

The Conception of Space in Two Late Nineteenth-Century Writers, Thomas Hardy and Josef Karel Šlejhar

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Abstract

The famous English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy and the little-known Czech short story writer Josef K. Šlejhar share a similar position in literary history, both being frequently, and rather inaccurately, discussed in the context of European naturalism. Though being partly influenced by the same ideas as the French naturalists, they both developed an individual mode of representation, especially in the way they structure the space of their fiction. The present paper attempts to analyse their approach and to demonstrate the fundamental difference of their conceptions. The prevailing form of space in Hardy is structured landscape where the nodal points are loci characterized by specific semantic density determining the issues the major characters are confronted with. Contrary to this, Šlejhar's conception tends to present space as an exteriorizing projection of his characters' situation, very often representing a moral dilemma of an individual or a community; due to this his space is less structured but more intense, deriving its meaning from the character, while in Hardy the process is reverse. The principal focus of the paper is thus on the semantics of the interaction between character and its environment or circumambient space.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, Josef K. Šlejhar, naturalism, symbolism, semantics of space, poetics of space, Gaston Bachelard

The experimental novelist is therefore the one who accepts proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled, and who tries to test, as much as he can, this personal sentiment, this idea *a priori*, by observation and experiment. I cannot understand how our naturalistic literature can mean anything else.

—Émile Zola, *The Experimental Novel* [Le Roman expérimental]

The famous English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy and the little-known and somewhat neglected Czech short story writer Josef K. Šlejhar share a similar position in literary history, both being frequently, but rather inaccurately, recognized as naturalists, i.e. followers of the French school of literary naturalism whose proponents were Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant or the Goncourt brothers. There are certain features, undoubtedly, which they had adopted: in particular, their conception of characters, people determined by the environment in which they live, by the social conditions and even by their own mental and moral setup, corresponds closely with the ideas of French naturalism. Hardy's and Šlejhar's characters, too, tend to be passive, to resign to the circumstances and to meet their inevitable tragic end. The biological theories of Darwin and the pessimism of Schopenhauer had found their way into their work as well as that of Zola, who expressed the issue of "the determinism of phenomena" clearly: "without daring, as I say, to formulate laws, I consider that the question of heredity has a great influence in the intellectual and passionate manifestations of man. I also attach considerable importance to the surroundings" (1893, section II, para. 8). And because man is "not alone; he lives in society, in a social condition," Zola believes that "our great study is just there, in the reciprocal effect of society on the individual and the individual on society" (1893, section II, para. 8). In this primary task of modern literature, Hardy and Šlejhar seem to agree with Zola; where they differ is how to achieve it, which means of aesthetic representation to employ to sound as true and convincing (and modern) as possible. A considerable difference can be found in their conception of literary space and, more specifically, landscape.

In the following discussion I intend to focus predominantly on landscape as a specific type of space, prevailingly as an open space of the countryside. I understand landscape basically as a structured space but at the same time I admit that for various reasons its structured character can be suppressed to accentuate one dominant and defining feature. Landscape consists in *places* and their *deployment* in the topography of the landscape. These places carry meanings by which they are not only characterized but also distinguished from other places; the dynamism of a text ensues from the interplay between these meanings and the position of characters is decided by their relationship to particular places. In this way the theme of a literary text is constructed.

It is obvious now that I view landscape, as well as other types of spatial representation, as a semantic area, a distribution of meanings within the defined space of a literary work, and that what I want to pursue is the *semantics of landscape*. I believe that a different conception of landscape with the authors influenced by naturalism lies in their different approach with which they deploy meanings in landscape, how differently they *semantize*

their landscapes, and how differently they understand the role of meanings in the topography of their works. It is therefore necessary to closely view the *strategies* they use when they create the semantic space of a landscape.

A number of critical works have dealt with the character of space in fiction. In his *Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre discusses various meanings of places and distinguishes several basic types of places, as constituent parts of literary space. Similarly, Leonard Lutwack's *Role of Place in Literature* (1984) addresses the issue of constructing a meaning of places, this time through action. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan applies people's notions and feelings about space and places to a non-literary sphere in his famous *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) and shows how our affections concerning places are conditioned by the sense of time. On the other hand, more recent scholars, such as Gabriel Zoran, problematize the status of space in works of art and stress the ambiguity with which the role of space is presented.

