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Architecture in Thomas Hardy's Novels***

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# Introduction

It is surprising that architecture in Thomas Hardy's novels did not attract the attention of the first critics, given that Hardy was an architect by profession and buildings feature prominently in his works. The role played by buildings in his novels has always been overshadowed by the other major theme, i.e. that of landscape. It is true that natural scenes are omnipresent in Hardy's works, but it is the purpose of this thesis to argue that architecture should not be subordinated to natural landscape and that a clear-cut distinction between natural objects and human artefacts is not only impossible, but also harmful for a complete understanding of the role played by setting in the *Wessex Novels*. The attention Hardy paid to the natural landscape of the South West of England is not at odds with his almost obsessive concentration on buildings. What W. H. Smith wrote of the literature from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards well explains why architecture and nature form a whole in Hardy's novels:

The best architectural descriptions are the fruit of that sensitiveness to environment which results also in a love of nature. The two qualities are usually found together; in fact a really good description of a building seldom fails to make some reference to the surrounding landscape, for the best descriptions come from vivid mental pictures, and it is hard to visualize an object apart from its setting.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, there is reason to believe that Hardy himself would have shared the belief that such a thing as a pure "natural landscape" no longer existed, at least not in his post-industrial revolution England. It is true that sometimes Hardy constructs a setting in a way which induces us to believe that unspoilt natural places still exist(ed), like Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* or, to a lesser extent, Little Hintock, the setting of *The Woodlanders*. Yet Hardy is equally good at seeding hints which make those idyllic descriptions fall apart like a house of cards. These hints, dating back to *Desperate Remedies*, continued to intrude into the *Wessex Novels*, until the final outburst of a squalid modernity in *Jude the Obscure*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Hunting Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Keith pointed out that in his regional novels Hardy included the factors of modernity (for example the railway, the penny post, the reaping machines, etc.), which other regional novelists tended to omit (see William John Keith, *A Regional Approach to Hardy's Fiction*, in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer, London, Macmillan, 1979, pp. 36-49, p. 38, while Raymond Williams observed that in Hardy's major novels change is always "central and even decisive" (Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* [1973], London, The Hogarth Press, 1985, p. 197).

Just as Hardy was deeply conscious that progress was a fact even in the most out-of-the-way districts, so he was convinced that to his contemporaries the word “landscape” did not – and could not – evoke the same images it evoked some decades before to his father, to his grandfather and to those whose memories he used to listen to when he was a boy. Hardy, in other words, was fully aware that the marks left by human beings on the landscape were so numerous that not only had the concept of natural landscape become outdated, but our very idea of landscape had changed as well. Moreover, he was aware that we have grown so accustomed to landscapes shaped by civilisations that we are almost unable to distinguish human artefacts from the rest. The spaces left to nature decrease, while constructions take their places, but at the same time ancient buildings have become so much part of the landscape, that in general we do no longer perceive them as intrusive objects on the landscape. A confirmation of our unawareness of the impact of human marks on the landscape comes from a close look at criticism on Hardy’s works. Not only has landscape always attracted more attention, but it has been considered as separate from architecture,<sup>3</sup> despite Hardy’s having been an architect before devoting himself entirely to literature, and despite his long-lasting interest in architecture.

Thomas Hardy’s father ran a building and master-masonry business established by Hardy’s grandfather.<sup>4</sup> In 1856 John Hicks, a Dorchester architect, took him as a pupil in his office.<sup>5</sup> Hardy’s tasks included making surveys of churches with a view to restore them. In 1862 he became assistant architect for A. W. Blomfield in London, where his profession began to disappoint him because he deemed architectural drawing “monotonous and mechanical”.<sup>6</sup> In the same year Hardy became a member of the Architectural Association and obtained two significant rewards. In 1863 his design for a country mansion won the first prize, and his essay entitled ‘On the Application of Colored [sic] Bricks and Terra Cotta to Modern Architecture’ (of which no copy survives) was rewarded with the silver medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects.<sup>7</sup> Hardy’s first published work dates back to this period:

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<sup>3</sup> This tendency is visible in particular in the first Hardy critics, for example in Grimsditch’s *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. In the chapter devoted to the study of Hardy’s characters in their environment, buildings are almost disregarded, excepting a brief analysis of the great barn in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (see Herbert Borthwick Grimsditch, *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, London, H. F. & G. Witherby, 1925, Ch. II).

<sup>4</sup> See Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* [2006], London, Picador, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate, London, Macmillan, 1984 (repr. 1989), p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> See Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* cit., pp. 95-6.

in 1865, his amusing account entitled ‘How I Built Myself a House’<sup>8</sup> was published in *Chamber’s Journal*. After his failed attempt to have *The Poor Man and the Lady* published, Hardy went back to his native Dorset and accepted the offer of George Crickmay, John Hick’s successor, to employ him as an architect in Weymouth. It was during one of his surveys of churches to be restored that Hardy met his future wife. In 1870 Crickmay asked Hardy to make a survey of St Juliot church in Cornwall, where he fell in love with Emma Gifford, the vicar’s sister-in-law. Before completely abandoning the profession to devote himself to writing novels, Hardy worked intermittently for Raphael Brandon in 1870 and, in 1872, for T. Roger Smith.

However, Hardy never completely abandoned architecture. Not only did he build himself Max Gate, his house in Dorchester, but in 1881 he entered the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), founded in 1877 by William Morris.<sup>9</sup> Hardy’s commitment to prevent indiscriminate restoration works emerges in particular in his letters and in ‘Memories of Church Restoration’, a speech he wrote to be read at the SPAB’s annual general meeting in 1906. In this speech Hardy evoked the period of his life when, as assistant architect, he contributed to church restoration, a practice which at the time often meant destruction of fine works of architecture.<sup>10</sup> Hardy’s letters prove that he was particularly concerned with churches and other significant buildings in his native Dorset, for example St Mary’s church at Stratton and Stinsford Church,<sup>11</sup> close to Higher Bockhampton, his birthplace.

The influence of Hardy’s architectural training on his life and work, then, should not be underestimated. Both Hardy’s career as an architect and the importance of buildings in his novels are two special topics on which many critics have focused since the 1970s. The first scholar who inaugurated this new branch of studies on Hardy is Claudius J. P. Beatty. His PhD thesis entitled *The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*

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<sup>8</sup> See Thomas Hardy, ‘How I Built Myself a House’ [1865], in *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences*, ed. Harold Orel, London; Melbourne, Macmillan, 1967, pp. 159-68.

<sup>9</sup> For a list of studies devoted to Hardy’s career as an architect and to his involvement with the SPAB, see further on, footnotes 22, 23 and 24.

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ [1906], in *Thomas Hardy’s Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Michael Millgate, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001, pp. 239-53.

<sup>11</sup> On Hardy’s commitment for St Mary’s church at Stratton, see ‘Letter to Thackeray Turner’, 16 Dec. 1889, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard Little Purdy, Michael Millgate and Keith Wilson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978-2012, 8 Vols., Vol. I, p. 205, ‘Letter to Thackeray Turner’, 29 Nov. 1890 in *Ibidem*, pp. 220-1, and ‘Letter to Jane Ashley’, 2 Dec. 1890, in *Ibidem*, Vol. VII, p. 115. For Hardy’s opinions on the restoration of Stinsford church, see ‘Letter to the Stinsford Church Restoration Committee’, [25] April 1909, in *Ibidem*, Vol. IV, pp. 18-20. Hardy’s consideration of local domestic architecture is proved by his note entitled ‘The Preservation of Ancient Cottages’ [1927], in *Thomas Hardy’s Public Voice* cit., pp. 458-60.

(University of London, 1963)<sup>12</sup> is still considered the major contribution to the theme of architecture in Hardy's novels. In his study, Beatty tried to identify the existing buildings Hardy drew upon for the representation of his fictional ones. Beatty took into consideration all of Hardy's novels, while the more general question of restoration is dealt with in the first chapter. Every single building featuring in Hardy's novels is analysed: Beatty takes the narrator's description as a starting point and goes on to individuate the real model.<sup>13</sup> Finding them, however, must not have been such an easy task. Hardy sometimes made the identification of his Wessex places difficult – if not impossible – by mixing details coming from different places, and he adopted a similar procedure in the creation of his literary buildings. Beatty was nonetheless able to retrace Hardy's architectural sources by using letters and records and by investigating Hardy's life in search of buildings he might have seen or been familiar with. Moreover, Beatty found out that Hardy owed much to John Hutchins's *The History and Antiquities of the Country of Dorset*<sup>14</sup> for many of his descriptions of buildings and ruins in his novels, as in the case of Corfe Castle, the model for Castle de Stancy in *A Laodicean*,<sup>15</sup> and of the tower in Charborough Park (both located in Dorset) which inspired the column of *Two on a Tower*.<sup>16</sup> However, Beatty's contribution goes beyond the mere account of the models for Hardy's fictional buildings, since he tried to infer the reasons behind Hardy's choice of some of them. Moreover, he discussed how Hardy decided to represent them and investigated the relationships between buildings, the plot and the major themes of the novels. In his opinion, Hardy portrays the basic shape of the buildings by focusing on their geometrical outline, but then he introduces some grotesque elements (a gargoyle or a human being with a characteristic appearance) in order to distort the symmetry. Beatty underlined how Hardy's experience as a professional architect is visible in his

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<sup>12</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy (with particular reference to the novels; A Biography of Thomas Hardy as Architect* [1963], Dorchester, Plush Publishing, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Similar attempts have been made by many scholars of Hardy's work, before and after Beatty's study. The most recent studies include Tony Fincham, *Hardy's Landscape Revisited*, London, Robert Hale, 2010, and J. B. Bullen, *Thomas Hardy: The World of His Novels*, London, Frances Lincoln, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See John Hutchins, James Whitworth Hodson and William Shipp, *The History and Antiquities of the Country of Dorset* [1774], 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 4 vols., London, J. B. Nichols & Sons, 1861.

<sup>15</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., pp. 255-62 and also Claudius J. P. Beatty, 'When is a Castle not a Castle?', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 90 (1969), pp. 258-60. Before Beatty's discovery, Stancy Castle was believed to bear slight resemblance with Dunster Castle in Somerset (see, for example, Hermann Lea, *Thomas Hardy's Wessex* [1913], London, Macmillan, 1928, pp. 251-2).

<sup>16</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., pp. 280-4. According to Denys Kay-Robinson, another model for the tower is the obelisk of Weatherby Castle in Milborne St. Andrew, Dorset (see Denys Kay-Robinson, *Hardy's Wessex Reappraised*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1972, p. 97).

descriptions. Indeed his detailed analysis of Hardy's fictional buildings reveals with what great variety architecture features in his novels. For instance, while *The Trumpet-Major* and *Two on a Tower* are dominated by one single building – the mill and the column respectively – in other novels there are almost as many buildings as characters, like in *The Hand of Ethelberta* or in *Desperate Remedies*. This disproportion, however, should not induce us to believe that architecture is less important in the works where few buildings are mentioned. On the contrary, the mill alone embodies “subtle differences of class and temperament”,<sup>17</sup> while the tower is, in Beatty's words, “the very ‘raison d'être’ of the novel”, a “magnet”<sup>18</sup> attracting the main characters.

The second aspect focused on by Beatty is the correspondence between buildings and their occupants, which reaches its acme in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The appearance of a building is another element which helps us to understand a character or a community, as in the case of churches. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule, in particular in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where – Beatty observed – there are less descriptions of buildings than in other *Wessex Novels* (for example, Tess's cottage is scantily described) because “Tess herself is above all ‘a field-woman’ and we should associate her first with the landscape of which she forms a part rather than with any cottage or building”.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, according to Beatty the representation of buildings in Hardy's novels reveals the author's ideas about architecture, in particular about restoration. The *Wessex Novels* show how Hardy's opinions changed throughout his life. If behind George Somerset's “‘unlimited appreciativeness’ of architectural styles”<sup>20</sup> and Paula's indecision in *A Laodicean* there is Hardy's own uncertainty about the best way of restoring monuments, in *Jude the Obscure* the criticism of the endless restoration works going on in the fossilised city of Christminster can be read, in Beatty's opinion, as Hardy's acknowledgement that change must be accepted as necessary to both architecture and society. Christminster, with its Gothic style “as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal”,<sup>21</sup> is the proof that conservative architectural restoration is not a sufficient condition for the preservation of the memory of the past.

Yet Hardy was a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings from 1881 until the end of his life. In the controversies about the restoration plans of churches, usually

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<sup>17</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 221.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 355.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 273.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* [1895], ed. Dennis Taylor, London, Penguin, 1998, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Jude*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.



located in Dorset, Hardy always pleaded for the preservation of their typical features and against the adoption of incongruous styles. An account of Hardy's activity for the SPAB can be found in Beatty's *Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect*.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, architecture and restoration continued to attract Hardy's interest well after he had abandoned the profession to become a full-time writer. To Hardy's early work as a professional architect Beatty devoted many studies, for example *Thomas Hardy's Career in Architecture (1856-1872)*, which is a detailed account of the churches and other buildings with which Hardy was connected while working for John Hicks, A. W. Blomfield, G. R. Crickmay and T. Roger Smith.<sup>23</sup> Among Beatty's essays, *Thomas Hardy and the Restoration of Rampisham Church, Dorset* deals with a church where Hardy probably became acquainted with the principles of A. W. N. Pugin, who had partially restored it some years before.<sup>24</sup> From the titles of these studies by Beatty and from a close look at the buildings mentioned in Hardy's works, it is clear that churches are the buildings which Hardy was most familiar with. Hardy's work as an architect led him to survey churches with a view to restoring them, but churches interested him for reasons which were not only architectural.

The reasons accounting for Hardy's special interest in ecclesiastical buildings were explored by Jan Jędrzejewski in *Thomas Hardy and the Church* (1996). Jędrzejewski's study examines Hardy's religious beliefs and his attitudes towards the Church, which shifted from the Evangelical Christianity of the early 1860s to the verge of agnosticism around the

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<sup>22</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect: His Work for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings with a Variorum Edition of 'Memories of Church Restoration' (1906)*, Dorchester, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1995. See also Anon., 'Thomas Hardy and "Anti-Scrape"', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1928, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy's Career in Architecture (1856-1872)*, Dorchester, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1978. For a list of buildings, in particular churches, where Hardy was involved, either as an architect or as member of the SPAB later in his life, see also Clive Holland, *Thomas Hardy, O.M.: The Man, His Works and the Land of Wessex*, London, Jenkins, 1933, in particular Chs. II and III; Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect* cit. and, by the same author, 'Introduction' to *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Id, Dorchester, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 1966, pp. 1-37, in particular pp. 22-34; JoAnna Stephens Mink, 'Some Dorset church restorations with Hardy associations', *Dorset Life*, No. 283 (October 2002), pp. 38-40; Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church*, London, Macmillan, 1996, Ch. 2.1; Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; and Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* cit., pp. 182-5.

<sup>24</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy and the Restoration of Rampisham Church, Dorset*, Bridport, Dorset, privately printed, 1991. Other interesting works on the part played by Hardy in the restoration of specific churches include Claudius J. P. Beatty (ed.), *Thomas Hardy and the Restoration of St Peter's Church, Dorchester, 1856-7: Two Contemporary Reports from the 'Dorset County Chronicle' (17 July 1856 and 4 June 1857)*, St. Peter Port, Toucan Press, 1978, and, by the same author, *Stinsford, a Hardy Church*, St. Peter Port, Toucan Press, 1967; 'From the 'Lamb and the Flag' to Christminster. A Fresh Look at Thomas Hardy', *The Thomas Hardy Journal* XVII, 1 (February 2001), pp. 44-53; Timothy R. Hands, *Thomas Hardy and Stinsford Church* [1992], Bridport, Creeds, 1997; and Charles P. C. Pettit, *St Juliot Church and Thomas Hardy* [1986], [England] n.p., Thomas Hardy Society, 2010.

publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1896. The second chapter of Jędrzejewski's essay is devoted to the churches appearing in Hardy's works. In Jędrzejewski's opinion, the representation of churches undergoes a change throughout Hardy's literary production, mirroring how the author's ideas as well were in continuous evolution. After providing an account of Hardy's work as an architect and as a member of the SPAB, Jędrzejewski focuses on Hardy's single novels, where churches seldom perform a religious function, but rather serve as public buildings, as centres for the community, like in *Desperate Remedies* and in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Churches however are usually gloomy and decaying places in Hardy's novels, features conveying, according to Jędrzejewski, "a sense of inadequacy of the Christian religion to solve the problems of modern man".<sup>25</sup> This awareness made its first appearance in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), where the two churches are not perceived as the centre of community life. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and in *The Return of the Native* (1878) Hardy's discontent with the Christian creed is even more marked. In the first, the great barn symbolises natural religion, perceived as timeless and almost innate in humankind, while in the second religion is considered as insignificant if compared to natural forces. Finally in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) Christianity already belongs to the past, with Jude (and Hardy himself) attracted to religion because of its external appealing aspects. If Christianity still retains some significance, this is to be found "in its form, visual, liturgical, or social, rather than in its spiritual fundamentals".<sup>26</sup> Jędrzejewski's analysis of Hardy's literary churches shows that buildings – in this case churches – acquire a significance which goes beyond their function of providing a setting for a scene. Even when churches do serve this function alone, a deeper meaning is attached to this choice, as for example that of criticising the inadequacy of the Christian creed or the oppressiveness of religion on individual lives. Jędrzejewski's study reveals that an attentive reading of Hardy's representation of churches opens the road to a deeper understanding of the other major themes and to the ideological structure of the novels.

Other interesting remarks on the role played by buildings in Hardy's novels include Simon Gatrell's article entitled 'Middling Hardy' (1990), devoted to the centrality of three buildings in three "minor" novels by Hardy (the mill in *The Trumpet-Major*, the column in *Two on a Tower*, and Stancy Castle in *A Laodicean*),<sup>27</sup> and Alison Byerly's chapter devoted to Hardy in

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<sup>25</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* cit., p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> See Simon Gatrell, 'Middling Hardy', in *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy: the Novels*, ed. Dale Kramer, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1990, pp. 155-69.

her *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (1997). Byerly explored Hardy's peculiar attitude to architecture and the arts in general,<sup>28</sup> showing how Hardy's opinion of the arts differs from that of his contemporaries, who often associated the arts with theatricality and misrepresentation of reality. Byerly argued that for Hardy both architecture and music express a more profound kind of truth. In particular, architecture "gives tangible form to the cultural memory that music can only ephemerally express".<sup>29</sup> Buildings always succeed in illuminating the personality of their builders and of those who use (or used) them. Through architecture, it is therefore possible to have an honest portrayal of the community which produced it. Indeed Byerly pointed out that Hardy's criteria for evaluating a building are not purely aesthetic. She underlined that for Hardy functionality and honesty prevail over beauty. Architecture is honest when it does not try to impress the viewer but rather performs its function, like the railway tunnel in *A Laodicean*, which is by some distance one of the two "more architectural" novels by Hardy – the other being *Jude the Obscure* – as argued by R. H. Taylor in his *The Neglected Hardy* (1982). In Taylor's opinion, in this "minor" novel we can find many of the themes and questions which will be given more mature expression in *Jude the Obscure*, like the conflict between modern sensibility and the fascination exerted by a medieval past. More than that, the opposites around which the novel is structured, embodied in buildings, and architectural issues – in particular restoration and eclecticism – become the battleground for a clash between opposite attitudes towards the past, religion and technological progress.<sup>30</sup>

Original remarks on buildings and architectural elements in Hardy's works are not limited to the studies we have mentioned. This state of the art, where I have mentioned just the most significant contributions, is far from being exhaustive, and a list of further reading is indicated in the final bibliography, which is meant to give a fuller account of the main studies on the topic. The point of reference for any study on Hardy and architecture, however, is of course Beatty's *The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* for the completeness and accuracy of his treatment of buildings in Hardy's works. This study will be

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<sup>28</sup> Other studies, besides Byerly's, discuss the role played by the arts in Hardy's work, for example J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, and Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, London, Macmillan, 1979.

