The Places and Spaces of Middlemarch and Jude The Obscure

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Abstract

This article investigates the role of places in *Middlemarch* by George Eliot and *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy, with a focus on how these novels transform and interrelate places and spaces. Utilizing Michel De Certeau's theories, the study examines how the protagonists' experiences convert places into memory-infused spaces within the narratives and identifies, within the fictional space of each novel, two key spaces: physical space and feminist space. It focuses on fictional space acting as a protagonist influencing plot and character development, a concept linked to "representational spaces" as discussed by scholars like Gullón, Lefebvre, and Régulier. The article also focuses on "feminist space," both literal and figurative, and investigates whether the female protagonists are able to truly feel free in these spaces or if a sense of imprisonment constantly troubles them. Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy feature fictional settings in England that are rooted in realistic ones: Eliot's Middlemarch and Hardy's various parts of Wessex in *Jude the Obscure*. Middlemarch is not just a town but encompasses the entire novel; similarly, *Jude the Obscure* is dominated by the city of Christminster. The methodology involves a close reading of the novels, drawing on De Certeau's framework and Franco Moretti's idea of "literary geography," which distinguishes between author-associated places and fictional locations. The findings reveal that in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*, place is not merely a backdrop but a central element that not only reflects the deep connection between characters and their environments but also influences character development and plot.

الملخص

يستكشف هذا المقال أهمية الأماكن في روايتي ميدل مارش (Middlemarch) للكاتبة جورج إليوت وجود ذي أبسكيور (Jude The Obscure) للكاتب توماس هاردي ، مع التركيز على كيفية تحويل هذه الروايات للأماكن والمساحات وربطها ببعضها البعض. باستخدام نظريات ميشيل دي سيرتو، تفحص هذه الدراسة كيف تحوّل تجارب الشخصيات الأماكن إلى مساحات مفعمة بالذكريات داخل السرد ،وتحدد داخل المساحة الخيالية لكل رواية مساحتين رئيسيتين: المساحة المادية والمساحة النسوية. تركز الدراسة على المساحة الخيالية التي تعمل كالبطل المؤثر في تطوير الحبكة والشخصيات، وهو مفهوم مرتبط بـ "المساحات التمثيلية" كما ناقشها علماء مثل غولون، لوفيفر، وريغوليي. كما تركّز المقالة على "المساحة النسوية"، سواء كانت حرفية أو مجازية، وتتحقق في ما إذا كانت البطلات الإناث قادرات على الشعور بالحرية الحقيقية في هذه المساحات أم أن شعورًا بالسجن يطاردهن باستمرار. تتميز روايتا جورج إليوت وتوماس هاردي ببيئات خيالية في إنجلترا مستمدة من أماكن واقعية: ميدل مارش لإليوت وأجزاء مختلفة من ويسكس في جود ذي أبسكيور لهاردي. ميدلمارش ليست مجرد بلدة بل تشتمل الرواية بأكملها؛ وبالمثل، تهيمن مدينة كريستمنستر على جود ذي أبسكيور. تتضمن المنهجية قراءة متأنية للروايات بالاعتماد على إطار دي سيرتو وفكرة فرانكو موريتّي حول "الجغرافيا الأدبية"، التي تميز بين الأماكن المرتبطة بالمؤلف والمواقع الخيالية. تكشف النتائج أن المكان في ميدل مارش وجود ذي أبسكيور ليس مجرد خلفية بل عنصرًا مركزيًا يعكس العلاقة العميقة بين الشخصيات وبيئاتهم كما يؤثر أيضًا على تطور الشخصيات والحبكة.

Introduction

In his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau (1984) declares that stories "carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces" (p. 113), and, consequently, so do novels. Nevertheless, he adds that the novel not only includes and represents space, but it also

"founds spaces" and "provides spaces for the actions that will be undertaken" (pp. 123-124), or integrates other spaces. Out of this diversity of spaces included in the novel, the following three might be considered of utmost importance: the fictional space, the literary space, and the space of the reader. The invented space (otherwise known as the fictional space), is where the plot develops. According to Ricardo Gullón (1975), it "exists starting from the moment of invention itself" (p. 12), that is from the very first words that begin the events of a novel. Kant (18th century) was the first to relate the idea of space to that of literary space which is the space of the text itself, and "it is there that it exists, and it is there that it has an operative force" (Gullón, 1975, pp. 11-12). The third type of space is that of the reader: it is the distance between the reader and the text, and it is bridged by the amount of detail provided to the reader by the narrator. This can be referred to the fact that, as De Certeau (1984) proposes, "an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs" and then concludes that "*space is a practiced place*" (p. 117).

Furthermore, when someone has an experience of any sort in a certain place, a connection between this person and the place is born, and that place is then transformed, through experience, into a space. Ricardo Gullón refers this idea to the hypothesis that, once experienced, space "is filled with memories and hopes which in some way allows it to be personified, felt as a reality whose consistence varies according to who observes it or experiences it" (Gullón, 1975, p. 12). In a parallel manner, Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier declare that "all 'subjects' are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy *and modify*" (Lefebvre & Régulier, 2006, p. 35, *emphasis added*), thus echoing the last idea of the "transformed" or modified spaces of Gullón. Lefebvre and Régulier (2006) further develop this theory of "representational spaces" – the third of their "triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived" spaces – and define them as "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' […]. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (p. 39). It might be deduced that these representational spaces can be characterized as *also* fundamentally transformational, that is, spaces where the growth and alteration – on the social, individual, psychological, and intellectual levels – of characters is revealed.