It seems that the principal impetus for these (and other) studies came from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964), in which he examines especially the images of *felicitous space*, in the investigations he calls topophilia. He focuses on the sorts of space that may be grasped, defended and loved, as opposite to the hostile space of hatred and combat, which can only "be studied in the context of impassionate subject matter and apocalyptic images" (1964, p. xxxvi). This definition rests on the condition space is a projection of the subject, created by the subject and thus in possession of this subject.

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect. (Bachelard, 1964/2014, p. xxxvi)

Such a concept of space can, characteristically, be found in lyrical poetry, where the lyrical subject exists in unity with the circumambient space, which is in fact a projection, expansion and externalization of the subject. Even the hostile space allows for such a view: it stands for the projection of what the subject is not, of the non-subject, which it is necessary to defeat and thus win this space for possession. In naturalist fiction, however, the relationship between a character and space seems to be more complex and varied; landscape here is not a character's circumambience only (in the sense Bachelard works with). On the other hand, a character can "appropriate" a piece of landscape to possess it, in a broader sense, but at the same time, in the semantic dynamics of these texts, landscape also tends

to “appropriate” the character and thus confirm his or her fatal passivity. Notwithstanding that, Bachelard’s conception points out an inevitable interaction between character and space in a literary work and may be found useful for analysis of various literary texts.

In a prototypical naturalist novel landscape plays a role which can be discussed in Bachelard’s terms, however cautious one must be with their application. Zola’s only novel set entirely in the French countryside, *La Terre* (1887), contains one significant description of the local landscape in Part Three, when one of the major characters, Buteau, a greedy and cunning peasant, surveys with much pleasure the flat country of La Beauce. He does so as an owner because he has just acquired the fields of his wife’s family and can start farming. Even if his possession is purely materialistic, it seems that a kind of unity between a character and the space he watches has been achieved: the meaning of the landscape depends on what he inputs there, how he submits it to his desires: “Never when he had hired himself out to others had he ploughed so deeply into the bowels of the earth. It was his; he wanted to penetrate and fructify its inmost parts” (Zola, 2008, p. 168). Yet Buteau’s possession is, semantically, a false and illusionary one, a result merely of his instinctive desire to conquer; the actual, intrinsic unity has not been achieved and landscape can never truly become the character’s felicitous space.

Thus La Beauce spread her verdure before him, from November to July, from the moment when the green tips first emerged to that when the lofty stalks turned yellow. Wishing to have the country under his eye without leaving the house, he unbarred the kitchen window—the rear one that looked out on the plain—and there he used to station himself and survey ten leagues of country: an immense broad bare expanse, stretching under the vaulted skies. Not a single tree; nothing but the telegraph posts of the Châteaudun and Orleans road, running on unswervingly till they were lost to the sight. At first, there was a greenish, scarcely perceptible shade, peeping just above the soil of the large squares of brown earth. Then this soft green strengthened into velvet stretches, almost uniform in tint. Then, as the stems grew taller, each plant developed its own tinge of colour. He distinguished from afar the yellowish green of the wheat, the bluish green of the oats, the greyish green of the barley; infinite expanses of ground spread out in all directions, amid glowing patches of crimson trifolium. It was the time when La Beauce is fair and young, thus clothed about with spring, and smooth and cool to the eye in her monotony. [...] As the wheat grew, his enjoyment increased. A grey islet formed by a village had disappeared on the horizon behind the rising level of verdure. There only remained the roofs of La Borderie which, in their turn, were submerged. A mill, with its sails, remained alone like a waif. On all sides there was corn—an encroaching, overflowing sea of corn, covering the earth with its immensity of verdure. (Zola, 2008, pp. 168–9)

In relation to the character of Buteau, this presentation of the landscape reveals two basic desires of this man: his lust for the family possessions, especially fields, and his lust for Françoise, the younger sister of his wife, who he repeatedly harasses. His surveying of the possessed soil teems with erotic overtones, being expressive of Buteau's sensuality: "he wanted to penetrate and fructify its inmost parts." The same atavistic desire, which attracts him to the young and fresh girl, dominates his attempts to appropriate as much of the family possessions, including the part owned by Françoise. Greed and sensuality define this character and they are projected into the landscape description, with its overarching motifs of nearly devouring fertility.