<sup>29</sup> Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy: Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels*, London, Macmillan, 1982, pp. 105-10.

no exception, and therefore Beatty's PhD thesis will be often referred to, although I will also refer to more recent studies. More than that, the aim of this thesis is basically to carry on the research started by Beatty in order to re-discuss and reassess some crucial aspects, for example the influence exerted by John Ruskin on Thomas Hardy and his work. If Beatty's main contribution was the identification of the architectural models for Hardy's fictional buildings, this study is meant to analyse and discuss the role and the significance of those buildings as they appear in Hardy's novels. I will argue for architecture what has been argued for the Wessex landscape and for other fictional settings, that is to say that writers pick up materials from reality and then combine and distort these elements in order to create something new and quite different from the original. What Hardy claimed of his 'Casterbridge' when he received the Freedom of the Borough of Dorchester in 1910 – that his fictional town “is not Dorchester, not even Dorchester as it existed 60 years ago, but a dream place that never was outside an irresponsible book”<sup>31</sup> – can be applied to all the other places featuring in his works, buildings included. Hardy would have agreed with Peter Brown's statement that “it is the writer's trade to disguise (or translate) rather than to transcribe, and that details of places known to readers will be accentuated, embellished, distorted, ignored, renamed, combined, or invented as need dictates – rendering comparisons with actuality otiose if not downright disappointing”.<sup>32</sup> This does not mean, however, that buildings are of less consequence because of their sometimes loose relationship with real ones. On the contrary, Hardy's representation of buildings becomes significant for the very reason of its being subjective and biased. Why did Hardy decide to describe a building in a specific way, leaving out some details and including others, only apparently less significant? What kind of information did he convey through the appearance of a building? An investigation about architecture in Hardy's novels will raise many other questions and possibly provide their relative answers or, at least, some hints indicating a possible answer.

The primary question to face is what actually was Hardy's idea of architecture, which is a rather problematical question because of two principal reasons. The first is that “architecture” itself is more difficult to define than the other arts; the second is that Hardy's concept of architecture seems to be rather wide, including disciplines which are now separate from architecture. Representations of buildings, or parts of them, in Hardy's novels have attracted

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Hardy, [Speech on Receiving the Freedom of the Borough] [1910], in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice* cit., pp. 319-22, p. 320.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Brown, 'Introduction' to *Literature & Place, 1800-2000*, ed. Peter Brown and Michael Irwin, New York; Oxford, Peter Lang, 2006, pp. 13-23, p. 15.

the attention of many scholars, but the question of what can be considered as architecture is seldom tackled. As far as the definition of architecture is concerned, we might wonder if any construction, even the simplest one, could be classified as “architecture”. In Hardy’s time the widespread opinion was that architecture, being a form of art, should be distinguished from mere building, an opinion which can be condensed in James Fergusson’s definition of architecture as “nothing more than the æsthetic form of the purely Technic art of building”.<sup>33</sup>

However, this definition does not solve the problem, since one might wonder in what exactly the aesthetic aspect of building consists. The question which arises is therefore if it is possible to draw a clear-cut line between what is architecture and what is not. John Ruskin was convinced that a clear distinction was both necessary and possible. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* he wrote that “architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure.”<sup>34</sup> According to Ruskin, then, it is not enough for a building to be simply stable and solid to be defined as “architecture”. What turns it into an object of art (architecture) is the presence of some element whose only function is to please the mind and to contribute to the moral education of occupants and beholders alike. Ruskin even uses the adjective “useless” to refer to those “venerable or beautiful” characteristics which allow us to distinguish between architecture and mere buildings.<sup>35</sup> It is worth noticing that the distinction does not depend, in Ruskin’s opinion, on the use for which a building was raised. Theoretically, any building could compete to become a work of art, provided that the distinguishing requirement (the addition of some unnecessary element meant to please the mind) is respected.

What Ruskin wrote of architecture in *The Seven Lamps* must be borne in mind when trying to answer the question of what is considered as architecture in Hardy’s novels. Indeed in Hardy’s novels it is not unusual to come across descriptions of humble buildings dealt with as “architecture” even if the narrator underlines their unpretending beauty, as in the case of Arrowthorne Lodge in *The Hand of Ethelberta*, whose main feature, possibly meant to please the mind, is a polygonal room with lancet windows which reminds Christopher of a church

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<sup>33</sup> James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* [1862], London, J. Murray, 1893, 2 vols., Vol. I, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* [1849], in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols., London, Allen, 1903-12, Vol. 8, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Ruskin’s definition of architecture as distinguished from building is far from being a clear one and much has been written about it. See, for example, Michael W. Brooks, *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* [1987], London, Thames and Hudson, 1989, pp. 75-8.

apse. This example shows very clearly that Hardy's and Ruskin's concepts of architecture are very close. Actually Hardy's narrator is not explicit, but there is a sense in the novel in which the builder of the little cottage where Ethelberta and her siblings live was willing to build something which could please the mind, besides the body. However, this example from *The Hand of Ethelberta* suggests that according to Hardy the concept of architecture is subjective, and that the human associations attached to a building are often more valuable than its intrinsic aesthetic worth, as we will see.

Hardy's conception of architecture, then, seems to be more inclusive than Ruskin's, and this is the second reason why the question about what is to be considered as "architecture" in Hardy is seldom dealt with. If Hardy had adopted Ruskin's definition of architecture, he would have ignored many man-made constructions which are on the contrary put on the foreground in his fictions, as the railway tunnel in *A Laodicean* or the squalid Union Workhouse in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. These two constructions would have been excluded from Ruskin's definition because they were not built with the aim of pleasing the mind. To be more precise, the railway tunnel is even a work of engineering, rather than a proper building, as Beatty pointed out.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the construction of bridges and railway lines too is now entrusted to engineers. Yet, these kinds of human artefacts cannot be ignored when dealing with architecture in Hardy, since these constructions form, together with "proper architecture", a group made homogeneous by some common features. First of all, they share the feature of being man-made artefacts, being thus opposed, in Hardy's novels, to natural objects. They testify to the presence of man and his necessities – protecting himself, processing and storing food, travelling, worshipping a god, etc. – in a "natural space". Secondly, works of engineering are made to come into the category of "architecture" in order to be evaluated on the basis of the same criteria as "pure architecture". Were the railway tunnel in *A Laodicean* considered as a mere work of engineering, it could not be compared to Castle de Stancy. In that case, George Somerset would acknowledge just its fitness and stability, because these are the qualities we expect in good works of engineering. Somerset instead evaluates the tunnel also from an aesthetic point of view. He is impressed by its appearance, in particular by its being in harmony with the surrounding landscape and by its majestic proportions. That is, Somerset's attitude towards the tunnel does not differ from his attitude towards Gothic churches and Castle de Stancy.

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<sup>36</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 246.

This more inclusive notion of “architecture” allows readers to better grasp the peculiarities of Hardy’s own aesthetic canon. Hardy places all edifices on the same level, regardless of their age, use and occupants. Cottages, mills and even shepherd’s huts are accorded the same importance as castles, manor houses and cathedrals, as the length and precision of their descriptions makes clear, while bridges and other works of engineering are evaluated on the basis of the same criteria used to evaluate buildings usually ascribed to architecture, that is to say beauty, resistance, functionality and a harmonic relationship with the surrounding landscape. This totally democratic and unprejudiced approach to man-made objects marks the boundary line between Hardy’s and Ruskin’s conceptions of architecture. If indeed Ruskin as well is eager to underline that it is not the purpose of a building what makes the difference between architecture and mere building, on the other hand he is not inclined to accept that purely useful constructions might be endowed with a certain beauty. It is true that Ruskin praises such works as the Rialto bridge, but he never puts architecture and engineering on the same level. For example, in *The Stones of Venice* he writes that Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci would have been greater artists if scientific knowledge had not “draw[n] away their hearts at once from the purposes of art and the power of nature”. In particular, Ruskin says that “Leonardo fretted his life away in engineering”,<sup>37</sup> which proves that for Ruskin engineering cannot be considered as a proper branch of architecture. On the contrary, the way the railway tunnel is represented in *A Laodicean* reveals where beauty in works of engineering resides in Hardy’s opinion. This is a beauty deriving neither from ornament, nor from exact proportions, nor, on the contrary, from irregularity. It is rather that kind of beauty associated with great works of engineering. That is a kind of beauty we have now grown accustomed to; it is linked to a sort of awe inspired by the technical skills which made a construction possible contrary to all expectations, such as a long bridge or a viaduct, and so it has possibly more to do with the sublime than with the beautiful, as I will argue in Chapter Three.

Hardy’s all-inclusive concept of architecture, however, is not monolithic, as we will see. If indeed in *A Laodicean* the tunnel seems to represent the modern sublime counterpart of the Gothic castle,<sup>38</sup> elsewhere Hardy does not seem so confident about the destiny of architecture in the modern world. Actually in *A Laodicean* too there are already hints that a new original

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<sup>37</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* [1851-3], in *The Works of John Ruskin* cit., Vol. 11, pp. 71 and 70.

<sup>38</sup> The opposition between the tunnel and the castle is part of the wider opposition between modern and ancient technology in the novel (see Kim Donguk, ‘Thomas Hardy’s *A Laodicean*: Paula Power as an “Angel of History”’, *The Thomas Hardy Yearbook* 37 (2008), pp. 3-14, p. 3).

style of architecture is wanting, while engineering has taken the place of architecture; and this metamorphosis of “proper architecture” (as defined by Ruskin) into engineering does not always provide a satisfactory alternative, as Hardy’s numerous representations of railways make clear. This problematic issue will be widely explored in the second part of the thesis in relation to *A Laodicean* and *Jude the Obscure*.

On the other hand, the analysis of architecture in such novels as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* or *Jude the Obscure* will necessarily enlarge its meaning to include another discipline which is at the same time similar to and distinct from architecture, that is to say town planning. We could say that town planning is architecture on a larger scale. An investigation of buildings in Casterbridge, Sandbourne, Wintonchester and Christminster cannot be separated from the general appearance of these towns, given that the narrator himself often dwells upon descriptions of towns seen at a distance from privileged points of view in order to highlight the meaning of their shape and to infer the character of their inhabitants.

Finally, there is the problem of the applied arts, like interior design and other decorative arts, for example glassware, furniture and woodwork. These arts cannot of course be made to come into architecture, since they involve different techniques than designing a building. Moreover, in Hardy’s time a division between applied and fine arts had already begun to take place, with the consequent specialisation of workmen, designers and craftsmen. If previously architects were entrusted with the task of planning buildings and their interiors, in the nineteenth century these different aspects became the speciality of various professionals. The division of labour had consequences also on architects and craftsmen, whose areas of expertise tended to diverge, although with some exceptions to this rule.<sup>39</sup> Applied arts will nonetheless be referred to in this study because the very process of their internal differentiation and of their deviation from architecture is particularly visible in Hardy’s works. The widening of the gap between architecture and other arts is obviously criticised by Hardy, especially in *The Hand of Ethelberta* and in *Jude the Obscure*, because excessive specialisation runs the risk of stifling creativity and imagination. Sol and Dan, Ethelberta’s brothers, have to renounce their versatility (they are able to do almost everything, from framing roofs to painting walls) if they want to find a job in London, where just highly

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<sup>39</sup> For example, A. W. N. Pugin was also a designer, while Sir Gilbert Scott used to design also the details (for example, of St Pancras station). William Burges too was both an architect and a designer. A different case is that represented by Joseph Paxton, who was specialised in greenhouses but was appointed the design of the Crystal Palace. Later in his life, Paxton designed also country houses.



specialised workers are required. Hardy's criticism of specialisation reminds us of Ruskin's attacks on the mechanisation of labour, which was mainly responsible for the modern workers' feeling of frustration.<sup>40</sup> Hardy is not as explicit as Ruskin in his criticism, but he reacts to this outcome of progress by underlining the strict relationship between architecture, interior design and decorative arts, in particular in the description of ancient buildings, produced when the modern division of labour had not yet taken place. According to Hardy, a building and its internal decoration are to be conceived together, and it is for this reason that modern interventions where the interior is completely refurbished are the main target of his criticism. For example, in *The Woodlanders* Mrs Charmond has refurbished Hintock House with "Versaillaise furniture [...] in style as unlike that of the structural parts of the building as it was possible to be" in order to "counteract the fine old English gloom of the place".<sup>41</sup> The narrator undoubtedly deems the new furniture as questionable as the reason lying behind it. Moreover, this minor detail contributes to the characterisation of Mrs Charmond as an intruder, in a novel where the theme of intrusion plays an important role.

We will therefore adopt a wide concept of architecture because limiting my developments to a clear-cut definition of it in the analysis of Hardy's novels would prove fruitless. Not only does the field of this art overlap with those of other arts in Hardy's novels, but the concept of architecture itself changes over the centuries, so that the word "architecture" meant for Hardy something different from what it means for us nowadays, and sometimes even something different from what it meant for his contemporaries. Moreover, Hardy himself was aware that buildings are complex organisms, so that their representation calls for that wide range of disciplines which are contiguous to architecture.

The purpose served by architecture in Hardy's works can be compared to that of a catalyst, a chemical substance which makes a reaction easier or quicker. Buildings do more or less the same with social, aesthetic, moral and historical issues in Hardy's novels. Architecture favours the encounter – or, in some cases, the clash – between only seemingly independent problems, showing their relatedness, their common causes and a possible solution to both of

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<sup>40</sup> See John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 10, pp. 194-202. Regarding Ruskin's social critique of the division of labour, see William Morris, 'Preface' to John Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter from The Stones of Venice* [1892], London, Euston Grove Press, 2008, pp. vii-x. Here it is worth pointing out that in his library at Max Gate Hardy possessed a copy of Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic' with Morris' preface (see Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy's Library at Max Gate: Catalogue of an Attempted Reconstruction*, University of Toronto Library, 23 August 2003, web, 25 November 2015 (<<http://hardy.library.utoronto.ca/>>)). On the influence of Ruskin's chapter from *The Stones of Venice* on Hardy's work, see Charles Swann, 'Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* and Hardy's *The Dynasts* – A Possible Debt?', *Notes and Queries* 39, 2 (1992), pp. 187-8.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* [1887], ed. Patricia Ingham, London, Penguin, 1998, Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 252. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Woodlanders*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

them. The power of architecture in bringing together different questions in order to give birth to more complex issues reveals itself in a specific moment in the life of a building, that is to say when a restoration plan is taken into consideration. This is not always the case, but if this happens, a series of questions arise. Hardy was aware that buildings can turn into battlegrounds where opposite attitudes clash. Is our past to be worshipped or should new generations look ahead? Is there a limit to man's necessity to tame nature? How can an age express its own identity through architecture? I think that Jan Jędrzejewski's statement about *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that "the attitude towards church restoration becomes in the novel a test of the characters' power of intellectual and moral discernment"<sup>42</sup> can be extended to all Hardy's works where restoration is dealt with or alluded to. Any investigation into the problem of preserving ancient buildings will reveal that the relationship with the past and with memory is always complex and demands continuous redefinition.

As the examination of buildings in Hardy's novels and stories proceeds, it will become clear that it is almost impossible to separate architecture not only from the disciplines we have just mentioned, but also from all the major themes. The relationship between men and nature, the need to counteract death by extending the limits of our life, the risk of losing our memory of the past: these are only some of the typical Hardyian topics strictly intertwined with architecture. Moreover, it will become clear that sometimes a univocal answer to questions regarding, for example, the best way of preserving a building, is not to be found. This happens because a building is never just a building, and this time in Hardy's novels exactly as in the real world. The newspapers, the TV news and other media are often occupied by debates concerning the lot of some ancient building or archaeological remains. Public opinion is often stirred by news regarding buildings in a state of decay or threatened by questionable interventions and even by demolition to make room for new buildings. Debates concerning the way of preserving, restoring and adapting buildings to new demands testify to the symbolic functions men assign to architecture. In this thesis I will argue that in Hardy architecture is no less richly significant than natural landscape and that Hardy's aim in choosing to represent certain buildings in a specific way was to investigate questions that were of paramount importance in the second half of the nineteenth century (and still are), and he decided to deal with them through architecture, the other art (besides literature) he was most familiar with.

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<sup>42</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* cit., p. 76.

Architecture will therefore be considered here as one of the elements around which all the major issues coalesce. This constellation of issues has been grouped around two main categories – space and time – for the sake of convenience and clarity. This thesis is therefore divided into two main sections, the first of which is devoted to the study of the relations between buildings and space, and in particular with the natural landscape. The aim of this first part is to illustrate how the representation of architecture in relation to the natural landscape in Hardy’s novels is an important chapter of Hardy’s investigation of the relationship between human beings and nature. The second section of this thesis is devoted to the relationships between architecture and time. The aim of the second part is to show that the preservation of buildings, which is of paramount importance for the preservation of the memory of the past, presupposes a “healthy” relationship with the past. Finally, each chapter of this thesis will concentrate on one or more novels in particular. The aim of these close studies is to try to reveal how the motif of architecture underlines and often highlights the themes at the core of each novel. Buildings and the relationships they entertain with the characters create a counterpart to the plot or, to be more precise, the motif of architecture complements the plots of the novels. The conviction on which this thesis is founded is that the close bond between architecture, nature and time, on the one hand, and the plot and the characters on the other, contributes to the highly visual quality of Hardy’s novels, so that much of what he has to say is conveyed through his “buildings”. Should we delete, say, Wellbridge abbey-church from *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* or Christminster’s medieval colleges from *Jude the Obscure*, much of the meaning of those novels would be lost. In the *Wessex Novels* architecture is far from being a mere background; it is rather something like another character, that is to say an active force endowed with its own personality, interacting with the other characters and even determining the course of the events, as in the case of *The Trumpet-Major*, *Two on a Tower* and *Jude the Obscure*, three novels where architecture is equally central. From this point of view, the role played by architecture in Hardy’s novels is no less important than the role played by nature, which is by now widely acknowledged.

The purpose of this thesis is to show that architecture and nature should not be studied as two separate entities, being always strictly intertwined as the two sides of one and the same coin. It will become clear that in Hardy’s novels architecture and nature contribute to the characterisation of Wessex as extremely local and, at the same time, universal.<sup>43</sup> For what

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<sup>43</sup> An interesting analysis of the ambivalent status of Wessex and of the counties it is made of is contained in Ralph Pite, *Hardy’s Geography: Wessex and the Regional Novel*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave

Virginia Woolf wrote about Hardy's characters – that “they live as individuals and they differ as individuals; but they also live as types and have a likeness as types”<sup>44</sup> – can be extended to the buildings featuring in his novels as well. Indeed works of architecture in the *Wessex Novels* are there to remind us that architecture, not unlike landscape, varies from locality to locality, and in this lies its uniqueness. Yet at the same time buildings are, together with other elements (like the characters and the plot), “metaphorical equivalents of the theme”<sup>45</sup> of each novel. And that the themes of the *Wessex Novels* bear universal significance cannot be denied, as Hardy himself implied in the 1912 ‘General Preface to the Novels and Poems’:

I considered that our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature found sufficient room for a large proportion of its action in an extent of their country not much larger than the half-dozen counties here reunited under the old name of Wessex, that the domestic emotions have throbbled in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe, and that, anyhow, there was quite enough human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purposes.<sup>46</sup>

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Macmillan, 2002. According to Pite, Wessex is made up of microcosms, each asserting its own independence and uniqueness but, at the same time, claiming universal validity (see *Ibidem*, Ch. 6 ).

<sup>44</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The Novels of Thomas Hardy’, in *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols., London, The Hogarth Press, 1968, Vol. I, pp. 256-66, p. 260.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Reed Andersen, ‘Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy’, *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 9, 3 (December 1954), pp. 192-208, p. 195.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘General Preface to the Novels and Poems’ [1912], in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* cit., pp. 44-50, p. 45.

**Part I**  
**Architecture and Space**

'If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air. In a house we all feel of the proper proportions. Everything is subordinated to us, fashioned for our use and our pleasure. Egotism itself, which is so necessary to a proper sense of human dignity, is entirely the result of indoor life.'

Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*

The most obvious category with which architecture is associated is space. All buildings share a common purpose: they protect human beings from nature, allowing them to inhabit a space which would otherwise be unfit to live in. The origins of architecture are indeed to be found in man's necessity to protect himself from rain, cold, wind and other atmospheric agents. However, it would be reductive to say that buildings have only the function of sheltering human beings and their goods. Not only do buildings cover a space, they also modify it, inevitably reflecting the builder's or the occupant's personality. In this perspective, buildings constitute a space alternative to the natural one. As the great scholar of the history of architecture Nikolaus Pevsner observed, "what distinguishes architecture from painting and sculpture is its spatial quality [...]. Thus the history of architecture is primarily a history of man shaping space."<sup>47</sup> Architecture subtracts space from nature and expands it for the benefit of human beings.

