. Nevertheless, in the course of the novel Giles's intensive natural assimilation transforms into his absorption into the forest surrounding his dwelling and his voice becomes united with the weather. Moreover, Giles' romantic love for Grace has no further prospects in comparison with the pastoral ending of the novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Winterborne's intensive contact with the space of the forest in unfavourable weather along with his disillusionment with society initiate his slow approach to romantic death; the young hero in fact dies for his love, which ironically comes too late and is bound by Victorian convention.

22 Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 281.

23 Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 281.

24 Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 1886-7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1994), 217.

25 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 348.

26 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 360.

The crucial obstacle for the potential lovers is formed by Victorian morality: Giles lets Grace stay in his cottage overnight, however, because of his gentlemanly gesture he stays outside in the rain. The potential lovers communicate only through the window as if they were in the centre of attention of Victorian public. Similarly to the concept of space of *Wuthering Heights*, the contrast between the outer and inner space becomes apparent. The interior of Giles's cottage represents safety and a warm and dry place to stay, whereas Giles, remaining outside during the rage of a storm, is exposed to the dangers of the natural elements. Being assimilated to natural cycles and already facing his approach to death, he does not mind the conditions outside, thus he has become reactive like Tess or the Mayor of Casterbridge.

The most intensive rage and fury of natural elements are expressed in the scene of Winterborne's death. Portrayed through personification, the storm threatens the cottage which shelters Grace but not Giles:

"The wind grew more violent, and as the storm went on it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colourless thing, was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, [...] shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the walls."²⁷

The humans exposed to a harsh, abrupt change in the weather seem to be diminished to mere helpless victims striving to survive, facing an irrational force hard to define: "As in the grisly story, the assailant was a spectre which could be felt but not seen." Hardy's naturalism becomes intensified in this scene as the storm is compared to a violent aggressor, "in the manner of a gigantic hand smiting the mouth of an adversary," with the rain figured as "blood from the wound."²⁸

In the description of the forest, Hardy makes use of the notion of smooth space, especially in the night scenes in which "the darkness was intense, seeming to touch [Grace's] pupils like a substance."²⁹ Orientation in space becomes difficult for those who do not display sufficient assimilation.

Close to death, Giles' voice is identified with the voice of "an endless monologue [...] from inanimate nature in deep secret places where water flows."³⁰ Apart from being absorbed by nature, Giles's soul after his death transcends the space of the woods, "passing through the universe of ideas like a comet; erratic, inapprehensible, untraceable."³¹ The correspondence between nature and Giles after his death points to the infinity of natural cycles in the continuation through the trees he planted. Nature represents Giles's grave as well as new life springing from the woods.

Conclusion

Hardy's focus on space-time relations seems to be far more complex than the space projection of other Victorian novelists, who frequently rely on consolidating either the position of a house and its domestic atmosphere or a dwelling exposed to the either natural or supernatural elements (e.g. in *Wuthering Heights*). Hardy's spatial projections are based on the notion of the open space. In contrast to the landscape of the Brontë

27 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 372.

28 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 372.

29 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 373.

30 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 377.

31 Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, 379.

sisters' novels, for example, Hardy's spaces become enlarged to their vertical and horizontal maximum, giving way to the interpretation of a heavenly dimension but also of oppressive limits in the distance. The lives of characters remain restricted by the boundaries of the region. Nevertheless, the characters exist mostly in the open space, thus the limits of the interiors are not emphasized. At the same time, the space of Wessex displays more specific geographical details, as the Wessex landscape does not become "empty" or blurred, an effect which would cause the characters' confusion. However, the outside (the modern world of the town) seems non-existent, infiltrating only the intruders into the core of Wessex. Hardy's concentration or accumulation of time relations into one generally non-changing period can be related to the concept of Deleuze's Aion, while at the same time it also reflects Deleuze's Chronos, a representation of the cyclical concept of nature. In accordance with Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of space, the notion of the smooth and the striated becomes apparent. The landscape of Wessex offers, however, a wider interpretation of space becoming smooth and thus exposed only to minimal striation. The illusory landscape of Wessex can generally be considered a smooth space with its own rules of time (e.g. Egdon Heath), a space which manipulates the characters from their assimilation into absorption by the environment they occupy. The space of Wessex has not succumbed to striation apart from the little villages therein. It has resisted intrusions by the outside modern world, and is thus preserved in its fictional form up to today. As a continuity of literary tradition of constructing "unique fictional topographies"³² we can perceive e.g. Jim Crace's novel *Signals of Distress* (1994) set in West Cornwall in Victorian times. According to Petr Chalupský there is also a "coexistence of settings and characters" in Crace's novel which brings *Signals of Distress* close to Hardy's novels: "As these people are exposed to changes far beyond their control, they are forced to cope with often conflicting demands in order to survive or preserve the community. The tension between adapting to such changes and preserving one's beliefs, values and personal integrity is inevitably accompanied by anxieties and fatal losses for these individuals. Moreover, it suddenly places them outside the social group, making them fully responsible for further courses of their life."³³

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32 Petr Chalupský, "A Parable of Humanity – Character and Landscape Construction in Jim Crace's *Signals of Distress*," *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*. Vol. 4, no. 1 (2012): 39.

33 Chalupský, "A Parable of Humanity", 34.

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