In Zola's novel, the semantics of the character *is* imprinted in and projected into the semantics of the landscape. Nevertheless, the purpose of this strategy is not to create a unity between a character and its setting, but to expose and condemn the defining traits of one of the central characters; the sense of affinity between character and landscape becomes a tool of subversion, an ironic comment on the human values distorted by the prevailing egoism of the whole region. The semantics of the landscape of La Beauce thus correlates with the principal theme of the novel, making it graphic, palpable and intense. The Zolaesque landscape plays a semantically *intensifying* role; as such, it is in fact unstructured, "monotone," unified around the central idea of his work.

On the other hand, the landscape in the novels of Thomas Hardy is markedly structured and semantically more complex. Eithne Henson characterizes the Hardy landscapes as "intensely visual; they are heavily loaded with symbolic meaning; they are physically instrumental to the plots, and, above all, they are inescapably gendered" (Henson, 2011, p. 127). This implies that the Hardy landscape is, first, a structured entity, and second, a textual entity. Supporting this fact, Ken Taylor first quotes W. G. Hoskins's proposal which states that the "landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright, is the richest historical record we possess," and adds his own conclusion that the modern approach tends towards "the expression of landscape as cultural process 'by which ... identities are formed'" (Taylor, 2008, p. 2).

This characteristic can be best demonstrated on Egdon Heath, the stretch of land where the story of *The Return of the Native* (1878) is situated. Egdon is a self-absorbed enclave, which in fact makes up the sole scene of the novel, a stage of human passions and desires. Its basic landmarks, as the map attached to the first edition and drawn by Hardy himself shows, are the dwelling places occupied by the major characters one time or another—Bloom's End, the home of Captain Vye and his granddaughter Eustacia; Mistover, where Mrs Yeobright and her niece Thomasin live and where Clym Yeobright returns;

the Quiet Woman Inn, owned by Eustacia's former lover Damon Wildeve; and Alderworth, a new home of Clym and Eustacia. These points ensure the basic semanticity of the story, at these places complex meanings are generated: e.g. Bloom's End is connected with water and fire, the nearby pond reflecting Eustacia's signal fire she uses to attract Wildeve, the motif that predicts her symbolic death by fire (as a wax effigy) and actual death by water in the Shadwater Weir at the end of the novel. Much of the action consists of the characters' traversing the Heath, moving from one point to another, either physically (as when Mrs Yeobright takes a long and exhausting walk to her son's new home), or just mentally (in which case, Eustacia's desire for Wildeve is even supported by her use of telescope). This way the meanings of the individual landmarks (or semantic markers) are confronted and the semantic dynamics of the structured landscape is established.

Egdon is, however, structured not only within its own domain but also in relation to what lies outside of it, especially to places such as Budmouth or Paris, which make the semantic opposites to Egdon. Therefore, it seems useful to introduce two types of meaning, which can be called (a) "endogenous meanings," (i.e. the meanings generated within the focalised enclave), and (b) "exogenous meanings," (i.e. those pertaining to the world beyond the bounds of the enclave). This distinction, of course, applies not only to landscape or its parts but to each place within it—every house and every natural formation has its own endogenous meanings standing in opposition to exogenous meanings, which at the same time can be the endogenous meanings of another place. "Closeness" with Alderworth, "security of home" with Mistover, "obscurity" with the Quiet Woman Inn (where Clym and Eustacia meet for the first time in disguise during a Christmas mumming show), or "death" with the Celtic barrows are examples of such meanings.

This inclusive and exclusive structuring of Egdon is horizontal, (i.e., purely topographic). But the Heath is also structured vertically. At the very beginning of *The Return of the Native* we learn that "overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor" (Hardy, 1985c, p. 53). Thus a unity of two contrasting spatial phenomena is introduced, predicting frequent conflicting motifs characteristic of the novel:

The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking dread. (Hardy, 1985c, p. 53)

The vertical dimension, however, stretches even further, beyond the tent-like canopy of the sky, into the universe itself: in the scene of Clym and Eustacia's first dating during a lunar eclipse, the terrestrial events are projected, as on a screen, on the bright surface of the Moon, being ultimately diminished by the distance. This vertical, cosmological perspective makes the events of the horizontal plane relative and insignificant.