The main problem architecture has to face is represented by that very space left outside, i.e. "nature". "Nature" is whatever man has to face which existed before his settling in a certain place: the weather conditions, the vegetation, the fauna and the kind of soil. When building, men have to be aware of the type and strength of weather conditions and other natural elements, such as the growth of vegetation or the conformation of the ground. A spot can be hollow, and thus protected from the winds but subject to dampness; towns built on an elevation are certainly drier but more difficult to reach. If the place is subject to strong winds, constructions will have to be built so as to be less exposed; where space is limited, as on the top of hills or mountains, houses are usually taller, provided that the kind of soil is suitable. After assessing the disadvantages of a given place, man is obliged to build accordingly, but builders must take into consideration also the advantages that a certain environment offers and then envisage the best way of exploiting them. Indeed, the environment itself often provides the means, that is to say the materials and certain techniques, which allow men to build more resistant constructions. The fact that the resistance of a human artefact may take

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<sup>47</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1951, p. 19.

advantage of local building materials and of various stratagems suggested by local nature is significant, since it highlights the paradox of the relationship between architecture and environment. If nature is undoubtedly a threat to architecture, it is at the same time its most reliable ally because the environment, besides providing suitable materials and techniques, also offers a repertoire of forms and motifs which human beings might or might not adopt for their buildings. Men therefore turn to nature also to draw inspiration for decorations and other ways of adorning a building, since nature too seems to have sometimes its own sense of proportions and beauty. So even if nature is often associated with irregularity, chaos and formlessness, this is not always the case, as the setting of some of Hardy's novels makes clear. In Wessex there are indeed some instances of landscapes – such as the Isle of Slingers and Cornwall – characterised by regular geometrical shapes, to the point that nature sometimes appears as more “architectural” than man-made artefacts.

The fact that architecture is influenced by the environment also means that buildings can vary significantly from one region to another, or simply from one village to the adjoining one. Indeed, the setting of the *Wessex Novels*, though relatively small and apparently uniform, is actually extremely varied in many respects. Wessex contains surroundings very different from each other, from the stony peninsula of Portland in *The Well-Beloved* and the chalky uplands of *Tess* to the wild heath of *The Return of the Native* and the impenetrable woods of *The Woodlanders*. Sometimes the setting of a single novel too is varied, as in *Tess* or in *The Hand of Ethelberta*. In these novels the variety is due to the fact that the story takes place in different places, with their heroines always moving from one to another. In other novels the variety is present in a much subtler way, given that places not far from each other are very different and sometimes even opposed. Thanks to its great internal variety the setting of Hardy's novels, small and circumscribed (not too much, though) as it is, is the ideal place where the dynamics of the relationship between man and nature can be studied as embedded in the relation between architecture and environment.

In Hardy's fictional Wessex many reasons contribute to render the relationship between architecture (and, therefore, man) and nature a very complex one. As already suggested, nature obviously poses problems of a practical kind; it is man's chief enemy and it can be frightening, especially in the environmental conditions which are particularly hostile to human life because of their weather conditions, fauna or vegetation. In these places – Egdon Heath being the most telling example – nature needs to be constantly tamed and buildings require incessant repair. Yet vegetation can represent a threat even in places where nature,

being apparently easier to tame, seems rather to emphasise the beauty of buildings. Also in its milder version nature can indeed be detrimental to architecture from both a practical and an aesthetic point of view, since in Hardy's Wessex architectural practical problems are strictly intertwined with moral and aesthetic questions as well. For example, nature can sometimes make it difficult to evaluate a work of architecture *per se*, since vegetation can even obliterate the original aspect of a building. Yet this kind of nature, which we can define as "picturesque",<sup>48</sup> proves sometimes to be harmful to buildings and their occupants alike, though paradoxical this statement may appear at first sight. In his novels Hardy often lifts the veil from the "beauty" of picturesque architectural settings, revealing that they often hide unhealthy and uncomfortable lives, although in the *Wessex Novels* there are also cases where nature contributes at making the appearance of a building less disagreeable. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, for example, the monotonous aspect of the Unionhouse is mitigated by the ivy covering one of its gables.<sup>49</sup>

As reflected in Hardy's Wessex the relationship of men – and architecture – with nature could be defined as one of love and hate, and since in Hardy's novels many shades of man's relationship with nature are explored through the expressive medium of architecture, the perfect balance between buildings and environment is seldom reached, as one always tends to prevail over the other. The three chapters of the first part of this thesis are devoted to the analysis of this complex relationship, with the aim of understanding how architecture illustrates and questions the ways man relates to nature and how this relationship is in continuous redefinition. In the first chapter cases will be analysed in which the delicate and long-sought balance between buildings and space, indicative of an unproblematic approach to nature, is to be found in the *Wessex Novels*. The second will be devoted to the consequences of men's desire to release their imagination from its subjection to nature in order to build something completely original and new, while the third will be focused around the opposite situation, when the scales are tipped in favour of nature, that is to say when nature takes over architecture, from both a practical and an aesthetic point of view.

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<sup>48</sup> The term "picturesque" comes from the Italian word "pittoresco", which means "in the manner of a painter". According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term first appeared in English in 1703, and at the beginning it was used to describe sceneries which were considered as proper subjects for a painting. Gradually the word began to be used to refer also to landscape. On the evolution of the concept of the "picturesque", see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain 1760-1800*, Aldershot, Scolar, 1989.

<sup>49</sup> See Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* [1874], ed. Rosemarie Morgan and Shannon Russell, London, Penguin, 2000 (repr. 2003), Ch. XLI, p. 244. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Madding Crowd*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.



## Chapter One

### The Architecture of Nature and the Nature of Architecture

In the complex relationship between architecture and landscape, a situation where the opposing forces, that is to say men and nature, are in equilibrium is rather uncommon in Hardy's novels. One of the two agents usually tends to prevail over the other, sometimes with unexpected outcomes. However, a sort of peaceful cohabitation is indeed possible, even if Hardy seems to be rather sceptical about that possibility in the present time. Situations where buildings and nature concur to shape a harmonious landscape belong either to the past or to places where time seems to be of no consequence, as if history did not substantially affect them. Yet when that happens, architecture and the surrounding environment complete each other, forming an indissoluble whole. Actually, in Hardy's novels entire landscapes of that kind are exception, the most common case being that of single buildings which stand out because of their perfect harmony with the environment.

The two places in Wessex where architecture and nature complete each other are Cornwall, the setting of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and the "isle" of Portland, called by Hardy the Isle of Slingers, the setting of *The Well-Beloved*.<sup>50</sup> It is no coincidence that a peaceful cohabitation flourished in these two places, which share indeed many characteristics, as we will see. And it is no coincidence either that the two novels too are very similar in many respects, as their most eminent admirer, Marcel Proust, observed. In *La Prisonnière*, the protagonist points out to Albertine "le parallélisme entre *la Bien-Aimée* où l'homme aime trois femmes, *les Yeux bleus* où la femme aime trois hommes, etc., et enfin tous ces romans superposables les uns aux autres, comme les maisons verticalement entassées en hauteur sur le sol pierreux de l'île."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Significant examples of single buildings in harmonious relationship with the landscape in the *Wessex Novels* are the great barn (see Chapter Four of this thesis), the maltster's inn and Oak's hut in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and Geoffrey Day's cottage in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. In Cornwall and in the Isle of Slingers, though, architecture and landscape not only complete each other, but they seem to be made of the same substance.

<sup>51</sup> Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*, in Id., *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Vol. III, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, p. 377. Hardy himself was aware that the idea of the "transmigration of the ideal beloved one, who only exists in the lover, from material woman to material woman" had fascinated also Proust (*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 303, and see also *Ibidem*, pp. 466-7). Many critics discussed the affinity between Hardy and Proust. The first was Joseph Hillis Miller (see *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1970, in particular pp. 168, 171-2 and 205-7 and also, by the same author, 'Introduction' to Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved* [1897], *The New Wessex Edition of the Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Philip Nicholas Furbank, 14 vols., London, Macmillan, 1974-5, Vol. 13, pp. 11-21, p. 15 and

Hardy classified both novels as ‘Romances and Fantasies’ for their rather sensational plots, where the use of parallelisms is pushed to extremes, and, as far as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is concerned, for “its visionary nature”,<sup>52</sup> though this definition could also be applied to *The Well-Beloved*, whose protagonist is, in Hardy’s words, a “visionary artist” following “a fantasy”.<sup>53</sup> The two protagonists too – Stephen Smith and Jocelyn Pierston – have often been associated with the author himself, given that the first is, as Hardy, an assistant architect, while the latter is confronted with questions of aesthetic nature – questions Hardy himself may have faced during his artistic career. Thus in Hardy’s last novel (given that the 1897 version of the novel is by now considered as an almost distinct work from *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, serialised in 1892)<sup>54</sup> many similarities to one of his earlier novels are to be found.<sup>55</sup> This is only apparently surprising though, given that Proust himself had observed, not long before the passage quoted above, that “les grands littérateurs n’ont jamais fait qu’une seule œuvre”.<sup>56</sup>

It is not only Proust’s famous remark which makes a comparison between *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Well-Beloved* compelling. Their settings share indeed many characteristics: both the Isle of Slings and the coastal uplands near West Endelstow are rocky places, where vegetation is scant if not completely absent. This is due to their climate, characterised by strong winds and gales, and probably to the kind of soil. As a consequence, these places appear as a *tabula rasa*, where nothing grows except for some bushes, the only kind of plants which “would stand in the teeth of the salt wind”.<sup>57</sup> The landscapes of both the Isle of Slings and of the coastal part of Cornwall are essential, primitive, minimalistic. They are made up of three basic natural elements – the sea, the rocks and the sky – as the earth in its infancy. Finally, they are both remote lands, entertaining few relations with the mainland. Even if the Isle of Slings is linked to the mainland through a long strip of pebbles called Chesil Beach, it is so isolated that its inhabitants have different traditions, intermarriages are nearly the rule,

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*Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982, pp. 151-2 and 172-3), followed by Enrica Villari (see ‘Il vizio moderno dell’irrequietezza’. *Saggio sui romanzi di Thomas Hardy*, Bari, Adriatica, 1990, Ch. IV) and Carlo Lauro (see *Proust e la cultura anglosassone*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1995, in particular pp. 107-21).

<sup>52</sup> *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Patricia Ingham, ‘Introduction’ to Thomas Hardy, *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* [1892] and *The Well-Beloved* [1897], ed. Patricia Ingham, London, Penguin, 1997, pp. xvii-xxxiii and, by the same author, ‘Provisional Narratives: Hardy’s Final Trilogy’, in Lance St. John Butler (ed.), *Alternative Hardy*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989, pp. 49-73.

<sup>55</sup> See J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye* cit., p. 224.

<sup>56</sup> Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière* cit., p. 376.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved* cit., Part III, Ch. I, p. 287. Further references to this edition of *The Well-Beloved* (abbreviated *Well-Beloved*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

and their accent too is peculiar. New fashions and ideas penetrate at a slower pace there than in the rest of Wessex, which is itself a step behind the rest of England. As for Cornwall, its isolation is due to the fact that it is the furthest province in the South West of England, projecting into the Atlantic. In some maps of Wessex, Cornwall is indeed denominated ‘Off-Wessex’, as if to underline its remoteness and its peripheral position in comparison with the other provinces. The journey Stephen Smith has to embark on to reach it in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a long one, taking many hours and involving different means of transport, not unlike the journey Hardy himself had to undertake in 1870 to reach St Juliot, where he first met his future wife. Cornwall, like Portland, has not been tainted by modernity, and the spontaneity of its inhabitants is set in contrast with the artificiality of London life, a contrast epitomised in Ch. XIV of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where Mrs Swancourt explains that in London one can learn the language of the “‘illegitimate sister’” of nature, that is to say “‘artificiality’”.<sup>58</sup> It is no wonder, then, that architecture too is peculiar in the Isle of Slingers and in Cornwall, since their remoteness has kept external influences out.

In *The Well-Beloved* the Isle of Slingers, in Beatty’s words, “provides the best example in the Wessex novels of regional architecture being entirely determined by local conditions.”<sup>59</sup> In this peninsula buildings are as elementary and primitive as the landscape itself. Here it is possible to form an idea of what architecture might have been like in its early stages, when it was still indistinguishable from the surrounding environment and when it was not considered as an art by human beings. In the Isle of Slingers not only is it difficult to distinguish buildings from the landscape, but it is also useless. Architecture and environment are made of one substance, the so-called Portland stone which has been quarried for centuries. As a consequence, when speaking of the island, the narrator describes buildings and natural objects together because the two are always intertwined.

Descriptions of the island (and, therefore, of some of its buildings or villages) recur with a certain insistence in the course of the novel. Pierston’s returns to his native place coincide with his encounters with the three Avices, and each time he goes back to Portland the island is described in order to emphasise its apparent immobility throughout the decades. Twenty years separate each of Jocelyn’s three returns from the following one, a considerable lapse of time if compared to a human life; indeed, although Pierston grows old very slowly, time leaves some

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* [1873], ed. Alan Manford, with an ‘Introduction’ by Tim Dolin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, Ch. XIV, p. 130. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Pair of Blue Eyes*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

<sup>59</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 389.

irreversible marks on his body. The island, on the contrary, is apparently always the same; its villages never expand, due to the limited space suitable for building, and cottages continue to be built in the same style. Each time Pierston returns to his native place, we find again the same landmarks – the Beal, the Red King’s Castle, the Pebble-bank, Sylvania Castle, Avice’s cottage, etc. – showing no changes, apart from slight improvements or deteriorations. Buildings are sometimes owned by different people in the course of the novel but, since all the islanders are related to each other, this is not perceived as a great change, unlike what happens in other novels by Hardy. For example, when the sixty-year-old Jocelyn goes back to Portland and finds out that Avice the Second lives in the house which had been his own home, he thinks the accident, added to the fact that she too is a Pierston, has brought them even closer (see *Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. I, p. 287). Moreover, in the 1912 ‘Preface’ to the novel, Hardy explained that a custom of the island consisted in transactions of houses “carried out and covenanted [...] in the parish church, in the face of the congregation” (*Well-Beloved*, 1912 ‘Preface’, p. 173), as if to underline that buildings somehow belong to the entire community of the Isle.

In the same ‘Preface’, Hardy also pointed out that though such a place could be the ideal retreat for people of genius, there are instead no visitors. Hardy does not tell why explicitly, but we can infer some reasons in the course of the novel. The first is that Portland is the extreme point of South Wessex, a region which was cut out from the rest of the country by the advent of the railway, which did not reach as far as there; secondly, the weather can be uncommonly harsh, as when Marcia and Jocelyn meet along the Pebble-bank. Finally, the island seems suitable for life to no one except the natives. In the 1897 version of the novel, Hardy called the peninsula ‘Isle of Slingers’, with reference to the ability of its inhabitants to defend themselves by throwing stones. This initial piece of information about the history of the island, added to the allusions to the frequency of intermarriages,<sup>60</sup> tells much about the nature of its inhabitants. Just as only some specific kinds of plants are able to bear the climate of the peninsula, so only the natives are suitable for life there. Indeed all the natives who try to leave the Isle of Slingers – Avice the Second and, maybe, also Avice the Third, Marcia and, of course, Pierston – are all forced to come back sooner or later. In addition, Pierston cannot but fall in love with women who are natives from the island, as if attracted by their

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<sup>60</sup> Yvonne Bezručka points out that “[t]he fact that we are here concerned with a *microcosm* (a region) is also emphasized by the reference to the intermarriages between its inhabitants, to the small number (six or seven) of families living here, and by the family ties between Jocelyn and his ideal women.” (Yvonne Bezručka, ‘*The Well-Beloved: Thomas Hardy’s Manifesto of “Regional Aesthetics”*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36, 1 (2008), pp. 227-45, p. 231).

common peripheral origin. Even if the reference to the frequent intermarriages casts a shadow on the island and its future, since consanguineous unions are deemed to be detrimental to small communities, the tendency of the inhabitants to marry each other seems to be so deeply rooted that nothing can be done to prevent it. Indeed Avice the First marries her own cousin and her daughter marries Isaac Pierston, who is in all probability a relative of both Jocelyn and herself. Finally, Avice the Third elopes with Henri Leverre, whose step-mother is Marcia Bencomb, another islander. In this case there is no blood-tie between the two lovers, but the fact of being somehow both connected with the island seems to be no coincidence. So the island acts as a magnet on its inhabitants in two ways, since it attracts them to their place of origin and, at the same time, it makes the islanders attract each other.

Therefore the island is almost like another character in the novel, endowed with its own power to influence the plot, especially if we compare it with the other setting of the story, i.e. London. Indeed Pierston's years in London are only vaguely sketched; what happens to him between his elopement with Marcia and his encounter with Avice the Second, and between her marriage with Isaac and his own meeting with Avice the Third is a matter of conjecture: two ellipses of twenty years each delete from the novel most of London, together with its way of life and its inhabitants. This does not mean, however, that London is not present in the novel, but it is given by far less prominence than the Isle of Slingers comparatively, considering the number of years the protagonist spends in the capital city. Unlike *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where Hardy's aim to stress the contrast between the simplicity of countryside people and the artificiality of London society is clearly visible, here London is rather left undescribed.<sup>61</sup>

As a consequence, the setting of the novel is dominated by the Isle of Slingers, which haunts Jocelyn's mind even while he lives in London. In the 1897 version of the novel, the island is given even more prominence through references to its history and to the civilisations which followed each other over the centuries. Moreover, the idea that the personality of Pierston, defined by Hardy as a "fantast", a dreamer, in the 'Preface' (*Well-Beloved*, 1912 'Preface', p. 173), is thus shaped because of the influence of the island was emphasised in the volume edition in order to establish a closer link between people and their environment. Only the Isle of Slingers can generate "a type of personage" like Jocelyn, "a native of natives" (*Well-Beloved*, 1912 'Preface', p. 173) because he is, like Avice Caro, "local to the bone" (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. II, p. 187), despite his education and his London popularity as a

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<sup>61</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 389-90.

sculptor. The whole singular plot of the novel seems to underline that people like Jocelyn cannot live outside the island because of their very peculiarity; no one could understand them outside the island.

In the 1897 version of the novel, however, not only did Hardy try to make the link between the peninsula and the natives more explicit, but he also gave more prominence to the architecture of the Isle of Slingers. While London remained only vaguely portrayed, descriptions of buildings in the island were extended and references to its architecture added. For example, in Ch. IX of the second part of the novel the history of the local church is more detailed and the reference to its proximity to a pagan temple is entirely new (see *Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, p. 261), but the most striking addition concerns the ending, where Pierston has the old Elizabethan cottages pulled down because they are damp (see *Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VIII, p. 336). The emphasis on the relationship between the peninsula and its inhabitants, together with a more detailed depiction of its architecture, gives birth to a narrative where people, landscape and buildings form an indissoluble whole.

Indeed in this microcosm architecture is not unlike people, since the island “generates” a kind of architecture which cannot be found or reproduced elsewhere. Even if every day tons of Portland stone leave the island for London, in the capital buildings do not possess the same “personality” as buildings on the island. The reason is that on Portland buildings grow from the island itself, they are made of the same substance and all that men have to do is to rearrange the material the island offers. When a construction decays, its stones are given back to nature and become available again for other human artefacts. This is the case of the Red King’s Castle and the Hope churchyard. The first, mentioned several times in the course of the novel, is one of the crucial landmarks of the island. The castle, overhanging a cliff, is in a ruinous state and the fallen blocks have rolled down the precipice, back again to their natural location. On these blocks generations of lovers have already written their names (Jocelyn and Avice Caro, then Avice the Second and Isaac), and the impression that the blocks have returned to the state of mere rocks – though slightly less anonymous because bearing human marks – is explicitly confirmed in the third part, when Jocelyn Pierston helps Avice the Third, whose foot is symbolically trapped in what is called “a crevice of the rock” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. II, p. 293), even if it was once presumably a block belonging to the castle. As for the Hope churchyard (very important in the novel as well, being the place where Pierston first kisses Avice the First), the graveyard “lay in a ravine formed by a landslip ages ago”, while

its respective church “had slipped down with the rest of the cliff, and had long been a ruin” (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. II, p. 186).

