

## **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.