The Heath is, simultaneously, endowed with a temporal dimension, becoming a spatio-temporal entity, where the present of the enclave is positioned against its past and, on a symbolic plane, life against death. This temporal aspect is symbolized by other constituent parts of the Egdon landscape, namely the remnants of the old Roman road, on which the first characters we are allowed to see enter the place, and especially the Celtic burial mounds called barrows; they both represent the notion of "landscape as cultural process" (Taylor, 2008, p. 2). During the evening when fires are lit to commemorate the Guy Fawkes rising, Eustacia makes her own fire on one of these barrows, as if to reveal her intrinsically pagan nature; more importantly, when later on old bones are dug out by accident on a barrow, Clym changes his mind to present them to his mother and instead he gives them to Eustacia, which introduces a motif foreshadowing the death of both women who are close to his heart and problematizes the motif of Clym's return, putting the blame at least partly on him.

It seems obvious now that the complex spatiotemporal character of the Hardy landscape plays a significant semantic role in his fiction; some of its parts manifest striking semantic density and invite detailed interpretation and perhaps even speculations about the typology of Hardy's semantic strategies connected with landscape. Let us demonstrate some of them. It is noticeable that most of Hardy's major novels open in a similar fashion, presenting in fact an analogical situation—a single person is seen walking through a specific part of landscape, and as such entering the space of the novel. The place he finds himself in encodes meanings which indicate the central theme of the novel, long before the story begins to develop in that direction. This means that the reader must, at the very beginning (or rather during a repeated reading when he or she has become aware of the author's strategies), decode the landscape symbolism he or she is confronted with. Thus one of the early novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), opens with a scene in which Dick Dewy, the male protagonist, hurries to his village to join a group of friends, members of the local church quire, with whom he intends to go carolling, since it is Christmas Eve.

He enters a wood which is described as follows:

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality.—On a cold and starry Christmas-eve within living memory a man was passing up a lane towards Mellstock Cross in the darkness of a plantation that whispered thus distinctively to his intelligence. (Hardy, 1985d, p. 39)

Here we have a scene in which every tree preserves its individuality as far as its voice is concerned yet the entire wood produces its chorale all the same, winter being its unerring and confident conductor. The image of a natural orchestra to which each member contributes with its individual sound anticipates one of the central themes of the novel, a planned dismantling of the traditional church quire and replacing it by the music produced by a single person playing the harmonium. The very first motif of the novel thus strikes the note of deviation of the human community from the world of nature, or from what is natural, and a potential conflict that may arise from such an ambition. Such initial symbolism is present in some other novels too; this specific semantic role of the Hardy landscape can thus be viewed as *thematic*.

A more complex conception of landscape as a semantic clue can be found in another earlier novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874). The two main characters, Gabriel Oak and Bethsheba Everdene, stand out early in the novel in the emblematic images presenting them in a symbolic connection with space. Oak is a shepherd whose only entertainment is playing the flute. The scene in which we learn this is described in these words:

To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement. The sensation may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude; but whatever be its origin the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding... Suddenly an unexpected series of sounds began to be heard in this place up against the sky. They had a clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature. They were the notes of Farmer Oak's flute. The tune was not floating unhindered into the open air: it seemed muffled in some way, and was altogether too curtailed in power to spread high or wide. (Hardy, 1985a, p. 58)

Once more, as in *The Return of the Native*, we have a cosmic vision here; the narrator, who is an observer of the scene, feels overcome by his sense of being involved in the cosmic movements and the muffled tones coming from Oak's hut may seem to be the music of the spheres to him. Definitely Oak is, in his modest way, included as part of this cosmic vision and thus identified with the endless space into which he symbolically expands. This idea is supported slightly later by the persisting universal vision:

The Dog-star and Aldebaran, pointing to the restless Pleiades, were half-way up the Southern sky, and between them hung Orion, which gorgeous constellation never burnt more vividly than now, as it soared forth above the rim of the landscape. Castor and Pollux with their quiet shine were almost on the meridian: the barren and gloomy Square of Pegasus was creeping round to the north-west; far away through the plantation Vega sparkled like a lamp suspended amid the leafless trees, and Cassiopeia's chair stood daintily poised on the uppermost boughs. (Hardy, 1985a, p. 61)

Such is the true character of Oak's ambience, the space in which cosmic objects mix up with earthly ones to make up one unified image. Bathsheba, coming to the place to live on a farm with her aunt and later to become a farmer herself, is also introduced in an emblematic image, but a strikingly different one; we see her, for the first time, sitting on a waggon amidst all her belongings:

The handsome girl waited for some time idly in her place, and the only sound heard in the stillness was the hopping of the canary up and down the perches of its prison. Then she looked attentively downwards. It was not at the bird, nor at the cat; it was at an oblong package tied in paper, and lying between them. She turned her head to learn if the waggoner were coming. He was not yet in sight; and her eyes crept back to the package, her thoughts seeming to run upon what was inside it. At length she drew the article into her lap, and untied the paper covering; a small swing looking-glass was disclosed, in which she proceeded to survey herself attentively. She parted her lips and smiled. (Hardy, 1985a, p. 54)

The scene obviously defines Bathsheba as vain, as Oak himself remarks, but the looking-glass conveys a more important symbolic meaning: while Oak, in the previous image, was presented as participating in the life of the entire universe, the looking-glass actually makes a screen which does not allow Bathsheba to share anything else but a reflection of her face. At that moment her landscape vanishes and her space is contracted to herself, or, more accurately, to an illusion of herself. The two principal characters thus enter the novel in this stark contradiction, in this semantic contrast of space symbolism.

The scene also has a predictive function: it anticipates the key moment when Bathsheba falls irresistibly in love with Sergeant Troy. This young soldier, whose future involvement with the farmer is suggested by the entanglement of his spur with her skirt during their first meeting, invites Bathsheba to see his art of fencing and takes her to a secluded place called the Hollow amid the Ferns, where he dazzles her when he shows how dexterous he can be with his sword. The place is described in the following way:

The pit was a saucer-shaped concave, naturally formed, with a top diameter of about thirty feet, and shallow enough to allow the sunshine to reach their heads. Standing in the centre, the sky overhead was met by a circular horizon of fern: this grew nearly to the bottom of the slope and then abruptly ceased. The middle within the belt of verdure was floored with a thick flossy carpet of moss and grass intermingled, so yielding that the foot was half buried within it. (Hardy, 1985a, pp. 237–8)

We notice the place's unique features, its seclusion from the rest of the world, its closeness, its circular shape and its sufficient shallowness allowing sunshine just to get in. It resembles a chamber made by nature, a magic spot, where Troy acts like a magician of a kind. Bathsheba is dazzled by his masculinity as well as the reflections of sunshine from the highly polished blade of his phallic sword. The looking-glass motif is repeated here; while earlier Bathsheba was fascinated by her own reflected beauty, blind to the surrounding world, now she is blinded by her love for Troy. This owes much to the fact that they are isolated from the surrounding world during this obvious ritual of sexual initiation, that the girl is confined within endogenous meanings and separated from the exogenous meanings signifying her responsibility as farmer.

This principle of mutually exclusive endogenous and exogenous meanings then finds its full development in Hardy's masterpiece, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892). A critical moment in the life of the novel's eponymous protagonist takes place in the Chase, referred to as the oldest wood in this part of England. Here Alec seduces Tess, making use of her exhaustion after the whole day at a market and after her row with other girls and taking her on horseback to a secluded, magic place, lit by a midnight moon. At a symbolic level, Tess becomes helpless against Alec's attempts not only because of these special circumstances, but because the place is virtually free from the intolerant Christian moral code; it is presented as pagan space, its existence reaching back to Celtic, druidical, times, and Christian signifiers are dismissed with a sneer:

But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked. (Hardy, 1985b, p. 119)

Tess is then persecuted not because she has sinned against nature or transgressed the law of nature (the scene rather confirms her "pagan" unity with nature, her sacrificial role to natural deities); she is persecuted because she has broken the narrow moral norm of the English Victorian society. But the point is that this norm does not apply in the Chase, this specific natural formation within the symbolic structure of the novel's landscape. Christian normativity is not part of the endogenous semantics of the Chase.