In general, the expression *place and literature* may actually carry in its fold two implications. The first are places that are immediately associated with the author – such as the town, city, or country of birth or of residence – and these are places considered to be external to the text itself. The second are places *in* literature, and these are the locations where the plot occurs, from structures or residences to cities and countries that are "experienced" by the individuals. Franco Moretti (1999) labels these as "literary geography" and classifies them, in turn, into *space in literature* and *literature in space*: the former being the fictional space, and the latter the real historical space (p. 3). The focus in this article is on the fictional space, the "invented space" where the plot develops. Such places, it will be argued, are not simple settings, but are "protagonists" themselves in that they at times mirror a character's persona while, at other times, they enact a role in the progress of the plot or the growth of a character. Additionally, Peter Brown (2006) posits that "place in literature performs an important function in the exploration of various aspects of identity, whether personal, social, or national. The individual's process of self-discovery is often enacted in relation to place, and through the attempts of an individual to understand it. Place influences the development of character just as much as places are given character by the people who inhabit them" (p. 22). This act of occupying a certain space determines characters' relations to places in novels, and the settings in the novels are going to be established as the "practiced places" of De Certeau, the spaces that acquire a substantial role in the development of both the action

and the characters. In brief, the space of the novel is the abstract space that is "tangible, recognizable, identifiable in form and meaning by means of the word that creates it" (Gullón, 1975, p. 15).

Both 19th-century novelists, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy wrote and published their novels during the same era, popularly known as the Victorian Age, and some of their themes and style are relatively close. They are in fact two of the most read novelists of the period and of the most extensively studied till this day. In many studies about their times, or about either of the novelists, the other author's name is encountered. What is more, when Hardy anonymously published *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874, the *Spectator* proclaimed that it was probably George Eliot who wrote it (Hardy, 1985, p. 100), being so similar in technique and approach to her own works. Eliot and Hardy are two authors who pay particular attention to places. Therefore, as Gullón (1975) expresses, such authors afford readers a great expanse of detail in order for them to be able to navigate among the characters and events with a familiarity close to the one felt at home (p. 18). As Michael Irwin (2006) confirms, "some readers take positive pleasure in inhabiting the fictional world, visualizing characters, rooms and staircases, responding to hints concerning direction and distance…" (p. 48).

This article is going to study the two novels *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) by George Eliot and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) by Thomas Hardy, focusing on the relationship between the main characters and the places, and attempting to answer the following questions: In what ways do the places in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure* act as protagonists, influencing the development of plot and character? How do the protagonists' interactions with their environments in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure* transform these settings into spaces imbued with memory and identity? What role do gender dynamics play in the representation of "feminist space" within these novels, and how does this influence the female protagonists' sense of freedom or imprisonment? It is going to be deduced that in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*, the places and spaces, both physical and feminist, are not merely narrative backdrops but act as protagonists that are integral the transformation of characters and the development of the plot.

Literature Review

The exploration of places and spaces in *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) has been the focus of various scholarly analyses, revealing how these settings serve as more than mere backgrounds but are fundamental to character development and thematic expression. In *Middlemarch*, the concept of "middleness" as discussed in Hollington's (2020) article, "Middleness in *Middlemarch*," emphasizes the centrality of space in reflecting the novel's social and moral complexities stressing that the spaces within the novel are not just physical locations but are symbolic of the protagonists' social positions and internal conflicts. Hollington (2020) remarks about the position and view of Lowick Manor, for example, that "the openness of the view provides symbolic expression, not only of Dorothea's idealism, but of a whole system of values contingent upon the location of the midlands at the centre of landscape stretching away" (p. 39). Complementing this, Blackburn (2020) in "The Wild and the Not-So-Wild: Environments, Settings, and Narrative in *Middlemarch* and *Wuthering Heights*" explores the dichotomy between wild and cultivated spaces, illustrating how these contrasting settings underscore the tension between order and chaos within the two novels. This analysis highlights how Eliot uses the rural and urban landscapes to mirror the societal and personal struggles of her characters, with spaces often acting as extensions of their identities. Blackburn notes how both Eliot and Dickens use "specific places that produce a psychological change in particular characters that is not possible in the wider, universal environment" in order "to reshape specific characters, aside from how the general environment shapes them" (p. 40). Moreover, the settings in *Middlemarch* and Wuthering Heights differ, as Blackburn indicates, with Eliot's being more orderly and reflective of

social norms compared to the wild landscapes in *Wuthering Heights*. In both Eliot and Hardy's works, spaces and architectural elements are intricately linked to the protagonists' desires and frustrations; however, while Eliot's town represents social stratification, Hardy's crumbling edifices evoke the fragility of dreams, as Stone (1984) discusses in his article "House and Home in Thomas Hardy." Stone (1984) further emphasizes that Hardy's characters typically lack secure lodgings, and returning home often leads to disillusionment. The theme of instability pervades Hardy's novels, and *Jude the Obscure* is no exception. The crumbling edifices and the stark landscapes around Jude serve as reminders of the fragility of human dreams and the inevitability of decay, with graves as the only permanent resting places (p. 300). Similarly, Junjie's (2022) work, "The Architecture of Desire in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*," delves into how Hardy constructs physical spaces, particularly urban environments like Christminster, as manifestations of Jude's aspirations and subsequent disillusionment. These spaces are not just physical locations but are charged with symbolic meaning, representing the unattainable ideals that drive Jude's tragic journey: "The recurring references to these intermediate shrines [the locations and landmarks between Jude's starting place and Christminster] bear out Jude's obsessive and obdurate mind. After Jude's intellectual aspirations are thwarted, these recurring architectural forms are the projections of his frustration, tenaciousness and reluctance to reconcile himself to his deflated hopes and dreams" (p. 102). The article further argues that Hardy's depiction of space is central to the novel's exploration of desire, social mobility, and the inevitable clash between ambition and reality. As for Sue Bridehead's space in this novel, Kathleen Blake (1978) in her article "Sue Bridehead" provides a critical analysis of the character Sue, focusing on her complex role as a feminist figure within the constraints of Victorian society. Blake (1978) also mentions how Sue fights to protect her own feminist space when she escapes, on several occasions, from places and situations that threaten her privacy or independence (p. 717).