Finally, a remark at the beginning of the third part confirms the general impression that ruined elements of decayed buildings seem to have gone back to their original natural state in the stony environment of the island. Pierston is in Rome, whose atmosphere reminds him of his native place: “Perhaps it was that in each case the eye was mostly resting on stone – that the quarries of ruins in the Eternal City reminded him of the quarries of maiden rock at home” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. I, p. 284). Rome, the symbol of civilisation and the city *par excellence*, is associated by Jocelyn with Portland, a peninsula where many civilisations, the Romans included, have settled but where nature predominates everywhere. This entirely subjective association is founded on the circumstance that – despite the obvious and rather sensational differences – even Rome’s solemn ruins are nothing but stones, after all. In this perspective Rome and its archaeological sites are not dissimilar from the quarries of the Wessex peninsula. There is a difference, though, since stones in Rome once belonged to important buildings, while on Portland “maiden rock” is quarried to be shipped or to build cottages. Yet Pierston is unable to grasp the difference because of his tendency to idealise not only female beauty, but also places. His native place acquires dignity in his eyes thanks to its resemblance with Rome, which is, together with Greece, the heart of classicism. While the narrator insists on the peculiarities of the architecture of the island, the protagonist continues to look at his native place and local architecture through the filter of idealism, as we will see in the next chapter.<sup>62</sup>

So everything, even the process of decay, is peculiar in the island. There is a sense in which the process transforming building materials into natural objects again when a human artefact decays is easier and more rapid in the island than elsewhere. Hence the narrator does not seem to be sorry about the fate of the buildings in the peninsula, where gales and salt winds accelerate the process of decay, given that in the Isle of Slingers architecture and nature are not so different from each other, being made of the same common element, i.e. rock. Just as people from outside are immediately recognised as “kimberlins” by the natives and just as foreign customs do not take root in the island, so foreign building materials are unknown to the inhabitants. Everything is made of stone, so that the difference between a building and the environment is sometimes imperceptible. At the beginning of the 1897 ‘Preface’ to the novel,

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<sup>62</sup> See Joseph Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* cit., pp. 12-13. According to Hillis Miller, both characters and narrators in Hardy’s novels tend to “trace likes in unlikes”, while Hardy believed that in nature every individual, being and object is unique (*ivi*).

Hardy referred to the setting of the story as a “peninsula carved by Time out of a single stone” (*Well-Beloved*, 1897 ‘Preface’, p. 171) and in the first chapter<sup>63</sup> the island thus appears to Jocelyn, who has been absent from the peninsula for four years:

The towering rock, the houses above houses, one man’s doorstep rising behind his neighbour’s chimney, the gardens hung up by one edge to the sky, the vegetables growing on apparently almost vertical planes, the unity of the whole island as a solid and single block of limestone four miles long, were no longer familiar and commonplace ideas. (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. I, p. 179)

In this frequently quoted description, three important elements are underlined. The first is the vertical appearance of both island and village. The houses are almost piled up on top of each other because the island is steep; the village has therefore assumed the same shape as the island, the “towering rock”. Secondly, buildings and the rock form a “solid and single block of limestone”. The impression of a homogeneous whole is reinforced soon after, when the narrator says that “all now stood dazzlingly unique and white against the tainted sea” (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. I, p. 179). Thirdly, we are indirectly informed that for the natives this scene, where houses, made of the same substance as the island, cling to the rock, is a “commonplace” one. In other words, they know no other way of building and for them such unity of architecture and environment is the rule. Conversely, Pierston is impressed by the vision of his native place because he is no longer used to it, having lived in London for years. This means that, even if every day blocks of Portland stone reach London wharves, the perfect harmony on the island between man-made artefacts and natural objects cannot be reproduced elsewhere. In the 1897 version of the novel there is a sentence which was not there in 1892. In the serial version, Pierston descended from the Red King’s Castle to the beach below with the aim of drowning himself; in 1897 Avice the Third and Henri Leverre go the same way to escape, but the beach is defined as “once an active wharf, whence many a fine public building had sailed – including Saint Paul’s Cathedral” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VI, p. 322). This is a striking comment, and not only because it associates this rather savage peninsula to London. It is indeed difficult to imagine anything in common between St. Paul’s Cathedral and Portland, a place which is the “last local stronghold of the pagan divinities, where pagan customs lingered yet” and where “Christianity had established itself precariously at best” (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. II, p. 186). The comment is striking above all

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<sup>63</sup> Here it is important to remember that *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, the 1892 version of the novel, does not begin with Pierston’s return to his native place, but with Pierston burning bundles of love-letters in his room in London, and that Jocelyn’s return takes place only in Ch. II in 1892. By beginning the novel with Pierston’s return, the island and its peculiarity are given more prominence, while London slides in the background.



because of something which, again, has to do with the characteristic architecture of the island. The kind of architecture represented by St. Paul's Cathedral, on the one hand, and local architecture, on the other hand, are poles apart. Neo-classical St. Paul is the symbol of ideal, canonical beauty, or, in Bezručka's words, "dictatorial perfection",<sup>64</sup> in opposition to regional beauty, that is to say a kind of beauty peculiar and open to imperfections. Indeed, the architecture of the island too is, like Avice Caro, "local to the bone", and its buildings are far from being ideal. With their imperfections and peculiarities, they are as many specimens undermining the validity of canonical art.<sup>65</sup>

In the novel canonical art coincides with both the Greek ideal pursued by Jocelyn in his statues and with the neo-classical architecture, of which St. Paul's Cathedral is representative, and there is a sense in which London architecture in general is just as lifeless and anonymous as Pierston's statues if compared to local buildings on the island. Local architecture is by definition peculiar and unique, it defies any canon and it is not circumscribed by a set of rules. The architecture of the island is unique and vital because men exploit the substance the island is made of, and draw inspiration from it.

The tie uniting architecture and landscape is one of the *leitmotifs* of the novel. At the very beginning of it, Avice's cottage is thus described: "Like the island it was all of stone, not only in walls but in window-frames, roof, chimneys, fence, stile, pig-sty and stable, almost door" (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. I, p. 180). Avice's cottage is representative of all the human artefacts on the island. The only building material is indeed the Portland stone, which is used also for those parts of a building which are usually made of wood, like the fences. Indeed, given that in the island only some evergreen shrubs can stand the salt gales (the only trees being those of the plantation of elms surrounding Sylvania Castle), the natives have tried to make the most of stone. This makes the architecture of the peninsula peculiar, but at the same time resistant. Again, speaking of Avice's cottage, the narrator observes that "with its quaint and massive stone features of two or three centuries' antiquity, [it] was capable even now of longer resistance to the rasp of Time than ordinary new erections" (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IV, p. 236).

Here is the proof that even in a hostile place like the Isle of Slingers, nature provides man with the means of building resistant artefacts. All that human beings have to do is to use the

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<sup>64</sup> Yvonne Bezručka, *The Well-Beloved* cit., p. 229.

<sup>65</sup> See *Ibidem*, in particular pp. 230-7. In her essay, analysing Pierston's renunciation of canonical beauty in favour of "regional aesthetics", Bezručka does not deal with architecture, but I think that the opposition between characteristic, regional beauty and idealised beauty at the core of the novel can possibly be further investigated through the theme of architecture.

typical materials of the place and copy the forms of nature. Indeed on Portland buildings are indistinguishable from the rocky ground they are built on not only because they are “framed from mullions to chimney-top like the isle itself, of stone” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. III, p. 231), but also because nature itself is somehow “architectural”. In the novel the natural landscape too is often described in architectural terms. For instance, in the first description of the island, the sun flashes “on infinitely stratified walls of oolite” (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. I, p. 179)<sup>66</sup> and the cliff forming the background of the beach where Avice the Third and Henri embark is defined as a “natural wall of stone” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VI, p. 322).<sup>67</sup> Yet the most telling example of the unity of architecture and nature is the Street of Wells, the main village of the island: “behind the houses forming the propylæa of the rock rose the massive forehead of the Isle – crested at this part with its enormous ramparts as with a mural crown” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, p. 255). The highest point of the island is protected by natural “ramparts”, a military term which reminds us of the warlike character of its inhabitants, the “Slingers”. Moreover, the houses, together with the rocky summit of the island at the back, form a sort of Acropolis. Man-made artefacts, i.e. houses, are a mere “propylæa” to the “temple”, that is to say the rock, characterised by an “almost vertical face” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, p. 255). The island itself, then, is a sort of pagan temple, so it is no wonder that Christianity is unable to assert itself. Now, the fact that the Street of Wells is defined as a “propylæa”, which reminds us of Greek architecture, might be interpreted in two ways. The first is that we are looking at the summit of the island through Pierston’s idealising eyes. If so, the comparison with classical architecture means that the protagonist continues to ignore the peculiarities of local architecture, looking at it through the filter of Greek art. Yet another explanation could be that forms of classical architecture are not inappropriate after all to the Isle of Slingers, where pagan traditions are still alive, as opposed to the neo-classicism of St. Paul’s Cathedral which is, instead, rather at odds with the spirit of Christianity.

In any case, the architecture of the island, though primitive and built with just one material, is impressive. By equating the Street of Wells rising from the rock to the monumental

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<sup>66</sup> In this and in the following quotations from *The Well-Beloved* the emphases are mine.

<sup>67</sup> In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Stonehenge is described in similar terms. Before realising that they are at Stonehenge, Tess and Angel think they have entered a roofless building. In the dark the monoliths appear to them as walls, then as pillars and, finally, as stones (see Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* [1891], ed. Tim Dolin, with an ‘Introduction’ by Margaret R. Higgonet, London, Penguin, 1998 (repr. 2003), Ch. LVIII, pp. 392-3. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Tess*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text). In *The Well-Beloved* Hardy had again recourse to the metaphor of architecture to characterise the natural landscape in order to convey the idea that human artefacts and nature are sometimes interchangeable.

gateway to the Acropolis at Athens, the narrator claims the superiority of regional architecture, built with local materials and reproducing the forms of nature, over canonised architecture, constructed with foreign materials and striving to conform to an abstract ideal of beauty. The architecture of the Isle of Slingers has its own peculiarity and uniqueness, which cannot be reproduced in London or elsewhere by just shipping there blocks of stone. Thus the architectural theme replicates and amplifies one of the issues at the core of the novel, that is to say the influence exerted by the island on its inhabitants, who share a set of characteristics making them different from the “kimberlins”. Jocelyn explains to his friend Somers, who is unable to understand his infatuation with Avice the Second, that he ““know[s] the perfect and pure *quarry* she was dug from”” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, pp. 257-8). Conversely, the island is a sort of human being endowed with its own personality, as the twenty-year-old Pierston realises: “He stretched out his hand upon the rock beside him. It felt warm. That was the island’s personal temperature when in its afternoon sleep as now” (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. I, p. 180).

People and the peninsula form a whole, and this unity of man and nature is made visible by architecture. In the Isle of Slingers the relationship between man and environment seems to be unproblematic and spontaneous because, although men certainly feel threatened by nature, they do not wish to oppose nature by building with different materials. Notwithstanding this, progress cannot be kept outside; new attitudes towards nature and a different way of building have already reached the peninsula, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Before analysing the consequences of man’s desire to release his imagination from the “yoke” of nature, I would like to focus on the other place in Wessex (actually, ‘Off-Wessex’) whose architecture is indicative of an unproblematic relation between human beings and environment, i.e. the coastal part of Cornwall as represented in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the novel where the attraction between architecture and nature is most evident. Indeed, in this part of Wessex nature itself *is* architecture. To be more precise, in Cornwall there is a sort of mutual interchange (or even confusion, at times) between landscape and architecture. Crags and hills are looked at and described in architectural terms, while the church around which the novel turns – West Endelstow – is provided a natural counterpart in the Cliff without a Name.

As many critics have pointed out,<sup>68</sup> *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is an indefinable novel, being neither a comedy nor a tragedy or a tragicomedy. Its setting too is difficult to define, given

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* cit., Ch. 3 (in particular pp. 34-5) and Tim Dolin, ‘Introduction’ to Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* cit., pp. xi-xxxviii (in particular pp. xxviii-xxxviii).

that the Cornish landscape in the vicinity of the coast can hardly be defined as “natural”, at least as far as its representation in the novel is concerned. The uplands near Endelstow Rectory are dominated by nature only insofar as human settlements are few and scattered on a rather wide tract of land. The general impression we gather from the novel of this part of Cornwall is that of a geometrical, almost abstract, landscape, where distinct lines divide broad surfaces uniform in colour. Only the vast uninhabited expanse of green where human dramas unfold interposes between sky and ocean, their nuances of blue or grey being otherwise undistinguishable on the horizon.

The most evident consequence of a landscape thus shaped by strong winds and gales is that both human beings and human artefacts are made immediately visible because they interrupt the straight line dividing the green of the Vallency Valley and its surroundings from the deep blue or grey of the sky. Secondly, the silhouettes corresponding to human bodies or human constructions – usually either colourful (especially Elfride’s dresses) or black (as far as Endelstow church and other buildings are concerned) – introduce a discordant element on the large uniform fields of colour. The first instance where the geometrical and rarefied character of the Cornish landscape is made explicit coincides also with the first description of West Endelstow by day, at the beginning of chapter IV. Stephen Smith arrived at Endelstow Rectory on the previous evening, when an idea of the loneliness and inhospitality of the land was conveyed by such remarks as “scarcely a solitary house or man had been visible along the dreary distance of open country they [Stephen and the cart driver] were traversing” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. II, p. 10). The following day the character of the landscape thus appears to Stephen Smith:

From the window of his room he could see, first, two bold escarpments sloping down together like the letter V. Towards the bottom, like liquid in a funnel, appeared the sea, grey and small. On the slant of one hill, of rather greater altitude than its neighbour, stood the church which was to be the scene of his operations. The lonely edifice was black and bare, cutting up into the sky from the profile of the hill. It had a square mouldering tower, owning neither battlement nor pinnacle, and seemed a monolithic termination, of one substance with the ridge, rather than a structure raised thereon. (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 23)

The function of this description in the novel can be compared to that of the overture of an opera, since it contains, condensed and just hinted at, some of the themes which will become *leitmotifs* by the end of the novel through that complex system of repetitions and parallelisms

noticed by Proust and analysed by Michael Millgate.<sup>69</sup> First of all, the three fundamental natural elements composing the landscape of the novel are all present: the steep and well-defined hills, the sea, only apparently “small”, and the sky. Yet this landscape would be incomplete without the form of the church, the only object signalling the presence of human beings. However, despite its being black, and hence contrasting with the colours of the natural elements, the church appears just as another natural object, “of one substance with the ridge”. West Endelstow is described as a “monolithic termination”, a definition foreshadowing the other monolithic terminations which will play an important role in the plot, that is to say the cliffs, and in particular the Cliff without a Name.

The meaning of this subjective (since the point of view is Stephen’s) landscape painting – one of Hardy’s many framed pictures<sup>70</sup> – is that regularity, straight lines and geometrical compositions are typical not only of architecture, but also of nature, usually associated with irregularity and disorder. Therefore the function of this description, placed almost at the beginning of the novel, is to establish a connection between the Cornish environment and local architecture, and the impression we gather is that nature and architecture stand in perfect accord with each other. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the identification between nature and architecture is pushed to extremes and takes an unexpected turn. Between the Cornish landscape and West Endelstow, it is almost impossible to establish which of the two is man-made, but while elsewhere in Hardy’s novels this is due to the fact that buildings look like natural objects, here it is nature that resembles man-made constructions. Indeed those attributes which are usually associated with human artefacts characterise here the landscape of this portion of Cornwall. What Smith sees is a symmetrical view, composed of geometrical shapes arranged in a well-proportioned whole, as if an architect had planned it, and this is the point around which the whole description (and other passages further on in the novel too) turns. Here we must remember that Stephen is actually an architect (although at this stage the reader does not know that), and as a consequence what he sees is shaped by his knowledge of architecture. And since here we are enabled to see with Stephen’s eyes, we are actually looking at the Cornish landscape with the eyes of an architect.

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<sup>69</sup> See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, London, Bodley Head, 1971, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> On the nature and significance of the numerous framed scenes and images in Hardy’s novels, see Sheila Berger, *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process*, New York, New York University Press, 1990, Ch. 2. For a detailed analysis of pictures framed by windows in Hardy’s work, see Jacqueline Hooi, ‘The Window-Frame as Metaphor in Thomas Hardy’s Fiction and Poetry’, *Trivium* 22, 2 (1987), pp. 89-102 and JoAnna Stephens Mink, ‘Fenestration as Narrative Technique in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*’, *Thomas Hardy Journal* 28 (2011), pp. 68-80.

The passage where the identification between landscape and architecture becomes explicit is the famous cliff-hanging scene. Here the correspondence between the cliffs, in particular of the Cliff without a Name, and architecture is underlined by the narrator, who borrows terms from architecture to describe the imposing natural element. The cliff is defined as a “terrible natural façade”, a “remarkable rampart”, and its “sheer perpendicularity” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 195) is clearly its main feature.<sup>71</sup> In a passage in Ch. XXII the cliff appears to Knight facing death as an enormous turret:

From the fact that the cliff formed the inner face of the segment of a hollow cylinder, having the sky for a top and the sea for a bottom, which enclosed the bay to the extent of nearly a semicircle, he could see the vertical face curving round on each side of him. He looked far down the façade, and realized more thoroughly how it threatened him. Grimness was in every feature, and to its very bowels the inimical shape was desolation. (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXII, pp. 199-200).

As in the first description of St. Agnes’s church and its surroundings, the geometrical aspects of nature are emphasised. The interior of the cliff is as perfect a cylinder as a man-made tower, and the narrator employs again the word “façade” to make the association between the cliff and a turret easier. It is significant that the cliff resembles precisely a tower, given that the restoration of another tower is the drive of the plot. Besides, the identification of the Cliff without a Name with the man-made tower of St. Agnes is carried out in the plot itself. One of the many parallelisms in the novel is represented by the two “falling” episodes – Elfride’s and Knight’s. Elfride underestimates the danger of walking upon the parapet of the tower, while Knight undervalues the force of the winds on the crags. Moreover, after being saved by Knight, Elfride foresees the cliff-hanging scene. She promises she will not walk on the parapet of the tower again just because ““it will be pulled down soon”” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XVIII, p. 155), so it is natural to hear her say: ““This is the moment I anticipated when on the tower. I thought it would come!”” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 196).

The identification between the cliffs and the architectural style of this part of England, however, is not limited to their general outlines. If it is true that the setting of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is mostly geometrical, a typical feature of architecture, it is also true that the Cornish landscape is actually irregular and that this same irregularity characterises local architecture

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<sup>71</sup> On the problem of identifying the real cliff which inspired Hardy for the Cliff without a Name, see, in particular, Denys Kay-Robinson, *The Landscape of Thomas Hardy*, Exeter, Webb & Bower, 1984, pp. 220-1 and Lawrence Jones, ‘Thomas Hardy and the Cliff without a Name’, in *Geography and Literature. A Meeting of the Disciplines*, ed. William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley, Syracuse, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1987, pp. 168-84, pp. 170-1.

as well. As said above, for Hardy the peculiar trait of the local style of Gothic art consists in its “wild and tragic features” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, 1895 ‘Preface’, p. 3). For him, the same “barbarous”, “clumsy”, “rough” style of the church deplored by Elfride’s father (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXXI, p. 291) are the features which make local architecture great. The clumsiness and roughness of Gothic art is due in particular to its irregular forms, a feature Hardy much appreciated. In a letter to a Dorset landowner, Hardy wrote that “irregularity is the genius of Gothic architecture”.<sup>72</sup> Ruskin had gone even further in *The Stones of Venice*. According to him, the very imperfection of Gothic architecture is the proof that medieval masons were free to express their own personality and to give vent to their creativeness in the work of art. This is the way Ruskin invites us to look at a Gothic cathedral:

...go forth again to gaze upon the old cathedral front, where you have smiled so often at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors: examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure...<sup>73</sup>

Now, the architecture of this part of Cornwall well illustrates the Ruskinian idea that irregularity in architecture is of great value.<sup>74</sup> Indeed both West Endelstow and the cliffs appear in a different way depending on the distance from which they are observed. When seen from afar, the church appears as a “monolithic termination” and the sea and the land are two vast expanses of uniform colour. Yet the real nature of man-made constructions and their natural counterparts, i.e. the cliffs, is fully revealed only when seen in detail. That the main feature of West Endelstow, an early Gothic church, is irregularity is proved by the fact that while Stephen Smith is surveying and measuring the tower, Elfride thinks she could “set herself to learn the principles of practical mensuration as applied to irregular buildings” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 28). Another telling instance is represented by the stone wall running along the track leading from the rectory to St. Agnes’s church. The surface of the wall gleams with “fragments of quartz and blood-red marbles, apparently of inestimable value, in their setting of brown alluvium” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 26). Here the distinction between

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Letter to Jane Ashley’, 2 Dec. 1890, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* cit., Vol. VII, p. 115.

<sup>73</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 10, pp. 193-4.