Though the seduction scene in the Chase plays a key role in the story of Tess's life, its semantic potential reaches beyond its presentation in Chapter XI. Just as the scene of Bathsheba's initiation in the Hollow amid the Ferns, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, has its predictive equivalent in the scene with the looking-glass, so is the scene of Tess's seduction signalled by an earlier passage. These earlier moments clearly stand for the thematically *anticipatory* function of the Hardy landscape. In Chapter II of *Tess*, one part of Tess's home country called the Vale of Blackmoor is introduced in these terms:

The district is of historic, no less than of topographical interest. The Vale was known in former times as the Forest of White Hart, from a curious legend of King Henry III's reign, in which the killing by a certain Thomas de la Lynd of a beautiful white hart which the king had run down and spared, was made the occasion of a heavy fine. In those days, and till comparatively recent times, the country was densely wooded. Even now, traces of its earlier condition are to be found in the old oak copses and irregular belts of timber that yet survive upon its slopes, and the hollow-trunked trees that shade so many of its pastures. (Hardy, 1985b, p. 49)

Here the readers get acquainted with the main theme of the novel for the first time: a complete destruction of innocent beauty. They are provided with it indirectly, in a symbolic fashion, but rather than through parallel equivalence this is done through a contrasting image, polemically, by way of a vertical rather than horizontal structuring. The legend says that the transgressor, who destroyed the innocent beauty of the hart, was heavily fined by his sovereign, whereas the Victorian society with its pervert understanding of Christian morals punishes the victim, not the transgressor, or, in other words, the sovereign, i.e. God, fails to secure justice in modern society because he is just the Aeschylean "President of the Immortals" for whom human fate is a mere sport,

as Hardy says in the last chapter (Hardy, 1985b, p. 489). As we can see, the vertical structuring in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is not merely temporal, representing landscape as "cultural process," but more complex: the construction of space is also used as a means of ontological confrontation of two modes of being, mythological and actual, related to concrete historical conditions.

The above confrontation of the ways Zola and Hardy employ the topos of landscape in their novels reveals not only a far greater structural complexity of space in Hardy's work, but a principally different function. By projecting the meanings pertaining to his characters into the surrounding space, the landscape of La Beauce, Zola accentuates his central theme. This theme is, however, already represented by his characters, their behaviour, their desires, their vices. The semantics of the landscape depends on the semantics of the people and is derived from it, however much his peasants are determined by their relation to their landscape, its fertility and productivity. Hardy's landscape, in which the determining factors are employed more on a symbolic plane, becomes, on the contrary, a clue to his characters and their fates; decoding the meanings imprinted in Hardy's space we come to understand the theme of his work.

Exploring Šlejhar's writings for passages dedicated to landscape descriptions, one is surprised by a relative scarcity of them. Though set prevalingly in the country, among north Bohemian peasants, his stories focus on man in an extreme situation, usually as a victim of adversity, egoism, disrespect or hatred of his or her antagonist(s). The landscape image, when employed, plays an even more profound role in such moments than in the novels of Thomas Hardy. The outer world becomes part of the inner being of a character, of his consciousness or his soul. One of these characters can even be the narrator, otherwise taking no part in the situation and posing just as a witness, though a very affected one. As such, the landscape in Šlejhar tends to be unstructured with just one dominant feature conveying the desired meaning. Such a conception may remind us of the famous dictum of Henri-Frédéric Amiel, the Swiss moral philosopher and diarist, who said that "any landscape is a condition of the spirit."

This principle can be well demonstrated on a passage from a short story called, in its magazine version, "Kaplička" ("The Chapel," published in *Lumír*, 1900), and later included in the collection *Z chmurných obzorů* (From the Gloomy Horizons, 1910) as "Na Krchovcích" (the place name Krchovce being suggestive of a burying ground). In it a nameless character, an old rich miller, walks from his village to a little chapel he built amid his fields several miles away from home as a sign of his repentance for the crimes he had committed in his youth.