Together, these analyses underscore the profound role that places and spaces play in both novels, serving as dynamic forces that shape and are shaped by the characters' inner lives and social contexts. Domestic spaces serve as backdrops for moral dilemmas, with homes in particular symbolizing characters' identities and aspirations.

Place and Space in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*

The novels *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy respectively share, among other aspects, an obvious attention to place: their plots occur in fictional settings such as the fictitious town of Middlemarch and various parts of Hardy's Wessex[1] respectively. These settings, however, are not completely fictional as, first, they are subtly related to real, topographic settings, and second, they are located in England. In addition, Middlemarch is not only a title and a town where events occur, but it utterly envelops the whole of the novel and its characters – Eliot even "sketched a working map for *Middlemarch*" (Irwin, 2006, p. 25), while *Jude the Obscure* "is entirely structured by Jude's relationship to geography" since the different parts of the novel have the following titles: "At Marygreen," "At Christminster," and finally "At Christminster Again" (Freeman, 1991, p. 63). Upon reading *Jude the Obscure* (1895), it becomes obvious from the beginning that the city of Christminster dominates the novel in its entirety. This is because, even when the characters are not physically there, they are constantly thinking about it as if it were haunting their thoughts. This fact also implies that places are not merely a background, but "architecture serves as a central metaphor

[1] Hardy first introduced the old word "Wessex" in *Far from the Madding Crowd* – one of his early novels – where he "obliterates the names of the six counties whose area he traverses in his scenes," and from then on, the name "Wessex" became popular (Hardy, *Life and Work*, p. 100). In 1876, for example, George Eliot used the term "Wessex" in her novel *Daniel Deronda* (Millgate, p. 181).

for the protagonists' psyches and egos disturbed and distorted by obsessive desires, which in turn leads to subjective and impressionistic perception of architectural images. Multiple dimensions of architectural space also provide a convenient metaphor for the depths of the human mind" (Junjie, 2022, p. 24). Furthermore, Hardy supplemented his novel *The Return of the Native* (1878) with a map of "Wessex". Irwin (2006) observes that this map "elucidates the workings of [Hardy's] novels as maps" (p. 47). As for the places in *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), while the map that Eliot initially outlined for the novel has apparently been lost, the novel itself might be viewed as a map – or *web* as Eliot herself describes it – of associations among the various protagonists who are by some means each connected to one another. Therefore, place may be considered as a fundamental constituent of these two novels, particularly since, as Irwin (2006) emphasizes, fastidious attentiveness to maps by an author "is a statement of intent, proclaiming that in some sense 'place' will be of importance in the narrative concerned" (p. 25).

Middlemarch (1871-1872), as its title undeniably denotes, is a novel mainly about the place itself, the town of Middlemarch being where most of the novel's events occur and where everyone who lives there or in its proximity knows everyone else. This last fact recalls Raymond Williams' definition of small country communities, in his influential work *The Country and the City* (1973) as embodiments of "direct relationships: of face-to-face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships" (p. 76). Even strangers to Middlemarch were welcomed with virtually no investigation about their past, as is the case of Lydgate whom "not only young virgins of that town, but gray-bearded men also were often in haste to conjecture how a new acquaintance might be wrought into their purposes," and the residents of the town even "contented with very vague knowledge as to the way in which life had been shaping him for that instrumentality" as "*Middlemarch*, in fact, *counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him* very comfortably" (*Middlemarch*, pp. 153-154, *emphasis added*).

One kind of place to be explored inside the larger spaces of the cities and towns of the novels are the houses the characters own. Historically, the purpose of building the earliest houses was for shelter and protection from the weather and other living beings that might cause threat. After that stage, and when the dwellers experienced safety and comfort, the house began to be regarded "as something in excess of its primary function as artificial shelter – as a place, in fact, which expressed something of the identity of the builder or owner or occupier, as well as something of the culture of the society in which it was built," and a space that mirrors "the desires and the fears of the occupants" (Smyth &Croft, 2006, p. 13). Therefore, houses are perceived as more than mere structures for shelter, but rather as entities that retain a profound connection with their occupants through providing a "domestic space," and it is at this stage that the house, the physical structure, becomes a "home."