<sup>74</sup> Ruskin’s aesthetics of irregularity influenced not only Hardy the architect, but also Hardy the poet. On this point, see Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* [1972], London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 14-5; Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception*, London, Macmillan, 1975, p. 107; Linda Shires, ‘Hardy and Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Poetics’, in Phillip Mallett (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Thomas Hardy Studies*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 255-78, pp. 274-5, and John Powell Ward, ‘Hardy’s Aesthetics and Twentieth-Century Poetry’, in *Ibidem*, pp. 279-302, in particular pp. 280-1.

human structures and rocks disappears. Stones composed of rather valuable elements have been used to build an ordinary fence. The stones have simply been relocated after having been moved from their original place, presumably very close by, to give birth to a man-made artefact indistinguishable from a natural formation because of its very irregularity and non-homogeneity. The wall is not devoid of a certain beauty, which is due more to the work of nature rather than to men's artistry. On the other hand, the hill backing the Cliff without a Name is paradoxically more homogeneous than the man-made wall: "The composition of the huge hill was revealed to its backbone and marrow here at its rent extremity. It consisted of a vast stratification of blackish-grey slate, unvaried in its whole height by a single change of shade" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 192). This is the very cliff which impresses Elfride to the point that she exclaims she cannot look at it. She explains her reaction by saying that the cliff "has a horrid personality" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 193). Even if the cliff has no name, the narrator himself believes that it has a strong personality; in other words, it has its own individuality:

It is with cliffs and mountains as with persons; they have what is called a presence, which is not necessarily proportionate to their actual bulk. A little cliff will impress you powerfully; a great one not at all. It depends, as with man, upon the countenance of the cliff. (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 192)

It can be inferred, therefore, that the cliff impresses Elfride because it is too human. Looking at it, one is put face to face not only with nature's power and its indifference to the fates of men, but also with an aspect usually ignored, that is to say with nature's intelligence. The natural forces which generated the Cliff without a Name seem to have had a plan in "mind". In other words, the cliff frightens Elfride because it is similar to a human construction, but of inhuman dimensions. Her attitude is contrasted by Knight's, the rational intellectual, who explains how the currents of air move, but soon after falls victim of the cliff and of his own rationality. When he finds himself face to face with the surface of the cliff, he too is obliged to acknowledge that it is true that the cliff is a sort of human being, that it has teeth ("...a bracket of quartz rock, standing out like a tooth from the verge of the precipice", *Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 194) and eyes ("It [the trilobite] was a creature with eyes", *Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXII, p. 200). Yet, there is another sense in which the cliff is human, and this is due, again, to its astonishing "ability" to mimic Gothic architecture. The surface of the cliff, so geometrical and uniform from afar, turns irregular when observed from close up. More than that, it appears as more Gothic than Gothic itself. When Knight is left alone with



the cliff, he is obliged to focus on issues and details he had never noticed before, like the prospect of death and his own life. He is also forced to study nature, and geology in particular, 'in the field', so to speak. This is how the personality of the cliff suddenly discloses itself to his eyes: "Haggard cliffs, of very ugly altitude, are as common as sea-fowl along the line of coast between Exmoor and Land's End; but this outflanked and encompassed specimen was the ugliest of them all" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXII, p. 199). And, further on: "Grimness was in every feature, and to its very bowels the inimical shape was desolation" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXII, p. 200).

Therefore, the monolithic façade of the cliff is anything but homogeneous and smooth. Like Gothic buildings, the details and the irregularities of the rocky surface become visible only at close inspection, while from afar both natural objects and human artefacts seem homogeneous in form and colour. The parallelism between architecture and landscape established in the novel has a specific purpose, that is to say to show how a peculiar harmonious relationship between man and nature works. West Endelstow and its surroundings are treated like a case study, like an ideal specimen of an unproblematic relation of men with nature. What is important to point out is that this mutual exchange of shapes and materials from nature to buildings and vice versa is peculiar to this part of Cornwall, but was made possible by Gothic masons. Indeed, Gothic masons did not limit themselves to imitate the forms of nature, and they did not try to obliterate the imperfections of nature either. The uniqueness of the Gothic way of building consisted in turning irregularity into its strong point and its main distinctive feature, as John Ruskin had explained in the passage from *The Stones of Venice* quoted above.

Still, nature around West Endelstow can be frightening, as the cliff-hanging episode suggests, but this did not prevent medieval builders from drawing inspiration from nature. Although Gothic masons were certainly frightened by the surrounding environment, they were not as frightened as modern men are, and not for the same reasons. Confronted with Smith's, Knight's, and Elfride's attitudes towards the Cornish landscape and architecture, the reader is induced to identify with them, and to experience the same feelings of fear mixed with fascination in front of buildings indistinguishable from the cliffs, on the one hand, and cliffs resembling too much human artefacts, on the other hand. The fact that the story takes place not in the Middle Ages (as Elfride's romance, set at the times of King Arthur), but in 1864 means that the reader comes to know indirectly that in the past men must not have been as afraid of nature as modern men are.

Now, the feeling characterising the protagonists – all modern men – is nothing but the sublime, that is to say a mixture of fear and admiration. I will deal more extensively with the responses of the three protagonists in the next chapter and with the sublime in the third chapter, but here it is worth pointing out that the sublime is a comparatively modern feeling which presupposes man's confidence in his own power to tame nature. Man needs to feel safe in order to experience the sublime. Without this conviction, the sublime could hardly be a source of delight.<sup>75</sup> Gothic masons were certainly afraid of animals and natural phenomena, but they accepted the superiority of natural forces with resignation; the wish to counteract nature in order to show the pre-eminence of men over nature was unknown to them (and to the inhabitants of Egdon Heath, as we will see in Chapter Three) because they recognised that nature was stronger than man. In other words, they considered themselves as part of the natural environment and, as such, at the mercy of the same dangers as the other animals. So the adoption of monstrous natural forms in their works of art is the proof that in the past men considered themselves and their artefacts as contiguous to the surrounding environment. This is the reason why, as we will see later, not only nature, but also Gothic architecture inspires feelings of fear and anxiety in modern beholders. Since architecture and nature formed an indistinguishable whole, modern men find both Gothic buildings and nature in its wildest attire equally frightening. More than that, modern men find that kind of architecture incomprehensible because medieval people were essentially different.

The relationship medieval men entertained with nature as embedded in the local Gothic architecture is so removed from modern men's problematic attitude that some anthropological change seems to have taken place in the meantime. The perfect agreement between human artefacts and landscape is a sign that Gothic masons were willing to be inspired by nature also from an aesthetic point of view. In other words, they did not feel the need to find their inspiration somewhere else than in what surrounded them. The process of assimilation of natural forms into architecture was dramatised by Hardy in the poem 'The Abbey Mason'. The protagonist, the inventor of the Perpendicular style, renounced fame because he thought

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<sup>75</sup> Edmund Burke, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, distinguished pleasure from delight. While the first is of a positive nature and independent from pain, the second is caused by the removal or diminution of pain or danger. Therefore, the sublime is accompanied by delight because it is excited by ideas of pain and danger (see Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757], ed. Adam Phillips, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 30-4 and pp. 36-7).

he had just copied nature's work.<sup>76</sup> Again, according to Ruskin, another distinctive element of Gothic architecture was "naturalism". In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he wrote that "all most lovely forms and thoughts are directly taken from natural objects" and that "it is out of the power of man to conceive beauty without her [nature's] aid".<sup>77</sup> Paul Hatton wrote that for Ruskin one of the features of the Gothic is "naturalism" because "the Gothic establishes a relationship between cultural production and the products of nature",<sup>78</sup> and the representation of traditional Cornish architecture in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* suggests that Hardy shared Ruskin's belief. Medieval builders imitated natural objects close at hand almost unconsciously, which means that their relationship with nature was unproblematic because the sense of superiority over nature felt by modern men was unknown to them.

The result of this genuine relationship between man and nature is described by Hardy himself in the 1895 'Preface' to the novel, where he wrote that in Cornwall "the wild and tragic features of the coast had long combined in perfect harmony with the crude Gothic Art of the ecclesiastical buildings scattered along it, throwing into extraordinary discord all architectural attempts at newness there" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, 1895 'Preface', p. 3). Since the life of the cliffs is almost everlasting if compared to human life and to the average existence of a building, as Henry Knight realises on the Cliff without a Name, artefacts built in any other style will be in conflict with the landscape. Yet, at the core of the novel there is a very "attempt at newness". The tower of West Endelstow, a "local record of local art" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXXI, p. 291) in Henry Knight's words, is being pulled down and the church restored "in the newest style of Gothic art" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXXI, p. 291), that is to say according to the dictates of the Camden Society, which imposed the Decorated as the unique style to be adopted for any religious building throughout the country.<sup>79</sup> The suspicion is that the new church will appear as unfamiliar and out-of-place as Marygreen's new church at the beginning of *Jude the Obscure* (see *Jude*, Part First, Ch. I, p. 12) because designed without taking into consideration the characteristics of the surrounding landscape and of local architecture.

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<sup>76</sup> See 'The Abbey Mason', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 403-11. Further references to Hardy's poems (abbreviated *CP*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text, followed by the number of the poem.

<sup>77</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 141.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Hatton, 'Ruskin and architecture: the argument of the text', in Michael Wheeler and Nigel Whiteley (eds.), *The Lamp of Memory: Ruskin, Tradition and Architecture*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992, pp. 123-37, p. 128.

<sup>79</sup> See Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: an Essay in the History of Taste* [1928], London, J. Murray, 1995, Ch. VIII.

So the primitive and essential architecture of the Isle of Slingers and the early Gothic church of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* are two examples showing that a harmonious relationship between man and nature is at the core of a kind of architecture in perfect accordance with the landscape. However, being both novels set in the nineteenth century, that fertile interchange between human artefacts and natural objects definitely belongs to the past. If in *The Well-Beloved* the deterioration of this special relation is only hinted at, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the conflict between man and nature, and the consequent wish to build in a new style, is not only a fact, but one of the main explicit issues of the novel, as we will see in the next chapter.

## Chapter Two

### Attempts at Newness

Instances of an unproblematic relation between man and nature are few in the *Wessex Novels*, and the examples of the Isle of Slings and Cornwall refer to the past, even if in *The Well-Beloved* it is less apparent than in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, since progress does not seem to take root on Portland, a place apparently immobile and out of time. In order to understand Hardy's view of the reasons which led to the deterioration of this bond, it is worth analysing how modern buildings and contemporary attitudes to both architecture and nature are represented in these novels. Before starting, it is worth pointing out that in the *Wessex Novels* modern buildings are not so numerous as it may appear. If we consider the great number of buildings and other artefacts represented in Hardy's novels, we are struck by the scantiness of new buildings in comparison with ancient buildings, such as cottages, churches and mansions. However, it is also true that the few modern buildings featuring in Hardy's novels create such a contrast with all the other buildings, the natural environment and the traditional ways of living of the inhabitants that they leave a strong impression on the reader. The same can be said of the way modernity more at large is represented in the *Wessex Novels*, where the symbols of progress – such as the threshing machine and the railways – stand in sharp contrast with the surrounding, and this effect is due precisely to the fact that modernity is usually kept hidden or outside the boundaries of Wessex. So when an unexpected detail is introduced which suddenly brings us back to the second industrial revolution, the truth about Wessex is disclosed. The pastoral settings of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* turn out to be illusory because that way of living, those traditions and those characters belong already to the past.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, a few modern buildings are sufficient to

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<sup>80</sup> Charles Lock observed that in most of Hardy's novels, especially in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, railways are almost invisible, but when we come to *Tess* and *Jude*, we become aware that Wessex was not as remote as we thought. This illusion is made possible also by the paratext. According to Lock, "[t]he paratext – maps, frontispiece – sets up expectations of an unsullied pre-industrial world which the text itself compromises" (Charles Lock, 'Hardy and the Railway', *Essays in Criticism* XLX, 1 (January 2000), pp. 44-66, p. 50). Simon Gatrell observed that railways feature in *Desperate Remedies*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *A Laodicean*, where Hardy "comes close to making the railway an active theme in the narrative" (Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy's Vision of Wessex*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 227), but in other novels, such as *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Trumpet-Major* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* railways are just mentioned or are absent, even if they had already been built, as in *The Return of the Native*. According to Gatrell, the railway embodies the future of Wessex, but until *Jude the Obscure*, which is a "railway novel" (Simon Gatrell, 'Wessex', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 19-37, p. 29), Hardy was able to hold opposing views of Wessex, which

convey the idea that even in Wessex the traditional ways of building have been supplanted by new methods, new materials, and perhaps a new style too, although Hardy seems to have some reservations about it. The irruption of progress into Wessex and the consequent struggle with a pre-industrial world is exemplified by the role played by modern buildings in the seemingly remote and archaic setting of the *Wessex Novels*. To be more precise, though, not all the modern buildings appearing in the *Wessex Novels* are also different in style from the ancient ones, since the Gothic Revival reached even the remotest places in the South West of England, such as the setting of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, which will be dealt with in the second part of this chapter. Signs of a new kind of architecture, though, are visible even in the Isle of Slingers, hence we will start with Hardy's last novel.

The very idea of the Isle of Slingers as a place untouched by modernity is actually undermined by some hints scattered along the novel by the narrator. First of all, it is true that its inhabitants are different because of their accent and their peculiar customs, but it is also true that influences from the outside have begun to change them. The most evident instance is represented by Avice the First, whose education is thus summarised by Pierston:

He observed that every aim of those who had brought her up had been to get her away mentally as far as possible from her natural and individual life as an inhabitant of a peculiar island: to make her an exact copy of tens of thousands of other people, in whose circumstances there was nothing special, distinctive, or picturesque; to teach her to forget all the experiences of her ancestors; to drown the local ballads by songs purchased at the Budmouth fashionable music-sellers', and the local vocabulary by a governess-tongue of no country at all. She lived in a house that would have been the fortune of an artist, and learnt to draw London suburban villas from printed copies. (*Well-Beloved*, Part I, Ch. II, pp. 186-7)

In this passage, Pierston (and in all probability the narrator as well) attacks the process of the transformation of Avice from a picturesque native into an anonymous girl similar to those living on the mainland. There is nostalgia for what is being lost, that is to say the distinctive features of the islanders, but the main reason behind Pierston's disappointment is that Avice has been turned into the caricature of a fashionable modern woman. Those who brought her up thought that buying songs in Budmouth and teaching her to speak standard English was sufficient to delete all the traces of locality in her. In fact the result is that now Avice is not exactly a fashionable girl, but at the same time she is not an authentic native anymore, like Clym Yeobright, Grace Melbury and many other Hardy characters before her. The curious

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appears alternately as a traditional and a modern place (see Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy's Vision of Wessex* cit., pp. 227-32).

thing is that Avice was induced to prefer London villas, standardised buildings of which hundreds of specimens exist in the suburbs, to her cottage, a unique specimen of local architecture. Thus Avice the First already bears marks of the advent of modernity in the peninsula.

Now, her subsequent incarnations, i.e. her daughter and her granddaughter, confirm the inexorability of this process. Avice the Second is less refined than her mother; yet she seems at ease in London. After sending her to the post office, Pierston fears she might get lost in London and begins to look for her in anxiety. When she comes back home, however, she is not the least tired or shocked and confesses she has been walking in the fashionable streets (see *Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. XI-XII, pp. 269-70). Avice shows an extraordinary ability to get used to the city, given that on the occasion of her first journey to London with the Kibbs, a Portland family, she seemed so scared of the city as to prefer staying on board the ship carrying blocks of Portland stone to the capital city (see *Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. V, p. 240). Finally, Avice the Third is the least native of the three incarnations. She is a “ladylike creature” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. I, p. 289), she is dressed fashionably and has been educated in Sandbourne. If the two previous incarnations were still products of the island, Avice the Third is not, and her mother is aware of this when she says that she is not a practical girl as she herself was. In her opinion, Avice is not suitable to live on the island, where her “expensive education” would be “wasted” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. IV, p. 304).

Not only the three Avices, but all the natives and the island itself undergo changes over the years. The major change which takes place during the first lapse of twenty years is the construction of a railway line reaching the peninsula, which becomes easily accessible except when the rail is “washed away by the tides” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. III, p. 233).<sup>81</sup> Yet the first outcomes of the advent of the railway become visible twenty years later, when Pierston comes back for the third time. Apart from the death of many inhabitants, apparently the island has not changed very much, according to the narrator:

The silent ships came and went from the wharf, the chisels clinked in the quarries; file after file of whitey-brown horses, in strings of eight or ten, painfully dragged down the hill the square blocks of stone on the antediluvian wooden wheels just as usual. The lightship winked every night from the quicksands to the Beal Lantern, and the Beal Lantern glared through its eye-glass on the ship. The canine gnawing

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<sup>81</sup> Here it is worth remembering that in reality the peninsula of Portland is not linked to the mainland by a railway line. So Hardy manipulated reality in order to emphasise the process of change affecting even the remotest corners in Wessex.

audible on the Pebble-bank had been repeated ever since at each tide, but the pebbles remained undevoured.

Men drank, smoked, and spat in the inns with only a little more adulteration in their refreshments and a trifle less dialect in their speech than of yore. (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. I, p. 283)

Everything seems to be the same, were it not for some imperceptible changes suggesting that accessibility has had drawbacks on the island and its inhabitants. Now drinks are more adulterated than in the past, which reminds us of two emblematic scenes in Hardy's novels – the drunk Michael Henchard selling his wife at the beginning of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and the “dyspeptic effects of the curious compounds” (*Tess*, Ch. X, p. 64), i.e. highly adulterated beer, sold to Trantridge people in *Tess*. Even if criticism is less overt in *The Well-Beloved* than in the other two novels, it is nonetheless clear that according to the narrator the damages caused by progress are hardly compensated by the advantages.

However, the most evident effect of the slow but inevitable advent of modernity on the island is a change in the way of building adopted by the natives, which is in its turn indicative of a changed relationship between men and nature. There are not many buildings in the novel, yet they are highly symbolic and meaningful. In particular, two kinds of buildings dominate the novel (and presumably the peninsula too), that is to say castles and cottages. As far as the first group is concerned, two castles are often mentioned in the novel, the Red King's Castle and Sylvania Castle, which represent two opposites (Henry the Eighth's Castle being actually situated on the mainland). As already noticed, the Red King's Castle is a ruin whose stones are being returned to the island. Sylvania Castle is close to it, hence the contrast could not be more striking. Indeed, while the Red King's Castle is almost indistinguishable from the cliff where it is built, the other is in antithesis with the surrounding landscape, as the description on the occasion of Jocelyn's second return makes clear:

It was the evening of Pierston's arrival at Sylvania Castle, an ordinary manor-house on the brink of the cliffs; and he had walked through the rooms, about the lawn, and into the surrounding plantation of elms, which on this island of treeless rock lent a unique character to the enclosure. In name, nature, and accessories the property within the girdling wall formed a complete antithesis to everything in its precincts. (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. VI, p. 241)

Sylvania Castle contrasts with the landscape and with the other castle for many reasons, starting from its name. First of all, the word “Sylvania”, evoking woods and forests, contrasts sharply with the island, made of “treeless rock”. This detail is particularly significant, since it suggests that modern men often make a blunder when they try to recover a harmonious



relationship with nature through architecture. Indeed nature is usually associated with vegetation, but this is not always the case, as the environment of the Isle of Slingers proves.

More than that, Sylvania Castle reveals that modern builders completely disregarded the architecture of the island, but chose instead alien materials and a *passee-partout* style. The hint to the new kinds of drinks which have reached the island suggests that many other alien products, habits and materials have already substituted the traditional ones, as modern architecture proves. These two features of Sylvania Castle – alien features and an abstract “universal” style – should be borne in mind, since they also characterise the buildings designed by Stephen Smith, as we will see later on in this chapter. Finally, the fact that Sylvania Castle is engirdled by a wall strengthens the impression that the estate is a sort of microcosm living on its own, having no relationship with the outside.

Yet there is another reason why the name of the mansion is misleading. It is called “castle”, but in fact is nothing but an ordinary manor-house of very recent construction, as the narrator had informed us earlier in the novel. A few pages before, the castle is defined as “a private mansion of comparatively modern date, in whose grounds stood the single plantation of trees of which the isle could boast” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IV, pp. 235-6). So the label of “castle” is improper for an ordinary residence which was not built for defensive purposes. The Red King’s Castle, on the contrary, is an authentic castle, given that it is encircled by a “defile [...] forming the original fosse of the fortress” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VI, p. 322). We can infer that the less ancient castle was built for pleasure alone.