It is raining heavily and other villagers either stay in their cottages or crowd in the local church. The protagonist, however, does not share communal religiosity, he needs to communicate with God in his own individual and—as he believes—more profound and genuine way. It is his last journey: at the end of the story we see him dying on the steps of the chapel. The landscape he passes through consists of all his fields, now soaked with water, with crop mostly destroyed. The scene is presented in its utmost intensity:

The whole country was growing black, dressed in the immense water robes which it was impossible to get rid of. Everything was soaked with water, in the tight grasp of heavy wet arms. The pouring from the clouds, destructively flooding the earth, was ceaseless and overpowering. Streams of water ran darkly across the blackened meadows and banks, fields and roads. Blackened houses, blackened grass, blackened woods and hillsides, vanishing gloomily in the undistinguished distances of the horizon, everything so black and dismal and vanishing in that persistent watery chaos.—By the road a flooded brook rolled its waters with dark and wild force, whirling occasionally on the meadows like a disturbed red sea and roaring darkly in one muffled but terrible echo of the rain. The alders lining its banks rose like dark, steep walls. (Šlejhar, 1900, p. 56—My translation)

The landscape Šlejhar presents so persistently is in fact a reflection of the hero's harrowed conscience, the mind shaken by the uncertainty of God's mercy. The picture of the landscape almost collapsing under the raging torrents is analogous to the hero's inner fight with God's wrath, the fight he must undergo before he reaches his goal, however illusory this goal may turn out to be. At the end of his final journey, the transgressor's consciousness meets its critical point and the inner world of the man collapses in the same existential cataclysm as that which defaces nature around him.

Interiorized landscape plays a similar role in other texts as well, e.g. in "Nehoda mesiáše" (The Accident of Messiah), a short story collected in the volume *Temno* (Darkness, 1902), where the protagonist makes his desperate trip to a local healer, in whose powers he sees the last hope for his limping horse; in a long story called "Jen si odpočiň..." (Just Take a Rest...) from the same collection; or in "Předtuchy" (Premonitions), the title story from a later collection (1909), in which the landscape destroyed by a storm represents the climax of a series of disastrous events serving as psychological torments under whose working a greedy and obstinate farmer transforms into a religious person and recluse. The landscape of these texts is no more a background or a matrix of symbolic meanings; it becomes an agent actively participating in the fate of Šlejhar's characters. It acts as a test of the heroes' moral integrity, their endurance and will.

Occasionally, a different use of landscape image occurs: in *Peklo* (Inferno), Šlejhar's only industrial novel, the barren and exploited landscape reflects the disintegration of values caused by a transfer of the traditional, rural society, in which life was based on a general respect for the laws of nature, towards a dehumanized, purely vegetative form of industrial society. Even this is, however, represented as a point of reference defining the state of the hero's own mind, as a picture resulting from an interaction of the hero's inner world with the outer conditions:

Walking the other days through this unpleasant landscape, whose entire beauty and amazing fecundity of its soil was oriented purely to beet growing, the quickest profit, and where nothing else was left to bring comfort, where only a calculating matter-of-factness of life was at work—he felt all the intense, hopeless grief of his own life, the helplessness of any other effort, any other desire, the confinement of his own being in some dull, low, wobbling sphere, the servitude to matter from which there is no escape. (Šlejhar, 2002, p. 25, my translation)

This initial image is later contrasted with its opposite, with an idealized picture of pure nature, unpolluted by civilisation, the landscape of his home, a place of return, as the hero promises to his lover, an idealized girl called, quite tellingly, Mary:

But I know a different country than this one, my country far away in the mountains, a country of green meadows as if made of emeralds, of shadowy woods with their unceasing rustle. That country is still unravished by the touch of mammon. That country is holy, feeding blessedly those who have entrusted themselves to its truth. We shall entrust ourselves to it, we shall leave this place. (Šlejhar, 2002, p. 261—My translation)

The text dynamics develop towards the landscape of the mind, the landscape of memory, an ideal pastoral and Christian landscape of childhood. The redeeming power of such space is the only hope for one who has become familiar with the industrial inferno. However illusory such hope turns out to be eventually, Šlejhar's strategy clearly indicates the dominant position of the interiorized pictures of landscape in his fiction.