Blackburn (2022) claims that Eliot conceived the environment of the town of Middlemarch as "a unifying, but a less active and drastic feature of the characters' lives" in that it "facilitates a web of connections that those individuals interact with and exist within, but does not govern or change them" to a great extent (p. 41). Therefore, and in order to "achieve this change, Eliot sets the characters into specific settings that produce the intensity required for a shift in characters' inner lives" (ibid.). An example of these settings is the only two houses – Lowick Manor and Stone Court – that are described on the outside and inside in much detail unlike all the other houses of the novel. However, both houses do not belong to Middlemarch but are located in Lowick parish, just outside the town. The reason why Eliot chose to give particular attention to the details of these two houses and not the ones within the town may be that the town is perceived as one whole with not one single house standing alone, the fact that distinguishes these two in particular. Both houses also share more common traits than just the location: they are ancient, colossal structures whose occupants are "ancient" and childless

– Edward Casaubon and Peter Featherstone respectively. In addition, the houses constitute spaces that two young Middlemarch people, Dorothea Brooke and Fred Vincy respectively, long to belong to: Dorothea through marrying the proprietor Casaubon, and Fred through inheriting it after the owner dies. The manor house at Lowick is first introduced to readers upon Dorothea's visit prior to marrying Casaubon. The way the narrator vividly illustrates the house on that gloomy November morning highlights the similarity between it and its owner:

> It had a small park, with a fine old oak here and there, and an avenue of limes towards the southwest front, with a sunk fence between park and pleasure-ground, so that from the drawing-room windows the glance swept uninterruptedly along a slope of greensward till the limes ended in a level of corn and pastures, which often seemed to melt into a lake under the setting sun. *This was the happy side of the house*, for *the south and east looked rather melancholy even under the brightest morning*. The grounds here were more confined, the flower-beds showed no very careful tendance, and large clumps of trees, chiefly of sombre yews, had risen high, not ten yards from the windows. The building, of greenish stone, was in the old English style, not ugly, but small-windowed and melancholy-looking: the sort of house that must have children, many flowers, open windows, and little vistas of bright things, to make it seem a joyous home. In this latter end of autumn, with a sparse remnant of yellow leaves falling slowly athwart the dark evergreens in a stillness without sunshine, *the house too had an air of autumnal decline*, and Mr. Casaubon, when he presented himself, had no bloom that could be thrown into relief by that background. (*Middlemarch*, pp. 73-74, *emphasis added*)

The narrator seems as if depicting "the soul of the house," as Bachelard expressed it, using adjectives such as "melancholy," "happy," or "joyous" to give it human attributes or to describe how it might make the onlooker feel. The "happy side" of the house, in fact, resembles Dorothea herself during her first days there: it appears friendly and hospitable for the visitor. Nonetheless, as the narrator swiftly continues to reveal that the other sides of the house are "melancholy even under the brightest morning," one might infer that the house probably "lures" the visitors instead of welcoming them, just like it did to Dorothea. In reality, the term "melancholy" appears twice in the excerpt, in addition to the words "sombre" and "gloomy" to describe the dwelling, implying that a house with such features cannot be expected to offer cheerfulness to its inhabitants. In this regard, Hollington (2020) observes that Lowick Manor, "whose name seems to pun on an absence of vitality in Casaubon, [is] far removed from the intensity of Dorothea's marked inner 'flame'" (p. 40). The first indication that this description actually foreshadows unhappiness is the account of Casaubon having "no bloom," living in a house with a general air of "autumnal decline," and reminding readers that Casaubon himself was in the "autumn" of life, in his late forties. A second indication is as the story unfolds and Dorothea is witnessed to be miserable; Ladislaw observes to himself that "Casaubon had done a wrong to Dorothea in marrying her […] and if he chose to grow grey crunching bones in a cavern, he had no business to be *luring* a girl into his companionship" (*emphasis added*); he is convinced that young Dorothea's marriage to his old cousin "is the most horrible of virgin-sacrifices" (*Middlemarch*, p. 360). Additionally, it is explicitly stated that if this "house" were to become a "home", to be "joyous", there must be "children, many flowers, open windows, and little vistas of bright things" and Dorothea will not have the power to alter any of this: she and Casaubon have no children, she does not do any gardening, and she certainly does not possess the ability to modify any architectural feature of the house. Furthermore, "the exterior façade and style along with the interior decoration, furniture, style, and layout of houses compose a semiotic system that signals status, class, and public display and creates meanings that observers, visitors, and the public may interpret and read" (Mezei &Briganti, 2002, p. 842). The narrator implies that Dorothea should have been warned by the gloomy

exterior of the house – as if the house itself were trying to communicate with her – and deduced that the dwelling represents its dweller since the consequences turn out to be destructive for her. This instance recalls Isabel Archer in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) where the protagonist also disregarded the heavy-lidded aspect of Osmond's grim dwelling in Bellosguardo, which proved tragic to her, and the reason is that house *is* Osmond (Mezei &Briganti, 2002, p. 840). Similarly, it might thus be added here that in *Middlemarch* the manor-house *is* Casaubon, and the fact that Dorothea fails to understand this house – and consequently Casaubon – will cost her greatly. The reasons for her failure, despite her wit, are her hopes and good intentions: she believes that helping and supporting others is her mission in life, and that is why she only perceives this house as the embodiment of her dream. In this aspect, she resembles Jude who fails to read the warning signs of Christminster, as will be discussed in the following part. Both characters will have to actually "practice" (De Certeau) the places of their dreams, which will then turn into spaces of nightmares.