Although it is of recent construction, nothing is said of the original owners and during the novel the mansion is just used as a temporary residence by many people, Pierston included. The castle is a sort of holiday house for rich tenants (at the beginning of the novel, Marcia says that her family had rented it for the season) who stay for a short period of time, foreshadowing the arrival of those “visitors” who have strangely ignored the island until now. Indeed in the course of the novel the island turns into a rather touristy place: if at the beginning nobody visits the peninsula, twenty years later many people staying in Budmouth come along the Pebble-bank “for an evening drive” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. VII, p. 248) and in the end Sylvania Castle is so well-kept as to suggest that tenants are not lacking. Nothing to do, therefore, with the typical Elizabethan cottages, all owned by the few families living on the peninsula, where, as we have already noticed, property transfers are “carried out and covenanted [...] in the parish church, in the face of the congregation” (*Well-Beloved*, 1912 ‘Preface’, p. 173). The consequence of the mansion being inhabited by different people each

season is that it lacks individuality; indeed its occupants live there for too short a period of time to leave marks on the building. To be more precise, the mansion has its own peculiarities, but the problem is that it appears as “a blot on the island’s beauty”, paraphrasing the description of Wintoncester in *Tess*. The oddity of Sylvania Castle is not due to its style (nothing is said about it), but to the plantation of elms surrounding it, which is in contrast with “this island of treeless rock”.

As far as the cottages are concerned, the main change occurs at the end of the novel by means of Pierston himself. After marrying Marcia, he decides to close the natural fountains in the Street of Wells and to buy some of the finest Elizabethan cottages in order to pull them down. His plan is indeed to substitute the old damp cottages with new ones “with hollow walls, and full of ventilators” (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VIII, p. 336). Jocelyn seems to mean well, that is to say to provide the natives with healthy houses, even if we do not know what they will look like, given that the novel ends before the new cottages are built. However, Pierston’s behaviour is too zealous and his plan too drastic to meet with approval. Indeed the narrator had said of Avice’s cottage that “with its quaint and massive stone features of two or three centuries’ antiquity, [it] was capable even now of longer resistance to the rasp of Time than ordinary new erections” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IV, p. 236). So in all probability Pierston is wrong, but the question is: why does he decide to pull the Elizabethan cottages down? The wish to build healthier houses is not entirely convincing, given that Pierston has never been a practical man.

First of all, Pierston’s final deed is a revolt against the traditional way of building peculiar to the island. With his unusual eagerness in carrying out his plan, Jocelyn embodies some of his contemporaries’ wish to do away with the architecture of the past, as we will see in Chapter Five of this thesis. Pierston is aware that the unity of nature and architecture represented by the Elizabethan cottages and the Red King’s Castle belongs already to the past and is irretrievable. That relationship of mutual exchange between buildings and landscape has come to an end, as the incongruous presence of Sylvania Castle on the island proves. The 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion is the first symptom of the standstill affecting architecture and, therefore, man, that is to say the necessity of finding a compromise between the wish to build in a new way and the awareness that a building must harmonise with the surrounding landscape. Pierston’s response represents, literally and figuratively, the “pulling-down part”, in the sense that he decides to demolish the symbols of that past unity; however, he fails to provide a valid substitute for it, at least from an aesthetic point of view. Indeed the problem of

Jocelyn and of his contemporaries as far as the future of architecture is concerned is their lack of creativity, their being “unimaginative”. This theme, just hinted at in this novel, surfaces in particular in the passage where the highest part of the peninsula is described. Here the Roman and the more modern roads to the summit of the island are compared. While the old Roman highway “turns at a sharp angle when it reaches the base of the scarp, and ascends in the stiffest of inclines to the right”, the modern one, “perfectly straight”, is “long, white, regular, tapering to a vanishing point, like a lesson in perspective” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, pp. 255 and 256). On the one hand, there is the Roman highway – straight and functional but, to Pierston’s eyes, picturesque; on the other the geometrical new road, heading directly to the summit. This is a passing comment, but it tells much about the modern way of building. Modern techniques are certainly more advanced, but the result is rather cold. By building a straight road, the problem of ascending the steep scarp has been adroitly solved, but we are led to wonder if a new road was really necessary, since in the *Wessex Novels* Roman roads are usually described as extremely functional and resistant.<sup>82</sup> On Portland the modern road looks like “a lesson in perspective”, as if the aim of its builders was to show their superiority as engineers on both their Roman predecessors and on nature. This sense of superiority is the first sign that something has changed in the relationship between man and nature. Modern men want to show their superiority as far as engineering is concerned, but the point here is that a new road was not actually required, and Pierston, the lover of beauty, significantly chooses “his proper and picturesque course” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. IX, p. 256). It is for this reason that Pierston’s final conversion from idealism to utilitarianism is all the more surprising.

At first glance, the final episode of Pierston pulling down the cottages raises many questions about its meaning in the context of the novel and its main issues – Pierston’s personal and artistic failures and the eternal problem of the relationship art and artists entertain with nature and life. In fact a closer relationship exists between architecture and sculpture, Pierston’s art form, than it may appear at first sight. Although *The Well-Beloved* is Hardy’s only *Künstlerroman* (literally, an “artist’s novel”, dealing with the artistic development of an artist), architecture is not less prominent than in such novels as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *A Laodicean*, where the hero is an architect. As Joan Grundy observed, Hardy

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<sup>82</sup> In *The Return of the Native*, for example, the Roman road is still visible on the surface of the heath because vegetation has not been able to efface it yet. By the way, the map of Egdon Heath designed by Hardy himself for the first volume edition draws our attention to the straight Roman road, crossing the heath in east-west direction.

believed that all the arts form a whole.<sup>83</sup> In particular, she argued that the Muse of “Form” worshipped by the poet in the poem entitled ‘Rome: The Vatican: Sala delle Muse’ (CP 70)<sup>84</sup> might include architecture, besides sculpture.<sup>85</sup> Grundy’s hypothesis is strengthened by John Cowper Powys’s portrait of Thomas Hardy in *Visions and Revisions*, where wrote that “it is, above all, Form that appeals to Mr. Hardy”.<sup>86</sup> Pierston too is fascinated by form or, as he calls it, “shape”. For instance, on the title-page of the 1897 version of the novel there was the epigraph from Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*, ‘One shape of many names’, which recurs also in the first chapter of the second part (see *Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. I, p. 220).

If it is true that Pierston is, like Hardy, attracted to form in general, his interest in architecture, including his final “utilitarian” deed, is significant.<sup>87</sup> Pierston is the representative of all the artists worshipping ideal beauty in any form of art, be it sculpture, architecture, painting or literature. The fact that Jocelyn is a sculptor rather than a novelist or an architect is of almost no consequence because Hardy’s last novel illustrates (and even ridicules) the effects of idealism in any artistic expression. The motif of architecture, of its progressive detachment from the natural landscape, stands as a counterpart to Jocelyn’s artistic failure. Pierston’s adherence to the rules of classical art is paralleled by the formal perfection of the modern road to the summit of the island. The statues crowding Jocelyn’s studio and the new works of architecture (or rather works of engineering) conform to abstract models having little to do with the peculiar environment of the Isle of Slingers. The new road adheres to the rules of perspective, while Pierston’s statues strive to conform to the rules of proportion and perfect beauty of Greek art. Although they are formally perfect, the new road and Pierston’s statues are cold and lifeless because they bear no relation to the individuality, the uniqueness, of the people (and the place) who have created them, both characterised, as we have seen, rather by vital irregularities and eccentricities. And irregularity was considered as a great value in architecture not only by Ruskin, who deemed it a sign of medieval masons’

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<sup>83</sup> See Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts* cit., p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Curiously enough, Tom Paulin observed that the Hardy of ‘Rome: The Vatican: Sala delle Muse’ resembles Jocelyn Pierston (see Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* cit., p. 55).

<sup>85</sup> See Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts* cit., p. 177.

<sup>86</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Visions and Revisions: A Book of Literary Devotions*, London, Macdonald, 1955, p. 167.

<sup>87</sup> In the 1892 version of the novel, Pierston and Avice the Third embark on a brief tour of the cathedral cities of the north of England before settling in their new house in London (see Thomas Hardy, *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* cit., Part III, Ch. XXVII, p. 139), a further sign of Pierston’s interest in architecture. This detail was deleted from the 1897 version of the novel, as Avice elopes with Henri Leverre.

freedom to express their creativity,<sup>88</sup> but also by Hardy, as already argued in the preceding chapter.

Jocelyn's abrupt conversion, though, does not mark his artistic and personal improvement, but the definitive rejection of both art and life, even if in the 1892 version of the novel the coincidence of art and life was made more explicit by the scene of Pierston's attempted suicide. All his life had been founded on the principle of "art for art's sake"; he had striven for ideal beauty without reaching it. At the same time, his native island, with its peculiar architecture and equally peculiar inhabitants, seemed to have had a certain influence on him. As we have seen in Chapter One of this thesis (see p. 28), Pierston too is essentially local, being "a native of natives". Indeed he falls in love with Avice Caro, but he is not inclined to admit that he is attracted to her because she is "local to the bone". Thus he never ceases to pursue his ideal in both love and art. From this point of view, the fact that the title of the first version of the novel was *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* is significant, since in 1892 the stress was on Pierston's endless but vain and illusory quest for the ideal. But the island is the real dominating force in Pierston's life. His whole life indeed has been shaped by the island and three of its inhabitants; the island has always been his guiding light, and it is no coincidence that images of lighthouses and lightships, always associated with the Isle of Slingers, abound in the novel. Pierston is drawn to his native island as a moth to a flame, he cannot help it.

Consequently, one might expect not only his life, but also his art to be shaped by the island, but this is not the case. As Enrica Villari pointed out, Pierston is unable to express in his art the peculiarities of the three Avices and of his native island.<sup>89</sup> The statues in his studio are condemned to lifelessness because Pierston is unable to establish a link between life and art. The twenty-year-old Pierston thinks that these two spheres are not connected and, as such, they should be kept separate. For example, he admires the stone cottages of the island because they are local, but in his art he vainly pursues ideal beauty. Here it is worth remembering that the narrator had said of Avice's cottage that it "would have been the fortune of an artist". However, just as Avice the First prefers London suburban villas as subjects for her drawings, so Pierston's models for his statues are Greek and Roman deities – Juno, Aphrodite/Venus and Athena/Minerva, the three goddesses Paris is confronted with. Moreover, Jocelyn applies the rules of classical beauty to all the incarnations of his Well-Beloved and compares the

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<sup>88</sup> See John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 10, pp. 204-14.

<sup>89</sup> See Enrica Villari, *Il vizio moderno dell'irrequietezza* cit., pp. 108-11.

three Avices, Marcia and Nichola Pine-Avon to those goddesses. To be more precise, he compares Avice the Second to Minerva (while he had identified Marcia with Juno) and with “one of the three goddesses in Ruben’s ‘Judgement of Paris’” (*Well-Beloved*, Part II, Ch. VII, p. 247), a clear sign that he completely disregards the actual character of his very local well-beloved. When he hears the matter-of-fact Avice the Second speaking, he carefully avoids catching the words in order to hear only her voice. In short, he blinds himself to the recognition of each woman’s individuality.

What is more, throughout his life Pierston never changes his mind, even at the age of sixty. Life never enters into his art, but it is rather the opposite, that is, he believes that his own life should be a work of art, with the result that his life is as fruitless as his artistic career: on the personal level, he grows old childless;<sup>90</sup> on the artistic level, his popularity begins to decline. It is true that at the end of the novel Pierston realises that his faithfulness to the ideal has been the cause of his artistic and personal failures; yet, instead of turning to what should be the sources of his imagination – the island, its so-called vernacular architecture and its inhabitants “local to the bone” – Pierston is in the throes of a destructive fury. Unable to infuse life in his statues and aware that ideal beauty is a chimera, he sells the lease of his studio in London, has his collection of statues dispersed, and, finally, pulls down the stone cottages of the island, the last reminders that another kind of art, free from “dictatorial perfection”, was possible. Jocelyn, deprived of his ideal and, at the same time, unable to “learn the lesson” that art cannot reject life and nature, chooses a third option: he gives up art altogether, and this conversion is given full relief in the final scene of the novel, which was not present in the 1892 version. It is significant, therefore, that when Hardy decided to change the ending, he emphasised Pierston’s transformation by turning him into the zealous demolisher of the cottages he had so praised during his life. After a serious illness, he becomes insensible to beauty; the artistic sense abandons him to never come back again. Pierston’s act marks his definitive conversion from the devotion to the ideal to a life where the place of art and beauty has been taken by practical concerns. The narrator thus vividly summarises the meaning of Pierston’s sudden conversion:

The artistic sense had left him, and he could no longer attach a definite sentiment to images of beauty recalled from the past. His appreciativeness was capable of exercising itself only on utilitarian matters, and recollection of Avice’s good

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<sup>90</sup> On Pierston’s infertility, on its consequences and on its exceptionality in the *Isle of Slingers*, see Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 238-41.

qualities alone had any effect on his mind; of her appearance none at all. (*Well-Beloved*, Part III, Ch. VIII, p. 330)

*The Well-Beloved* is indeed a peculiar *Künstlerroman*, since its protagonist does not achieve a *Bildung* at the end of the novel. The *Bildung* consisted in a balance between life and art, realism and idealism, but Pierston turns from utter aestheticism to utter utilitarianism,<sup>91</sup> missing what lies in-between. Utilitarianism and the risks inherent to it, just hinted at the end of this novel, had been at the core of one of Hardy's early and so-called minor novels,<sup>92</sup> *A Laodicean*, as we will see in the second part of this thesis, but what is striking here is that, as Taylor pointed out, a native of the island becomes an unimaginative destroyer, which means that the island is threatened from within.<sup>93</sup> Pierston's return to his native place is therefore sterile, and in this respect he shares the fate of Clym Yeobright, another embodiment of what Hardy meant by idealism (see pp. 70-1 of this thesis), although there is a substantial difference between the fate of the two characters. Indeed, while Pierston fails to benefit from his native place (from its local architecture, its inhabitants and its natural environment), Clym is "defeated" by his very place of origin, in particular by the other heathmen.

The Isle of Slingers, then, is only seemingly a remote and immutable place. Modernity has begun to affect the inhabitants and, consequently, their way of building, which clearly illustrates how the relationship between men and nature has changed. Sylvania Castle is the evidence that the unity between buildings and landscape no longer characterises contemporary architecture. If Pierston's contemporaries cannot compete with their ancestors as regards architecture, the demolition of the cottages may be read as the desperate act of a man who tries to compensate for that inferiority by asserting his own modern superiority, as far as practical matters are concerned.

Now this awareness of the flaw inherent to a kind of architecture utterly independent from landscape, just hinted at in *The Well-Beloved*, is the issue at the core of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where the conflict between creativity and pragmatism concentrates around the restoration plan of West Endelstow. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* architecture plays a more important role than in *The Well-Beloved*, as the plot itself turns around a church to be restored and a tower to be

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<sup>91</sup> Here I am using the word "utilitarianism" in the broader sense of the belief that the value of an action, a building, etc. is determined exclusively by its usefulness.

<sup>92</sup> For an analysis of Hardy's "minor" novels, see Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* cit., and John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988.

<sup>93</sup> See Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* cit., p. 166. See also Andrew Radford, 'Hardy and Scientific Humanism', in Rosemarie Morgan (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 253-68, p. 266.

pulled down; besides, the male protagonist is an assistant architect. So in this novel architecture is really the filter through which man's attitude towards nature is studied. To be more precise, the relationship between man and nature is seen evolving through time thanks to the restoration theme. On the one hand, there is a decaying medieval church, whose style is indicative of a certain attitude towards nature; on the other hand, there are modern parishioners, incumbents, visitors and restorers, who have different attitudes towards both nature and architecture, depending on their role. The focus of the previous chapter was on the relationship Gothic masons entertained with nature, which was their primary source of inspiration because they were not afraid of it in the same way modern men are. That unproblematic relation resulted in a kind of architecture almost indistinguishable from the landscape.

Here I would like to focus instead on the different responses of the modern characters, in particular of the two male protagonists, to local architecture, nature and their mutual interchange. Indeed, every character in the novel, sooner or later, is obliged to deal with this issue, directly or indirectly and for different reasons. Indeed the restoration plan of West Endelstow obliges all the characters to come to terms with both the nature of the place and the local architecture. The two male protagonists acknowledge the meaning and importance of Gothic architecture, but they are nonetheless condemned to passivity by their opposing but equally harmful faults: an excessive concentration on details on the one hand, and the penchant for sheer abstraction on the other. The response of Stephen Smith, the budding architect, is of course the most telling, since it reveals how the process of mutual exchange between buildings and landscape has evolved over the centuries. Being an architect, he can be considered as a sort of *alter ego* of Hardy himself, or at least of the young Hardy, the heartless church restorer whose deeds the elderly Hardy was to deprecate in 'Memories of Church Restoration', where he indirectly admitted his involvement in the "active destruction under saving names"<sup>94</sup> of medieval buildings. Yet, if we are to believe Hardy's statement that "Henry Knight the reviewer, Elfride's second lover, was really much more like Thomas Hardy",<sup>95</sup> we have to examine also Knight's attitude towards architecture, restoration and the Cornish landscape, since it can reflect some of the author's opinions. These two characters, the pragmatic man and the intellectual, provide two different but complementary points of view on the relation between architecture and landscape, which, together with the other issue,

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Memories of Church Restoration' cit., p. 241.

<sup>95</sup> *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 76.



i.e. the restoration of St. Agnes, can be considered as a “test of the characters’ power of intellectual and moral discernment”.<sup>96</sup> Smith and Knight can be said to be complementary because, even if their personalities are opposed, they are both representatives of the modern man and, as a consequence, they embody modern concerns and attitudes about the centrality of men in relation to nature.

The characters of the novel can be divided into two groups – the natives and the foreigners. Stephen Smith occupies an ambivalent position, since he is a native of Cornwall but has spent many years away from Endelstow, living first in Exonbury (corresponding to Exeter), where he was educated, and then in London, where he works as an assistant architect. In his case, however, the reader (and Elfride and her father as well) is not aware that he is actually a native until his secret is revealed in chapter IX. In this respect, Smith is one of the many Hardy characters – Clym Yeobright, Grace Melbury, Fancy Day and Jocelyn Pierston – who return to their native place after a lapse of time which has determined such deep changes in their constitution that their returns are usually painful because they realise that the past cannot be retrieved. The first impression we gather of Smith is that of a person who looks at the landscape with the eyes of an architect, that is to say with particular attention to the general composition and to proportions. We must remember that the observer of the framed picture of the Vallency Valley quoted on p. 35 of this thesis, in which the geometrical and rarefied character of the Cornish landscape emerges, is Stephen Smith himself. Moreover, Stephen Smith is clearly, despite Hardy’s denial of it, the *alter ego* of Hardy himself,<sup>97</sup> who had been an architect in his youth, which reinforces the impression that this description is clearly made by an architect.<sup>98</sup> Smith notices how the church accords perfectly with the surrounding landscape, to the point that it appears “of one substance with the ridge, rather than a structure raised thereon” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 23). Therefore Smith is not indifferent to the main feature of Cornish architecture, that is to say the perfect accord between buildings and natural objects. He is aware that nature inevitably influences architecture, and this awareness is due to his being a native and an architect at the same time.

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<sup>96</sup> Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* cit., p. 76.

<sup>97</sup> Almost all Hardy’s biographers agree on this point: see, for example, Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, London, Heinemann, 1975, p. 165, Martin Seymour-Smith, *Hardy*, London, Bloomsbury, 1994, p. 153, Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* cit., pp. 195-8, Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* cit., p. 131-4, and Claire Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man* [2007], London, Penguin, 2012, p. 122. According to Tomalin, though, “*A Pair of Blue Eyes* is only passingly autobiographical, because Stephen leaves for India and faithless Elfride meets and prefers his older friend and mentor, Henry Knight” (ivi).

<sup>98</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 95.