Šlejhar's conception here bears closely upon his prevailing impressionist method of representation, suggested already by the title of his first collection of short stories, *Dojmy z přírody a společnosti* (Impressions from Nature and Society, 1894). It is in this respect that Šlejhar differs substantially from Zola's definition of the naturalist writer as one "who does not interpose his personal sentiments" (Zola, 1964/1893, Section V, para. 13). Emotional involvement is a feature marking a number of Šlejhar's writings. Even if his narrator witnessing the scenes in which evil is at large in all its cruelty never interferes

with what is going on and does not become a character participating in the actions, he nevertheless realizes the presence of evil with great sensitivity and feels tormented by it so much as to experience hallucinatory states which are close to a kind of mystic ecstasy.

Thus in *Vražďení* (Murdering), a novel set in a village where Šlejhar lived for a time, an autobiographical character records the events that have taken place within the last half-year. He first comments upon them with a deal of ironic aloofness or only slight compassion and presents them as “documents” (respecting the subtitle of the novel). But with the escalation of these events, his narrative perspective changes and what he shares with the reader is his mental processing of these events, images of his exalted mind, a mystic vision projected against a specific night scene of a starlit landscape. The objective world becomes, due to the narrator’s emotional intensity, a transcendental vision. The semantics of the text changes from the meanings of the objective, external reality to those formed not rationally but emotionally, springing right from a painfully torn soul, which is no more able to bear all the evil it witnesses: “and for long are my senses unable to comprehend what is going on, what is the purpose of that inexplicable stupor in which as if some mystique storm was about to break. My soul seems to grope in the dark” (Šlejhar, 1910, p. 224). Šlejhar’s landscape has its true origin in the human soul; sensual perception and subjective impressions are mere conditions for its existence.

This tendency towards subjectivity of Šlejhar’s space culminates in his short story “V mých březnové noci” (In the Fogs of a March Night) from the collection *V zářeží krbu* (In the Shades of a Hearth, 1899), where the actual landscape seems to vanish entirely and become, in the observer’s consciousness, something unknown or even uncanny; the intangible other:

I don’t recognize the familiar dwelling places, objects, shapes [...] Everything I have been so far certain of knowing is changed into groups curiously deprived of their substance, garlanded with vapours and shadows, blurred, eluding all the notions and dimensions of experience—into groups dislocated from their positions and shelters and formed in poses of some intense waiting, blown up out of all earthly proportions, terribly—into something of entirely different, mysterious and unsolved meaning. (Šlejhar, 1899, p. 258—My translation)

This is the most extreme example of deviation of naturalist fiction from the original conception of space as practised by Émile Zola. The scene is created entirely by the narrator’s mind swayed by the overwhelming impressions of the moment, and the actual landscape of the scene emerges only very slowly and gradually behind this purely subjective vision. In such parts of Šlejhar’s fiction landscape plays a *psychological* role, being determined by one’s consciousness, or, in Amiel’s words, “a condition of the spirit.”

The purpose of discussing extracts representing landscape in its various semantic functions was to demonstrate how the authors from whose work these passages were selected, Hardy and Šlejhar, transformed the original naturalist conception of literary space and in doing this deviated from the school of French naturalism. Both of them seemed to find the original intensifying role of environment, as employed in Zola's novel, inadequate. Hardy exploits the broad semantic potential of landscape to provide ample interpretive clues through his spatial imagery. His use of endogenic and exogenic meanings in the construction of places provides his novels with a specific form of interaction between character and environment: instead of simple Darwinian determination he offers a concept based on symbolic understanding of his topography. We can thus identify various functions of his use of landscape, such as thematic or anticipatory.

Šlejhar goes even further in his farewell to Zolaesque naturalism: he internalizes landscape and turns it into an aesthetic instrument for the examination of the human mind, accentuating a psychological function of landscape. For him subjective reflection of outer reality, prompted by an intense emotional involvement of his protagonists in the depicted situations, is much more important than an objective, detached representation of reality. Both Hardy's and Šlejhar's complex strategies contributed to building a bridge between traditional realist fiction and modernist literature of the early 20th century.

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