The parish and the area surrounding the house are also meaningful places in Dorothea's story. As she is walking around the grounds, the curate assures her that "everybody is well off in Lowick" (*Middlemarch*, p. 77), which for her means that her help is not required to enhance anything or anyone there: the cottages, the cottagers, and the gardens are all well-tended to. Dorothea, maybe not so unexpectedly, is saddened by this fact since she wants to have "active duty" there (p. 78). This incident is yet another indication by the narrator that Dorothea in fact will remain an outsider to the place because, if she were to transform this place into her home, to make it a familiar space, she must have the ability to alter things. Eliot, therefore, utilizes the places to foreshadow the events to the readers.

The houses and rooms of *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are places where it is rare to find comfort, love, or happiness. Jude Fawley, the main protagonist, is constantly in search of a space where he can feel this way, of a place to call "home." Nonetheless, the idea of "home" for him lies in more than just a concrete place, but is embodied in several different forms: from houses, to places of work and study, to the city of Christminster, and, mainly, to wherever his beloved Sue resides (which is Christminster at first). Jude might be seen as a "dreamer of dwellings," "[h]oused everywhere but nowhere shut in," therefore, a "daydream of elsewhere" is constantly open for him (Bachelard, 1969, p. 62). Therefore, for Jude "home" is a space, not a place associated with a locale; however, he tragically realizes this fact too late as he keeps seeking happiness in the unattainable Christminster when he should have been content with a simple life with Sue and their children. For Jude, then, the journey is to attain a certain place, whereas for Dorothea the journey begins after having found her dream space, Lowick Manor.

The main reason why Jude is on a relentless quest for a home is that, as a child, he lost both parents and was living with his great-aunt Drusilla (who is also Sue's aunt) in Marygreen, deprived of any kind of affection (*Jude*, p. 17): the old woman never hesitated to remind Jude that he was a useless child who should have died with his parents. Thus, Jude starts seeking a place to feel at home, and, since he has grown to be fascinated by books and learning, he finds refuge in the idea of Christminster, the city of knowledge and enlightenment, where he hopes to pursue university education, and where, as he later discovers, Sue lives, the fact that intensifies his interest in the place. Jude's desire for both Sue and Chritminster might be considered as intense and is also what drives the plot of the novel. Junjie (2022) in a study that compares *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 1861) explains that in both novels "desires take the form of proxemic interactions which are reified by a central building or a cluster of buildings. The dynamics of desire formulated in terms of the theory of proxemics give rise to the dynamics of plot" (p. 92). In *Jude the Obscure*, this can be seen in how Jude's longing for education and social mobility is symbolized by his relationship with Christminster. The city's – and at several times Sue's – physical and symbolic distance plays a crucial role in shaping Jude's ambitions, frustrations, and ultimately, his tragic fate. The spatial dynamics between proximity and

distance thus reflect and intensify the characters' internal struggles and desires, making space an active agent in their personal narratives.

Because it is the city itself that constitutes Jude's focus, and not the rooms where he dwells during his stay there as a stone mason, these rooms are not given careful physical description – as are the houses and rooms in *Middlemarch* (1871-1872). For Jude, these temporary places serve merely as shelter for him and his family while it is the larger space of the city that he cares about belonging to. Moreover, inside these rooms, Jude is an entirely different person from the one in public: inside, he is a zealous scholar, "accumulating knowledge," while outside he is a similarly zealous stonemason "accumulating money." Jude is confident that this double life is all he needs to attain his dream of becoming "a son of the University" (*Jude*, p. 83); however, he still has to realize that the community he is living among, while accepting him as a stonemason, will not readily welcome him into its universities. Lefebvre (1991) believes that "all 'subjects' are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify," (p. 35), and Jude fails to "recognize himself" and realize that the chasm between the world he currently resides in and the one he longs to attain is too large to bridge. In fact, when the first time that Jude arrives to the city, at night, he finds himself in front of "the outmost lamps of the town—some of those lamps which had sent into the sky the gleam and glory that caught his strained gaze in his days of dreaming, so many years ago," he imagines that "they winked their yellow eyes at him dubiously, and as if, though they had been awaiting him all these years in disappointment at his tarrying, they did not much want him now" (*Jude*, p. 73). Although Jude senses that he is unwanted by the city, he ignores the signs and still desires to pursue his dream. He starts exploring one "ancient mediæval pile" after the other, until "he began to be encircled as it were with the breath and sentiment of the venerable city" and is completely mesmerized by it that when "he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them" (p. 74). Hardy keeps showing through Jude's eyes that the next morning "the colleges had treacherously changed their sympathetic countenances: some were pompous; some had put on the look of family vaults above ground; something barbaric loomed in the masonries of all. The spirits of the great men had disappeared" (p. 79). Jude, like Dorothea with Casaubon's house, does not want to be warned that this city is not what he seeks; instead, when the next day he sees that "what at night had been perfect and ideal was by day the more or less defective real," the stone mason in him is moved. Jude now feels sympathy towards these ancient buildings:

> Cruelties, insults, had, he perceived, been inflicted on the aged erections. The condition of several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings. They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man. (ibid.)

These feelings hinder Jude from perceiving the reality of his situation relatively to what is inside the buildings, that he is not going to be welcomed there, and shift his attention to their outer stone condition. In addition, Junjie (2022) believes that "these highly fractured architectural bodies prefigure Jude's equally fractured body at the end of the novel caused by the crushing blows of his unfulfilled aims" (p. 94).