The problem, though, is that Smith limits himself to only observe and measure throughout the novel. Smith's duty consists in making a detailed survey of St. Agnes; he therefore has to take measurements, make sketches of the plan and of the several parts of the building and to assess what must be done to restore it. At the beginning of the novel Elfride and her father take Stephen to St. Agnes's church for his first survey. While the young architect examines and measures the tower, Elfride thinks she could "set herself to learn the principles of practical mensuration as applied to irregular buildings" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 28). Yet Smith's aim is not to understand the building principles of his medieval predecessors, but to conform a unique specimen of local architecture to a standardised national style. As a native of Cornwall, Smith should appreciate the irregular character of Gothic architecture, especially of this style of Gothic, but in fact all he can do is to measure something which is irregular by definition.<sup>99</sup>

It is true that Smith's work can hardly be defined as creative, given that it is probably up to Mr. Hewby, his employer, to provide the design for the new parts of the church and the changes to be made to the original. Yet there is reason to believe that Smith's lack of creative power is not only due to the kind of job he is obliged to perform. If Elfride's suitor has often been defined as a dull, colourless character, it is not (or, to be more precise, not only) because of his unimaginative job. Indeed, there is a sense in which Stephen's inability to conceive anything new and original has its roots in his own nature. The narrator underlines this feature of Smith's personality on many occasions, and especially in a long passage in Chapter X, where he goes back to the rectory from his parents' cottage on a peaceful evening, perfect for meditation:

Stephen was hardly philosopher enough to avail himself of Nature's offer. His constitution was made up of very simple particulars; was one which, rare in the springtime of civilizations, seems to grow abundant as a nation gets older, individuality fades, and education spreads; that is, his brain had extraordinary receptive powers, and no great creativeness. Quickly acquiring any kind of knowledge he saw around him, and having a plastic adaptability more common in woman than in man, he changed colour like a chameleon as the society he found himself in assumed a higher and more artificial tone. He had not many original ideas, and yet there was scarcely an idea to which, under proper training, he could not have a respectable co-ordinate. (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. X, p. 88)

This passage casts a shadow on the figure of Elfride's suitor, even if the narrator defends him by saying he is the son of his own age. Until then, the reader had formed quite a different

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<sup>99</sup> Indeed Andrew Radford defined Smith's attitude to the past as "sham medievalism" (see Andrew Radford, 'Hardy and Scientific Humanism' cit., p. 259).

idea of Stephen Smith's character; several reasons might have been advanced for his dullness and his strange detachment from the scenes in front of him, such as a certain awkwardness owing to the fact that he will have to make his humble origins known. Before the revelation of his secret, Smith's indifference could be attributed to his being a foreigner in Cornwall. In this passage instead we are told that Stephen's lack of creative power is innate. Unlike many Hardy's characters, from Angel Clare to Little Father Time, he does not tend to formulate general laws but to stick to particulars. Smith is unable to transform the impressions he receives into original ideas, even if his receptive powers are indisputable, as his insightful observation of the Vallency Valley from his window demonstrates. Stephen is an excellent observer thanks to his "receptive powers", but the impressions and the knowledge he acquires are simply "stored" in his brain and stay unused. It is true that an architect is not (and should not be) a philosopher, but Stephen Smith is utterly unable to form abstract concepts, or to associate the impressions he receives in order to give birth to new ideas. Stephen's excessive concentration on details stifles in him any burst of creativity and prevents him from fully appreciating the architecture of his native place. By applying "practical mensuration" to "irregular buildings", Smith obeys his employer's orders, but in so doing he fails to recognise the characteristics which make the style of St. Agnes's church unique: the exact correspondence between architecture and the surrounding landscape pursued by Gothic masons and the perfect balance between regularity and irregularity which characterises the Cornish landscape as well. Indeed, although Smith appears as a scrupulous architect, always busy with copying, sketching, and measuring, these tasks are performed with a view to the specific purpose of destroying the crumbling parts of the church, like the tower. So even if he is a native, Smith does not seem to be touched by the fate of the church. He simply "obey[s] orders",<sup>100</sup> as Hardy was to say to excuse himself later on in his life, when he felt guilty about what he had done as a church restorer. The fact that West Endelstow is associated with his own life – doubtless with his childhood and now with his love for Elfride – has no influence on his architecture. Unlike Knight, he does not seem to feel sorry when the tower is undermined in order to take it down – an event which even kills a person, Mrs Jethway.

Yet Smith succeeds in becoming a renowned architect at the end of the novel. He indeed possesses some characteristics which seem to guarantee his success in the modern world: he is able to learn anything very quickly; he is extremely adaptable and he can adopt ideas

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in William Archer, 'Real Conversations', in Martin Ray (ed.), *Thomas Hardy Remembered*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 28-37, p. 30.

according to the kind of society he finds himself in. It is indicative that in the end he is “fêted by deputy-governors and Parsee princes and nobody-knows-who in India” and that he is chosen to design buildings “by the general consent of the ruling powers, Christian and Pagan alike” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXXVI, p. 322) since his buildings can be built anywhere, from his native Cornwall to the exotic India, because he adopts for his plans a sort of *partout* style. Yet this means that his plans, unlike Gothic buildings, lack individuality, and it could hardly be otherwise. Indeed Stephen himself lacks individuality, a feature he shares with his contemporaries and, in general, with mature civilisations (“as a nation gets older, individuality fades...”). This very crucial Hardy theme is significantly in keeping with a fertile tradition of the notion that creativeness wanes as a civilisation gets older (with the equation between the degree of civilisation and the ages of man). According to Giambattista Vico, for example, a civilisation develops in a recurring cycle of three ages, corresponding to the ages of man: the divine (childhood), the heroic (youth) and the human (adulthood).<sup>101</sup>

However, a closer resemblance seems to exist between Hardy’s low opinion of mature civilisations and the definition of “civilisation”, as opposed to “culture”, given by the German philosopher Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*, published in 1918. According to Spengler, cultures degenerate into civilisations, which are “a conclusion”, “death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic.”<sup>102</sup> In Spengler’s opinion, one of the characteristics of civilisations is the predominance of “cold *matter-of-fact* in place of reverence for tradition and age”.<sup>103</sup> Civilisations are made up of “traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, *unfruitful*” men.<sup>104</sup> This definition well suits Stephen Smith, whose cleverness, education and pragmatism are to the detriment of his creative powers, although other Hardy characters, as we will see, are equally “unfruitful” because of their excessive reverence for tradition and age. Stephen Smith embodies instead Hardy’s conviction that “experience *unteaches*”.<sup>105</sup> In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* his colourless constitution is contrasted with the marked individuality of his father:

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<sup>101</sup> See Giambattista Vico, *The New Science* [1725, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. 1744], trans. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1948, Book One, Section II, pp. 67-8

<sup>102</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson, New York, A. Knopf, 1927, p. 31. In this and in the following quotations from Spengler’s work the emphases are mine.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32

<sup>105</sup> *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 182.

In common with most rural mechanics, he had too much individuality to be a typical 'working-man' – a resultant of that beach-pebble attrition with his kind only to be experienced in large towns, which metamorphoses the unit Self into a fraction of the unit Class. (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. X, p. 83)

While John Smith's personality is so peculiar as to be unique, his son has no distinctive traits to distinguish him from his contemporaries. If his father cannot represent a "typical 'working-man'" because he is a unique specimen, Stephen is a typical architect of his age. It is no wonder, therefore, that his buildings can be built anywhere, since they lack the peculiarities which would make them "local to the bone".

Yet, unlike other returns in Hardy's novels, Smith's return to his native Cornwall is not painful since he is not distressed by his lack of creativity. He has no inferiority complex towards Gothic masons, their architecture and their originality. His being indifferent is also at the core of his lack of fear of the wild nature of Cornwall. Indeed Smith is the only character who does not seem to be touched by the wild roar of the sea, the height of the cliffs and the desolation of the place. If indeed his concentration on details is the cause of his passivity and of his inability to come to terms with the lack of regularity of Gothic buildings, his very obtuseness protects him from tragic outcomes.

The excessive pragmatism embodied in Smith is opposed to his friend Henry Knight's unrestrained tendency to generalise. These two extremes, however, lead to the same result, that is to say to the weakening of imaginative powers. Indeed the unrestrained tendency to generalise is equally harmful to creativity, as the personality of Henry Knight well illustrates. Unlike his friend, he usually tends to ignore the particulars, which leads him to draw conclusions without duly considering individual circumstances and details. His inclination to generalise surfaces on many occasions, especially when the two friends discuss women and women writers in Ch. XIII, or at the end, when Knight realises that Elfride does not conform to his ideal. Knight belongs therefore to that group of Hardy's characters whose tendency to abstraction and idealisation stifles imagination and the ability to sympathise. From this point of view, Henry Knight is one of the many predecessors of the unimaginative character *par excellence*, Little Father Time. Indeed, Jude and Arabella's son "seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particulars" (*Jude*, Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 278). Even if Little Father Time's tendency to generalise is so extreme to become pathological, Knight inclination to formulate laws leads to similar outcomes. Little Father Time is described as a "passive" boy (*Jude*, Part Fifth, Ch. III, p. 276), careless and indifferent about what surrounds him; his penchant for abstraction prevents him from

appreciating beauty. If his father Jude still believes in the possibility of reviving Gothic spontaneity and is unable to see that “mediævalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85), for his son there is no hope in anything, knowledge and Gothic art included.

Fortunately, the penchant for abstraction has not completely stifled Knight’s ability to appreciate beauty. To do him justice, he is one of the few characters who understand the value of the tower which is about to be pulled down. For example, while the tower, which had become an integral part of the landscape, is being demolished, Elfride comments ““Poor old tower!”” and Knight replies ““Yes, I am sorry for it.’ ‘[...] It was an interesting piece of antiquity – a local record of local art’” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXXI, p. 291). Here we must remember that at this point of the novel Knight has already had direct experience of how deep and interchangeable architecture and nature can be in the crucial scene on the Cliff without a Name. It is a curious thing that Hardy chose a layman of architecture for a scene where the architectural character of nature is clearly expressed (as explained in the previous chapter), but it could not be otherwise. Besides being a rational man whose fault is his tendency to generalise, Knight is also a writer, more specifically a journalist and critic. As a consequence, he is not unlike Smith, since he is not involved in any creative work either. He is undoubtedly clever and witty, but his intellect is employed in criticising other people’s writings, rather than in creating something original. He masters language excellently, to the point that he is able to win Elfride away from Smith, but in fact his imagination and his creative power lie asleep.

The close encounter with the cliff, and in particular with the trilobite, rouses in Knight a series of thoughts and emotions, but the leading one is certainly fear, an emotion which Gothic masons humbly accepted by reproducing in their buildings the forms of nature, distorted and exaggerated by their imagination. As we will see in the next chapter, this does not mean that in the Middle Ages men were not afraid of nature, but that their fear was of a different kind because their relationship with nature was different. However, although the encounter with the cliff opens Knight’s eyes, it does not awaken his creativity. Finding himself face to face with nature, Knight becomes aware of the fact that in the Cornish landscape regular and irregular features combine to give birth to natural objects endowed with a personality, and he probably realises where the local style of architecture comes from, but he fails to learn the lesson nature taught him. As Tess Cosslett observed, Knight “is forced painfully to recognise the power both of inanimate Nature and of his own subjectivity – but

Hardy does not let this cancel out the value of his strong, objective rationality.”<sup>106</sup> After the close encounter with the cliff, he is apparently able to appreciate Gothic architecture: while Smith succeeds as an architect in India, Knight travels around Europe, visiting all the most significant examples of French Gothic. Yet his journey is purposeless, hasty, inconclusive, most likely because he has become aware that Gothic architecture can be appreciated and studied as a record, but the spontaneity with which Gothic masons turned to the surrounding landscape for inspiration cannot be revived. The only lesson he learns from the encounter with the trilobite is the insignificance of men in relation to both nature and time, which cannot but aggravate his passivity and further inhibit his creativeness. If man is insignificant and his life is nothing but a blink of an eye if compared to geological eras, any human creation is futile and ephemeral. Instead of arousing his imagination, the “cliffhanging” episode drives Knight to despair. At the same time, the fear he experiences on the cliff is so deep that he reacts by rejecting nature altogether. The discovery that Elfride had more than one lover before him repulses Knight because it forces him to come to terms with the sensuous part of human nature. Elfride bewilders – and even frightens – Knight in that she fails to conform to his abstract ideal of femininity. In the end he chooses to reject her because she is the exception undermining his ideal, his system made up of universals.

So Smith’s excessive concentration on details and Knight’s equally excessive tendency to deduce general laws lead to the same result, that is to say the lack of creative powers, united to a certain passivity. Smith’s pragmatism and his friend’s idealism can be considered as two sides of the same coin, i.e. of modern man, whose sense of inadequacy generates passive and unimaginative personalities. Smith contributes to an incongruous “attempt at newness” with his passivity, even if he is not as responsible for the destruction of the old tower as Parson Swancourt, the one who commissions the restoration work to Mr. Hewby. Again, the threat to local architecture comes from within, as in *The Well-Beloved*. Smith and Knight, Hardy’s *alter egos*, are complementary, but they are two distinct people in the novel, so that none of them is able to combine philosophical speculation with pragmatism, abstraction with concreteness, the particulars and the universal, to give birth to creativeness. Smith’s and Knight’s visions, opposed as they are, are both partial and consequently incomplete. The combination of Smith’s and Knight’s tendencies is at the core of the *Wessex Novels*, where

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<sup>106</sup> Tess Cosslett, *The ‘Scientific Movement’ and Victorian Literature*, Brighton, Harvester, 1982, p. 140.

Hardy exerted the “art of observation”, consisting in seeing “great things in little things, the whole in the part”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 262.



## Chapter Three

### The Taming of the Shrew

The focus of the previous chapter was on two of the many returns of natives represented in Hardy's novels. Both Pierston's and Smith's returns fail, even if Smith is kept safe from tragic outcomes by his inability for philosophical speculation, which prevents him from realising that he is a living example of the circumstance that creativity cannot prosper any longer in old civilisations. Being aware of his inability "to avail himself of Nature's offer" (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. X, p. 88), Pierston reacts instead by devoting himself entirely to utilitarian matters. Yet, although Smith and Pierston are very different characters, they share the characteristic of coming from places where in the past a perfect interchange between nature and architecture had been possible. That irretrievable condition is foregrounded by the contrast with modern architecture, which completely disregards the surrounding landscape. In the first chapter of this thesis I have analysed the essential features of the ancient harmonious relationship between human architecture and nature in the Isle of Slings and Cornwall, while in Chapter Two we have seen how in the same settings in modern times human creativity has been replaced by a rather passive human attitude, thus producing a sort of "impasse" in modern architecture. Yet in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* Smith's passive and rather cold attitude is opposed to Knight's (and Elfride's) intense response to nature in its wildest aspects: the Cliff without a Name is a source of intense horror to him.

In the first part of this chapter I will focus on the particular kind of fear characterising modern men's relationship with the wildest aspects of the natural world. I will argue that the kind of fear experienced by Knight has its roots in modern man's pride in his own assumed superiority over the natural world and drives. I will start my argument by referring to a novel where architecture is almost absent, its very conditions of existence being denied by the unconquerable nature of the natural environment of its setting. In *The Return of the Native* the reasons of the failure of Clym's return can shed light on the anthropological change which, according to Thomas Hardy, had determined the essential and substantial difference between medieval men, as described by Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* through the analysis of their architecture, and Hardy's contemporaries. As we will see, the contrast between Egdon Heath, the most extreme area of the *Wessex Novels* and the one which is closest to a state of uncontaminated nature, and Clym's return from his modern, cosmopolitan experience in Paris

offers an illuminating perspective on the process of change, in man's relation to nature, which caused "genuine" fear – a comprehensible emotion in places where nature is threatening – to be supplanted by the feeling of the sublime, an emotion typical of modernity. The second part of the chapter will focus instead on the picturesque, the other modern aesthetic experience having its origins – like the sublime – in the eighteenth century, and mediating, like the sublime, our responses to both nature and architecture.

As already argued in Chapter One, according to Ruskin the surrounding environment, even in its most frightening aspect, was the main source of inspiration for medieval masons. As already noticed, this does not mean of course that medieval masons were not afraid of nature, but that they humbly accepted this fear by copying even frightening natural forms in their buildings. Now Egdon Heath is certainly the most inhospitable – and therefore the most frightening – place in Wessex even if compared with the Isle of Slings and Cornwall, other wild places in Wessex where nature can also be frightening. Indeed in Off-Wessex and Portland architecture was not only possible, but it demonstrated that a perfect interchange with the landscape had at least once been possible. In Egdon Heath, on the contrary, nature is so hostile that it seems that men have never even made an attempt to conquer it by architecture in the Ruskinian sense of buildings contributing to the "mental health, power, and pleasure" of men.<sup>108</sup> Here men seem to have limited themselves to erecting buildings only to protect themselves from the rage of atmospheric agents, the invading vegetation and animals. The setting of *The Return of the Native*, being an extreme case, well illustrates the situation where men and buildings alike are at the mercy of the forces of nature. Again, the motif of architecture (or, to be more precise, of its impossibility and absence on the heath) underlines the main theme of the novel, that is to say Clym's problematic return to his native place and his consequent frustrated attempt, against the background of an unconquerable natural environment, to master his own (and Eustacia's and his mother's) obscure natural drives.

The statement about Egdon Heath that "civilization was its enemy"<sup>109</sup> is proved true since the very beginning due to the conditions of buildings in the heath. Cottages, houses and other constructions seem to be immersed in a general darkness, darkness itself coming over Egdon Heath rather early in the afternoon, given that in this microcosm it gets dark earlier than outside, as the narrator explains at the beginning of the novel: "the heath wore the appearance

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<sup>108</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* [1878], ed. Simon Gatrell, with an 'Introduction' by Margaret R. Higgonet and Notes by Nancy Barrineau, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005 (repr. 2008), Book First, Ch. I, p. 11. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *The Return*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived thereon, while day stood distinct in the sky” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 9). There are many examples of houses being visible in the dark thanks to an enlightened window,<sup>110</sup> but as soon as candles are put out, they plunge back into darkness, hidden behind the thick vegetation which constitutes an even thicker screen in daytime, when no lights are there to be seen. Most of the buildings occurring in the novel are defined as “removed” (Bloom’s End, *The Return*, Book Second, Ch. I, p. 109), lonely (Mistover Knap, see *The Return*, Book First, Ch. VIII, p. 72) and isolated, as the map of Egdon Heath drawn by Hardy makes clear. Moreover, the inhabitants are sometimes obliged to make their dwellings even more secluded by planting trees or by building some kind of defence to keep the vegetation off. The Yeobrights’ house, for instance, is built on a spot where bushes are less thick, but is surrounded by a row of palings, probably planted to protect the house from the advancing vegetation and from the wind. Besides, the “heavy thatchings” and a “huge pyracanth” (*The Return*, Book Second, Ch. V, p. 129) concur to make the Yeobrights’ house almost invisible. The same can be said of Eustacia and Clym’s house at Alderworth, whose exact position is unknown even to Mrs Yeobright: before reaching it, she goes the wrong way several times and is finally obliged to ask for directions.

Yet the most secluded place in the heath is Mistover Knap, a hamlet now composed of just one house – Eustacia and her grandfather’s – and two cottages. Captain Drew’s dwelling is described as “the loneliest of lonely houses on these thinly populated slopes” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. VIII, p. 72), screened as it is by a clump of fir trees at the back of the house. There are no roads leading to Mistover Knap, which is therefore difficult to reach but easy to escape from, as Eustacia well knows, since “it was a hopeless task to seek for anybody on a heath in the dark, the practicable directions for flight across it from any point being as numerous as the meridians radiating from the pole” (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. VII, p. 340). At the same time, the thick vegetation makes Mistover Knap appear as an island surrounded by the sea, and indeed Captain Drew had decided to go and live there right because “a remote blue tinge on the horizon between the hills, visible from the cottage door, was traditionally believed to be the English Channel” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. VII, p. 68), and Eustacia spends much time looking through her spyglass, as if she were at sea.

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<sup>110</sup> Richard C. Carpenter, in an essay devoted to Hardy’s pictorialism, pointed out that the fact that light is Hardy’s most effective technique is linked to the great number of night scenes in *The Woodlanders* and in *The Return of the Native*, “where a sudden splash of light from a window, a fire, a lantern illuminates in startling contrast the characters and setting Hardy wishes us to visualize” (Richard c. Carpenter, ‘Hardy and the Old Masters’, *Boston University Studies in English* V, 1 (Spring 1961), pp. 18-28, p. 24).

Vegetation is therefore the main problem the inhabitants of Egdon Heath have to face. The distance between the landmarks mentioned in the novel, buildings included, is not so great, but the thick vegetation makes any journey a venture, especially at night or when it rains, or both, as on the tragic night of Eustacia's flight (on this occasion, Thomasin gets lost on her way from Blooms-End to the Quiet Woman Inn). Vegetation is what the natives are always busy about (by cutting furze and turf), and it is also the main threat to their buildings. As soon as a construction is deserted, nature reasserts its power over it and regains its place. Mrs Yeobright's house at Blooms-End runs this risk after her death. When Clym returns to the house almost two months after his mother's funeral, he finds that "a spider had already constructed a large web tying the door to the lintel, on the supposition that it was never to be opened again" (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. II, p. 306). In the following week, he is busy "working about the premises, sweeping leaves from the garden paths, cutting dead stalks from the flower-beds, and nailing up creepers which had been displaced by the autumn winds" (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. VI, p. 331).