Jude is ambitious, and, in our modern society, ambition and hard work usually help people to attain their goals. Nevertheless, Victorian society was much different: it still upheld the hierarchical structure based on hereditary privilege; thus, whereas it was hypothetically probable for someone "fired by praiseworthy ambition [to rise] as high as his talents and exercise of the appropriate prudential virtues allowed," realistically, "the odds were against it" (Altick, 1973, pp.18-19). Therefore, Jude had no ability to "modify" (Lefebvre) that space except outwardly, and additionally chose to seek

idealism rather than adhere to his trade and the simple life that this society/space allowed him; in consequence, he was made to pay a very expensive price for his choice.

Jude leaves Christminster and returns several times. Eventually, after many years, he returns to the beloved city with Sue and their children where they stay in a very small room which is described carefully by the narrator since it holds a symbolic meaning in the plot and will be the scene where Jude's life changes drastically. The room is located in "a narrow lane close to the back of a college, but having no communication with it;" it is "darkened to gloom by the high collegiate buildings, within which life was so far removed from that of the people in the lane as if it had been on opposite sides of the globe; yet only a thickness of wall divided them" (*Jude*, p. 324). The location of this room, in such a close proximity to the colleges but "in this depressing purlieu" implies that Jude is "still haunted by his dream" (*Jude*, p. 328). This room also epitomizes Jude's continuous separation from his dreams, constantly appearing so close yet in truth still unreachable as ever. Additionally, it is the location and size of this particular room that trigger Little Father Time (Jude's son by his wife Arabella) who was seized with a "brooding undemonstrative horror" by the family being refused lodging in several houses and ending up in this tiny place that had no room for his father, eventually leading the little boy to kill his siblings and hang himself. The place they sought for protection becomes a platform for dreadful events that will not only end Jude's dreams and relationship with Sue, but also ultimately lead to his death.

The character that is quite the opposite to the wandering Jude in the same novel is the inactive Phillotson. The places he resides in constantly relay the idea of perpetuity and stability, whether he is near Christminster, in Shaston, or in Marygreen towards the end of the novel. In Shaston, the old scholar is getting the marital "nest" ready for his future wife, Sue, attending to even the slightest details and appearing as someone who appreciates domesticity. That house itself relates its owner's ambitions and personality:

> A glance at the place and its accessories was almost enough to reveal that the schoolmaster's plans and dreams so long indulged in had been abandoned for some new dream with which neither the Church nor literature had much in common […] that of keeping a wife. (*Jude*, 1895, p. 156)

However, as it is described a few lines further that Phillotson has "[a]ll the furniture fixed, the books shelved, and the nails driven" (ibid.), it is therefore implied that the schoolmaster's "business" with Sue is now settled and that he has reached the dual objective of finding a wife and, simultaneously, a teacher for the girls' school adjacent to his own. Consequently, these preparations resemble the concluding of a business deal, or even the employment of a secretary, particularly since at one point Phillotson contemplates "historic notes, written in a bold womanly hand *at his dictation* some months before" (*Jude*, p. 157, *emphasis added*), to refer to Sue's handwriting. This incident suggests that Phillotson mainly perceives Sue as a mere secretary to whom he can dictate not only "historic notes," but also ideas and behaviors. These proceedings also hint that Sue is going to be merely "an inhabitant" in Phillotson's house and not "a dweller" (Heidegger) who can alter her own space.

Feminist space in *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*

Generally speaking, feminist space is portrayed in the novel as both literal and figurative. Because they have a sense of security in their houses, the female protagonists are intended to feel at ease and free to act in the former. Still, it is unclear if these women are able to truly feel free or if their sense of imprisonment haunts them forever. The primary cause of this feeling of imprisonment is the fact that, according to the Victorian law, only a man is allowed to own a house. This is in line with what Irigaray (1985) believes, that a man "robs femininity of the tissue or texture of [woman's] spatiality" and "[i]n

exchange […] he buys her a house, shuts her up in it, and places limits on her that are the counterpart of the place without limits where he unwittingly leaves her" (p. 123). In fact, Dorothea is only able to realize the reality of her situation away from that "home," in Rome, "outside the narrow limits of Middlemarch provincial life…" (Michie, 1993, p. 157). Moreover, the woman – the feminine – herself constitutes a space for men where they can feel "at home." Irigaray (1985) identifies the mother woman as "a place deprived of a place of its own. She is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it" (p. 122). The paradox of the woman being both a space and a person deprived of space causes the problem of feminine space to become more serious. Taking into consideration the limitations that women faced in the nineteenth century in addition to the gendering of certain spaces, this next part will delve into how the main female protagonists of the two novels engage with their environment as well as how they are regarded as a space that men consider as "home" and continually pursue for reassurance.

Social class was the primary determinant of women's status and role in Victorian England society. If they were from the lower classes and impoverished, they had to labor in mines, factories, and fields just like the men did. Teachers and governesses were positioned somewhat higher in the social hierarchy. The middle-class and upper-class people made ornamental items at most, or did nothing with their days. However, all the ladies of the gentry and aristocracy could do was visit or remain at home, a situation Dorothea called "oppressive liberty." According to Altick (1973) women from higher social classes were prohibited from working or even going to the places where their men were working. These women were considered to be "sedulously set apart from the worlds of commerce and, generally, of intellect" (p. 50). The biological basis for women's confinement to the home in Victorian culture, as Brady (1993) remarks, stemmed from Victorian society's beliefs about their propensity for hysteria, instability, and "potential maternal role;" women's reproductive activities, it was thought, "prevented their minds from functioning as men's could." These assumptions were "thus used to reinforce the Victorian construction of gendered social roles, which confined women to the domestic world and enforced a cult of female chastity, while allowing men to inhabit the public as well as the private spheres" (p. 88). In Victorian society, then, places conveyed social boundaries based on gender. Women's education, which consisted of reading "light" literature, playing musical instruments, and being attractive, as well as their production and social contribution, were among the many ways in which this separation was mirrored. Prior to becoming imprisoned inside the four walls of their married houses, women from this socioeconomic class were imprisoned within the beliefs of the day.

Dorothea, the main protagonist of Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), is affectionately – and possibly thoughtlessly – called "Dodo" by her sister Celia after the flightless bird that was extinct in the 17th century. Similar to the Dodo, Dorothea possesses wings, but she is unable to utilize them due to social constraints. She is imprisoned, and in the words of Tameca Jones (2004) "flightless and oppressed," by a "male-chauvinistic society." Jones continues: "George Eliot depicts Dorothea's numerous cages, which take the form of the frustratingly restrictive world of her childhood and the suffocating 'virtual tomb' of her marriage" (n.p.). Although Dorothea's "cages" are interpreted metaphorically by Jones, in this context they will be understood to refer to both the actual physical rooms and houses as well as the metaphorical ones.

The first cage that aided in Dorothea's imprisonment was her educational and religious background. In some way, she has been able to shape her own religious beliefs around empathy, selflessness, and tolerance for the benefit of society as a whole. She is well aware of her standing and boundaries, but she still aspires to serve her neighbors and learns everything she can, exceeding what women were allowed to learn, things that Dorothea deemed as "devoid of intellectual content, let alone intellectual challenge," (Altick, 1973, p. 54) and defying the norms to a certain extent by training

in the "masculine languages" of Latin and Greek. She also marries the considerably older Casaubon because of her wish to break free from these intellectual constraints. She was initially drawn to this union since it "would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path" (*Middlemarch*, p. 29). She travels to Rome with her "guide" for their honeymoon before permanently relocating to Lowick.

Rome itself is the representation of "patriarchal culture," and "the embodiment of the classical heritage which made up Western civilization" (Michie, 1993, p. 147); therefore, it might be considered as a gendered space. Rome becomes Dorothea's abrupt introduction to the masculine world she so desperately wants to inhabit based on her girlhood experience. When Dorothea first appears there, her identity is taken away from her: standing next to the statue of the sleeping Ariadne, Will Ladislaw and his German companion Naumann identify her as a mere "figure" (p. 189). Will is the one who recognizes this "figure" as Dorothea one whole page later in the novel, hence it is implied here that Will is the one who saves her – first from an aura of anonymity, then eventually from the shadow of a solitary existence as a wealthy widow.

In this realm of history created by men, which can be extremely difficult to comprehend on a first visit, Dorothea feels confused and isolated. Furthermore, she discovers that she must share her honeymoon period with thousands of years of history rather than spending it alone with her spouse. Therefore, after each tour in the city, she "ended by oftenest choosing to drive out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages" (*Middlemarch*, p. 193). This feeling that the city induced in her in addition to her husband's familiarity with everything there to the point that he finds nothing intriguing suffocate her:

> What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge. (*Middlemarch*, p. 196)

However, and as Michie (1993) claims, Casaubon is the one who fails to fulfill his implicit commitment to Dorothea, namely to grant her entry to the world of Rome and, by extension, to his own and to the world of men. While he is accumulating more knowledge in the libraries, Casaubon abandons his new bride to ponder over statues and artworks while she roams through museums. In doing so, he reinforces the existing Victorian gender difference even in Rome. When left on her own, Dorothea realizes that the world of men – especially her husband's – that she had yearned to enter is not as fantastic as she had thought. Therefore, "in representing Dorothea's suddenly changed perception of Casaubon in Rome, Eliot dramatizes the moment when a female figure looks at a male and ceases to see him as the embodiment of cultural wholeness. In that moment, Dorothea is shown recognizing that the masculine perspective does not guarantee whole, full, or coherent vision" (Michie, 1993, p. 159). Michie further maintains that "Eliot, in the Rome section of *Middlemarch*, challenges the model of gender difference that opposes masculine wholeness to feminine fragmentation" (ibid.). Not only does Dorothea successfully navigate the traditionally male realm of Rome, but she also subverts it from within, refusing to submit to the city's opulence and challenging her husband about "her desire to enter into some fellowship" (*Middlemarch*, p. 201). That being said, Dorothea does change while she is in Rome, but not the way she was expecting – the one that would turn her into her husband's assistant and equal – hers is a transition from the innocent girl to the experienced woman who, rather than through marriage, sees the actuality of everything around her via the magnificent city of Rome, whose space she acquires on her own terms and transforms into a place where she constantly resists the conceptualizations of masculine space.

Sue Bridehead of *Jude the Obscure* (1895) – which was published a few years after *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) – faces similar struggles to Dorothea's in order to acquire the education and life that she feels she deserves. Long before the story begins, her desire to become knowledgeable and educated – and by doing so, to overcome the constraints placed on her as a woman – leads her to live in Cambridge for a year with a university student. She gains access to books that she would not have otherwise been able to access and learns a little Latin and Greek grammar while living with him as just two comrades. Due to his unfulfilled yearning for Sue, the young student dies at the end of this disappointing relationship. Sue obtains from this an intellect full of knowledge that she can only use to impress Jude with her discourse till he acknowledges to her that she is indeed intellectually superior to him. Furthermore, she has no means of applying that information to her career as a teacher and penetrating the world reserved for men without Phillotson's assistance. This time, nonetheless, there is a heavy cost she must bear: getting married to an older man, which feels like yet another cage from which she is always trying to break free. Jude at that point knows quite well how to convince Sue of leaving this preposterous marriage: he accuses her of being constrained by the social code, and, according to Wilson-Bates (2018), Jude's "statement is effective because it works beyond the simple situation of her marriage and extends to the implicit socio-cultural apparatus that exerts pressures of class, propriety, and mobility throughout the text" (p. 129). Sue flees to Jude but finds herself imprisoned with him in a life that she did not anticipate. She relives her past experience with the student by being at first only Jude's roommate, and subsequently becomes the family's only provider after he becomes ill, bearing another responsibility that further inhibits her from obtaining freedom.

Additionally, Christminster serves to demarcate the male and female spheres. While women are permitted to teach in schools, work as shopkeepers (like Sue) or in inns (like Arabella), they are not permitted to attend universities or even just to ponder the thought (like Jude can). Sue enrolls in the Training College on Phillotson's advice as an alternative. She invites Jude to visit her there because she is depressed and alone. Millgate remarks: "No significant relationship between Sue and any of the other girls is presented or mentioned, and the college thus becomes little more than a mildly repressive *prison* from which she *escapes*, a set of conventions against which she deliberately offends" (Millgate, 1982, p. 352, *emphasis added*). Her escape from the College suggests that she may have tried to flee the space reserved for women in the Victorian era on multiple occasions. It appears that she cannot face the fate of being a woman with so many restrictions on her sex. Running to Jude, she offers him an explanation: "They locked me up for being out with you; and it seemed so unjust that I couldn't bear it, so I got out of the window and escaped across the stream!" (*Jude*, p. 140). Furthermore, the incident when she buys the sculptures of Venus and Apollo and returns them to her accommodations in the same building where she works serves as another sign of her rebellion. She arranges them in her room, which is decorated with religious images that her employer provided there for her. Sue's clash with her environment is also suggested by the highly symbolic language of this scene. She is working in a business owned by women where she is surrounded by religious figurines, a place that society – and even Jude – believes to be ideal for her, but spiritually she is on the other side. She breaks free from the Training College and her first marriage because of this, and she still tries to escape now. Eventually, the landlady finds the Greek statues and smashes them on the floor (p. 99), implying that any ambitions of escaping the gendered places Victorian society created for women – especially for women like Sue – are crushed.

Conclusion

In *Middlemarch* (1871-1872) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the characters' interactions with places come at crucial points in the novels' plots. Through the lens of Michel De Certeau's theories and other scholarly frameworks, this article has attempted to demonstrate how Eliot and Hardy meticulously

craft their fictional worlds, where places like Middlemarch and Christminster are imbued with symbolic meaning, reflecting and influencing the desires, conflicts, and identities of the protagonists. In *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), spaces such as the town and its surrounding areas function as a microcosm of the social and moral complexities of the time, offering insights into the characters' inner lives and societal positions. Meanwhile, in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the architecture of desire encapsulated in Christminster highlights the tragic course of Jude's aspirations, with spaces serving as both the source of his dreams and the site of his downfall. As for the houses and the rooms, they become projections of their occupants' feelings, imaginations, and beliefs, regardless of their gender. All these places become transformational as they cause change in the characters who experience them, while the characters also transform the places by imagining them and projecting them through their subjectivities, making them spaces. Thus, a deep relationship emerges between the characters and the places that they have transformed into spaces.

Women in particular share a special relationship, a bond so singular with the houses and rooms they dwell in that they mutually affect each other in exceptional ways. Woolf (1929) asserts that "women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, […] overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar …" (p. 59). However, Sue and Dorothea are both like the Dodo bird imprisoned by social norms that are represented by the houses and rooms they live in. Both protagonists are endowed with intelligent minds highly inclined towards higher studies and a voracious thirst for knowledge but find it challenging to put their limited resources to use within societal restrictions. Sue succeeds in escaping for a brief period, assuming she has truly achieved freedom. Nevertheless, eventually, her attempts to break free from the gendered spaces society has built for women fail, and she has to settle to being "the property of her husband" (Woolf, 1929, p. 27), completely submitting to his will. Hardy ends his novel by having the revolutionary Sue, the "New Woman," subdued forever. Morgan (1988) interprets her final move as a gradual regression "to total dependency upon Phillotson, the "punitive" father figure, to beg forgiveness, punishment, pity. […] She takes psychological refuge in self-disgust, so real-life grim and tortuous terrors block out the pain of the far greater real-life horror of her murdered babies" (p. 131). On the other hand, Eliot redeems Dorothea to a certain point by liberating her from her old husband. However, the young woman marries Ladislaw who is considered beneath her in social class and education and has to relinquish the inheritance that Casaubon left for her on the condition of remaining unmarried. Her union with Will thus represents her reentry to the limited realm of domesticity. Dorothea never entirely fulfills her potential of being an ardent philanthropist and is only able to do so in the shadow of her husband while being his wife and raising their children.

The analysis of these spaces reveals a deeper understanding of how Eliot and Hardy use setting to explore themes of social mobility, gender dynamics, and the clash between individual aspirations and societal constraints. These spaces are not passive backgrounds but are active elements to the unfolding of the narrative and the development of the characters. As such, they contribute to the rich tapestry of meanings within the novels, offering readers a more nuanced understanding of the Victorian world, with its spaces, and the human experiences within it.

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