Human constructions, even the most imposing and apparently lasting ones, are all subject to the inexorable advance of nature. The final stage of this process is symbolised by Blackbarrow (or Rainbarrow, as Hardy called it 1895), the element dominating the heath which plays an important role throughout the novel. The tumulus, despite being a human artefact, looks like a hill, even if its shape is strangely regular and therefore unique in the context of Egdon Heath. In building Blackbarrow, the Celts certainly drew inspiration from nature, but now the barrow is being reabsorbed into the landscape of the heath. The narrator, speaking of the barrow and of the Roman road, says that they are "almost crystallized to natural products by long continuance" (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 12). Only the natives and Diggory Venn know that the tumulus was made by men many centuries before. However, the appearance of a human figure upon the barrow is enough to make it look again as the man-made object it originally was. Surmounted by Eustacia, thus the tumulus appears to the reddleman:

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it there was the dome without the lantern: with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous. The vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above, all of these amounted only to unity. Looking at

this or that member of the group was not observing a complete thing, but a fraction of a thing. (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. II, p. 17)

The presence of Eustacia brings harmony, unity, regularity to a spot where irregularity is the dominant feature, so that the narrator describes the scene as “strangely homogeneous”. Thanks to a human figure, the barrow not only makes its artificial nature manifest, but even becomes a dome, an architectural element much more complex than a Celtic tumulus. For a moment, Blackbarrow stops being a man-made object almost completely incorporated into nature and is made to appear as the most accomplished example of Classical architecture, an impression intensified by the way Eustacia is described in Ch. VII, that is to say as a Greek deity to whom “Egdon was her Hades” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. VII, p. 67).<sup>111</sup> The fact that Blackbarrow, a Celtic tumulus, appears as a sort of St. Paul’s or St. Peter’s dome is another Hardyian irony, given that Egdon Heath is a place where religion, and Christianity in particular, is irrelevant.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, shortly afterwards the heathmen gather on the same dome-like barrow to perform a pagan rite, since in Egdon bonfires “are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. III, p. 21). Yet at the end of the novel Clym elects Blackbarrow as a stage for his Christian preaching because it occupies a central position and, being elevated, can be seen from many points. The barrow is indeed one of the few spots in Egdon where vegetation does not grow, except for ferns and heather, but this is due only to the fact that its summit is exposed to savage winds and rain.

Indeed the second problem human beings have to face is represented by weather conditions. On Egdon Heath, a land of extremes, atmospheric agents seem to be much more aggressive than anywhere else. Winds and storms on the one hand, and the heat on the other, are equally dreadful; the hill near Alderworth where Mrs Yeobright has rest – significantly called Devil’s Bellows – is as stiflingly hot in summer as it is blustering in winter. On the night of the tragedy, natural elements and human passions seem equally uncontrollable, and both men and buildings are subject to the violence of nature. Human constructions seem inadequate to resist the power of winds, as the description of Blooms-End on the fateful night suggests:

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<sup>111</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 206. Beatty observed that the figure on Rainbarrow has two functions: the first is to give a necessary finish to the scene; the second, to transform the barrow into a piece of architecture, with Eustacia acting as a living sculpture.

<sup>112</sup> See Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* cit., pp. 90-1. Here it is worth remembering that the stone to build St. Paul’s Cathedral was quarried in the still pagan Isle of Slings (see p. 31 of this thesis).

To Clym's regret it began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house, and filliped the eaves-droppings like peas against the panes. He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms, stopping strange noises in windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements and crevices, and pressing together the lead-work of the quarries where it had become loosened from the glass. It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet. (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. VIII, p. 344)

This scene, where Blooms-End is shaken by the winds and beaten by the rain, epitomises man's never-ending battle against nature. On Egdon Heath the condition of buildings is not so different from the condition of men. On the heath both human beings and their dwellings are overwhelmed by nature. The winner of the war between men and the environment is known since the first chapter, where Egdon is defined as an "untameable, Ishmaelitic thing" (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 11).<sup>113</sup> All that men can do is to try to survive, and consequently to build with the simple aim of protecting themselves, abandoning the ambition of competing with nature by means of architectural constructions. The inhabitants of Egdon Heath have learnt this lesson a long time ago. Houses and cottages are unpretentious; they are, like their owners, concealed under the thick vegetation. It is for this reason that on Egdon constructions never rise to the status of proper architecture, at least as Ruskin intended it when he wrote that "architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure".<sup>114</sup>

As already underlined in the 'Introduction', according to this notion of "architecture" a building can be defined as "architecture" if it is not only solid, but also built with the aim of pleasing the mind. If we stick to this definition, it is clear that in *The Return of the Native* there are a few buildings, but no architecture at all. Even the first requirement, i.e. that a building must be solid, well-built, is not wholly satisfied, but this is not due to the unskilfulness of the inhabitants of the heath regarding building techniques. Being able to stand against the inclement weather conditions and the encroaching vegetation is all that is to be expected from a building on Egdon Heath. There are indeed places, and Egdon Heath is one of them, where men have to give way to nature. Life in a place like Egdon is so harsh that there is no room for artistic ambitions. Any such ambition would be not only out of place, but

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<sup>113</sup> Indeed Tony Fincham stated that *The Return of the Native* is the only novel where "the landscape is the main protagonist, of greater significance than the human beings who crawl over its face like 'ants on a great plain' or 'flies on a billiard table'" (Tony Fincham, *Hardy's Landscape Revisited* cit., p. 255).

<sup>114</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 27.

completely useless for the reason that man has already lost his battle against nature. In short, in the setting of *The Return of the Native* nature cannot be a source of inspiration as in the Isle of Slings and in Cornwall because it is too hostile to human life.

On Egdon Heath, then, natural elements are so hostile that men's efforts are devoted exclusively to the struggle for survival and, as a consequence, buildings are not beautiful in a proper sense. Notwithstanding this, they do, even if in a small amount, contribute to the "mental health, power, and pleasure" of men because the heathmen feel safe and comfortable when at home. In the novel scenes taking place in interiors of any kind – from Diggory Venn's van<sup>115</sup> and Susan Nunsuch's cottage to the Quiet Woman Inn and Blooms End – are set in strong contrast with the outside. This opposition between a cosy, warm and bright interior and the cold, dark outside is particularly evident in the Mummies' Play at the Yeobrights'. This means that on Egdon buildings *are* a source of "mental health, power, and pleasure" *per se*, without the recourse to ornamentation. They contribute also to men's power, even though it is a very "feeble" power, given that nature is always stronger, as the inhabitants well know. So, elementary and humble as they are, the buildings of *The Return of the Native* are not inferior to other constructions featured in other novels which have the aesthetic requisites indicated by Ruskin to be called "architecture". They are indeed suitable for the kind of environment they belong to and, what is more, they show no ambition to rival nature. They are certainly functional and comfortable, and in this their special beauty resides.

Therefore on Egdon Heath, the most extreme setting of Hardy's novels, the environment poses problems of both practical and aesthetic nature. Men have to renounce any aesthetic ambition if they want to win the struggle for survival since, as stated above, man's power is limited in places of this kind, where nature is untameable. The natives are aware of their state of inferiority to nature, to which they submit with resignation. Not all of them, however, accept their fate with acquiescence: Clym Yeobright is indeed the one who dares to defy nature by using civilisation as a weapon. Yet Clym, although a native of Egdon Heath, cannot be compared to the other inhabitants. The main reason is that Clym has spent some years first in Budmouth/Weymouth and then in London and Paris working for a jeweller, so that the Clym who left the heath when he was a boy bears little resemblance to the Clym coming back home after seeing the world. Hardy did believe, as we have seen, that "experience

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<sup>115</sup> Here it is interesting to report what John Bayley said about the absence of proper homes in Hardy's novels. In *An Essay on Hardy*, he wrote that "few people in whom he is interested in the novels possess a proper home." He also remarked that "Venn's caravan, lurking in the nettle-grown hollow among the furze, is the most congenial domicile on Egdon; the least, the love-nest of the just married Clym and Eustacia" (John Bayley, *An Essay on Thomas Hardy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 20).

unteaches”,<sup>116</sup> and this is the main cause of the numerous unsuccessful returns in the *Wessex Novels*, where the “return of the native” is indeed a *leitmotif*. The problem affecting Hardy’s returning natives – or “*déracinés*”, as John Holloway called them<sup>117</sup> – is that they do not belong to their native place any longer, yet their origins continue to exert a strong influence on them, so that they are unable to adopt a truly new identity. One of the characters where this conflict determines the most tragic outcomes is Grace Melbury, whose education and refinement contribute to her estrangement from Little Hintock, as exemplified by the detail of her “encounter” with her own bedroom after her return, which “wore at once a look more familiar than when she had left it, and yet a face estranged” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 47). The comparison between Grace and Clym allows us to identify where the peculiarity of Clym lies. First of all he is far more experienced than Grace, as anyone realises by just looking at him (“it was really one of those faces which convey less the idea of so many years as its age than of so much experience as its store”, *The Return*, Book Second, Ch. VI, p. 135). Yet there is another substantial difference between Grace and Clym: while the only cause of Grace’s estrangement is her education, Clym is intrinsically different from the other natives. It is true that his experiences outside his native microcosm have transformed him, but it is also true that Clym’s personality has always been anomalous in comparison with those of the other inhabitants of the heath, as the narrator underlines:

He had been a lad of whom something was expected. Beyond this all had been chaos. That he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way, seemed equally probable. The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born. (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch. I, p. 165)

The other heathmen are aware of Clym’s peculiarity, coinciding with his being affected by what Hardy was later to call “the modern vice of unrest” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85). Unlike them, he does not accept the *status quo*, which implies a total submission to nature, and tries to bring civilisation into Egdon. The natives, though, instinctively know that Clym’s attempt is doomed to failure, even if they hope he will succeed: “There is an indefinite sense that he must be invading some region of singularity, good or bad. The devout hope is that he is doing well. The secret faith is that he is making a mess of it” (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch.

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<sup>116</sup> According to Philip Larkin, though, there is a maturing experience in Hardy, that is to say suffering, and modern men like Clym Yeobright are marked out by a greater sensibility to suffering (see Philip Larkin, ‘Wanted: Good Hardy Critic’, in *Required Writing. Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*, London, Faber and Faber, 1983, pp. 168-74, p. 172).

<sup>117</sup> John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument*, London, Macmillan, 1953, p. 285.



I, p. 166). When Clym illustrates his plan of becoming a teacher in the heath, Fairway comments that “in a few weeks he’ll learn to see things otherwise” (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch. I, p. 169). Unfortunately for Clym, the natives’ “secret faith” and Fairway’s statement prove true. The novel describes Clym’s progressive re-absorption into the heath as his attempts to civilise the heathmen, and to control his own inordinate passions, fail. Although Clym is defined as a product of the heath (see *The Return*, Book Third, Ch. II, p. 171), his peculiar constitution and his studies in Paris combine to prevent him from understanding that the plan he has in mind cannot succeed. Clym is too far ahead not of the times, but of the time of Egdon Heath, where prehistory has not ended yet. His plan consists in leading Egdon Heath from prehistory directly into modernity without passing through the intervening ages, thus failing to realise that the intermediate stages cannot be ignored:

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of these stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase. [...]

A man who advocates aesthetic effort and deprecates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether. (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch. II, pp. 170-1)

Clym therefore ignores that a comfortable life is necessary to allow people to devote themselves to intellectual aims. As the condition of architecture in Egdon makes clear, “aesthetic effort” cannot precede “social effort”. In a place where men are obliged to toil “out of doors in all winds and weathers” (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch. I, p. 168), there can hardly be any strength left to employ in aesthetic contemplation and in philosophical speculations. For the heathmen, nature is often an enemy to counteract if they want to survive, hence any aesthetic contemplation of the wild environment they live in is incomprehensible to them. Since they know that the untameable natural elements could crush them at any time, nature is never a source of delight or pleasure for them, but simply a constant presence turning at times into a real threat. That was very clear to Burke who, in his investigation about the origin of the emotion of the sublime, stressed its being founded on pain and danger. Yet he specified that “when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they

are delightful”.<sup>118</sup> Indeed there is not enough distance between the heathmen and their environment to allow them to experience the thrill of the sublime. Buildings represent temporary shelters to the natives, who are obliged to spend all day outdoors to make a living. Moreover, as we have seen cottages and houses continually risk falling prey to vegetation.

Therefore what Clym would like his neighbours to do is to become sensible to a kind of aesthetic pleasure without the material conditions necessary for experiencing it, that is to say the certainty of being safe. The fact that in Egdon Heath time has stopped at prehistory (or, to be precise, that Egdon Heath exists outside time)<sup>119</sup> means that the heathmen belong to an age when the modern sublime analysed by Burke was utterly unknown. It is no coincidence if the novel begins with a description of Egdon Heath where the narrator stresses the most frightening features of the place but, at the same time, explains why landscapes of this kind appeal to modern men. The description opening the novel impresses the reader because the heath is seen from above, from the aerial perspective of the narrator or from the perspective of someone who is contemplating Egdon from the outside – possibly the same Clym coming home. Certainly we do not see the heath with the eyes of the natives who, hidden under the thick vegetation, toil all day and try to ingratiate themselves with nature. The almost complete absence of humanity in the first totally descriptive chapter, entirely devoted to the heath, makes clear since the very beginning that here any effort to dominate nature is doomed to failure, thus foretelling Clym’s vain attempt to bring civilisation. The peculiar kind of beauty evoked in the first pages is meant to foreshadow where the flaw in Clym’s plan lies. By insisting on the sublime and on its appeal to modern men, the narrator induces us to consider the wide abyss separating Clym’s time from the natives’. When the narrator says of Egdon that “it was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 10), he clearly refers to Clym and modern men, belonging to a “provincial future” (*The Return*, Book Third, Ch. II, p. 170) if compared to the inhabitants of the heath, who cannot experience the sublime before being allowed to experience the beauty represented by the “smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 10) Egdon denies them.<sup>120</sup> There is indeed a great

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<sup>118</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* cit., pp. 36-7.

<sup>119</sup> As Isabelle Gadoin remarked, “en fusionnant ciel et terre, l’espace d’Egdon annule tout repère de temps” (Isabelle Gadoin, ‘La scène tragique dans *The Return of the Native* de Thomas Hardy’, *Études Anglaises*, 52, 1, 1999, pp. 5-17, p. 9).

<sup>120</sup> Regarding the basic change in the way wild places in Hardy’s Wessex counties came to be considered, Desmond Hawkins pointed out that *The Return of the Native* may have played an important role in this “revolution in taste” (Desmond Hawkins, ‘Hardy’s Wessex’, in *Essays by Divers Hands*, 43 (1984), pp. 75-89, p. 80). In particular, Hawkins draws our attention to the gap between the description of Piddletown Heath in John

difference between the beautiful and the sublime, which is a relatively modern emotion, as the following extraordinary passage from *The Return of the Native* sadly underlines:

Gay prospects wed happily with gay times; but alas if times be not gay. Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings over-sadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming.

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain, will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen. (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 10)

So Egdon Heath may well appeal to modern men, but Clym does not realise that the sublime is incomprehensible and even distasteful to young civilisations, to which the natives still belong. Here Hardy has recourse again to the parallel between the ages of man and the development of a civilisation to suggest that the heathmen have to go through youth and adulthood before reaching the old age,<sup>121</sup> when men, grown tired of “orthodox beauty”, turn to such “haggard” places as Iceland and Egdon Heath. Indeed the setting of *The Return of the Native* is far from being a “charming and fair” place:

Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for mere prettiness are utterly wanting. (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 10)

Egdon Heath does indeed embody all the characteristics of the sublime listed by Burke.<sup>122</sup> According to Burke, obscurity is necessary to induce a sense of terror, which is the

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Hutchins's *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, dating back to the 1770s, and a newspaper article written in the early 1980s where the author spoke enthusiastically of the heathland (see *ivi*).

<sup>121</sup> Indeed according to Simon Gatrell the heathmen perceive the heath as boundless, much as a child would do (see Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, London, Macmillan, 1993, p. 43).

<sup>122</sup> For a detailed analysis of the way in which Hardy used Burke's *Enquiry* as a sort of guide for the characterisation of Egdon Heath as a sublime place, see S. F. Johnson ('Hardy and Burke's "Sublime"', in *Style in Prose Fiction*, ed. Harold C. Martin, NY, Columbia University Press, 1959, pp 55-86) who argued that Egdon Heath concentrates all the features characterising the sublime according to Burke. On the same topic, see

fundamental cause of the sublime.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, “the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste [...] could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 9), that is to say when it is getting dark, and in the novel there are many scenes taking place at night. Secondly, sublime objects must be also powerful, given that “pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly”.<sup>124</sup> Egdon Heath is more powerful than any other thing, even civilisation. Being an “untameable, Ishmaelish thing”, the condition of both buildings and men in the novel confirms the superiority of the heath over human beings. As for vastness and infinity, Egdon is perceived as great and boundless by its inhabitants, for whom the heath is their world.<sup>125</sup> The boundaries of the heath are unknown to both the natives and the readers, since places lying outside the heath are seldom mentioned. The heath is, like the sea, vast and uniform, another source of the sublime.<sup>126</sup> Finally, Burke says that “all *general* privations are great, because they are all terrible”.<sup>127</sup> By “privation” Burke means “Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence”.<sup>128</sup> Egdon Heath certainly possesses the first three features, especially solitude, given that the heathmen live isolated from the rest of the world. Moreover, the natives are condemned to a solitary life because cottages and houses are isolated, as we have seen above. As for the last “privation”, Egdon Heath is all but silent, but “the linguistic peculiarity of the heath” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. VI, p. 55), consisting in the sound of the blowing winds and in animal cries, is equally frightening, as Burke himself acknowledged.<sup>129</sup>

As said above, the reason why this unorthodox beauty does not appeal to the heathmen is that their lives on the heath are in constant danger, whereas modern men coming there from civilised places where nature is under human control are confident enough to delight in the contemplation of the stormy spectacle of the heath. Yet the awareness of being safe does not alone explain why modern men are attracted to the sublime. According to Burke the reason is

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Richard Bevis, *The Road to Egdon Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature*, Montreal and Kingston; London, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>123</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* cit., pp. 54-9.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 60.

<sup>125</sup> Hardy conveyed the idea of Egdon Heath as an unlimited tract of land by uniting under the same name at least twelve distinct heaths (see *The Return*, 1895 ‘Preface’, p. 415).

<sup>126</sup> See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* cit., pp. 68-9.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65 (emphasis in the text).

<sup>128</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>129</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 75-8. Burke stated that sudden and loud sounds or, on the other hand, low and intermitting sounds are frightening.

that men consider themselves as having a share in the terrifying but grand spectacle they are contemplating:<sup>130</sup>

...whatever either on good or upon bad grounds tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates.<sup>131</sup>

Therefore when man, safe from risk, experiences the sublime he feels he is contributing to the vision in front of him. Not only is man aware that he is able to tame nature, but he also attributes to himself the work of nature. In other words, he thinks he is able to exert his influence on nature. Now, in the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* there are hints that man is seeing himself reflected in the gloomy landscape of Edgdon Heath. Despite being the enemy of civilisation and of man more at large, Edgdon is described as if it were a human being. The chapter itself is entitled ‘A *Face* on which Time makes but Little Impression’,<sup>132</sup> and further on the human aspect of the heath is emphasised through such remarks as “the *face* of the heath by its mere *complexion* added half-an-hour to eve” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 9) and “it had a lonely *face*, suggesting tragical possibilities” (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 11). The reason why modern men perceive the heath as a sort of extension of themselves is that this kind of landscape – hostile yet fascinating – is in fact not unlike human beings:

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man’s nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. (*The Return*, Book First, Ch. I, p. 11)

Modern men are able to feel the “recently learnt emotion” of the sublime because they are themselves sublime, i.e. dangerous and great at the same time. Technology has allowed them to tame what was considered to be untameable, while the heathmen are still at the mercy of

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew Radford thus explains Clym and his contemporaries’ preference for sublime views: “the ‘modernity’ that Clym embodies is a condition in which the mind is haunted by impulses it cannot fully comprehend, let alone regulate; impulses which adumbrate a primal and perennial connection to the apparently ‘obsolete’ energies emanating from Edgdon’s sandy terrain” (Andrew Radford, *Mapping the Wessex Novel: Landscape, History and the Parochial in British Literature, 1870-1940*, Continuum Books, 2010, p. 29). In his opinion, Clym provides the link between the animism of the heathmen and higher civilisations.

<sup>131</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* cit., p. 46.

<sup>132</sup> In this and in the following quotations from *The Return of the Native* the emphases are mine.

nature. Places like Egdon Heath are so frightening (but at the same time delightful) because man is actually terrified by his own power. So modern men are terrified not only by nature in its wildest attire, but also by their awareness of having acquired the means to tame even the wildest places. Man's delight comes from his seeing himself mirrored in nature, but the image sent back by nature reveals man's most brutal side. So man is afraid not so much of wild nature, but of his own – wild – power.

To what extent Hardy grasped the real nature of the emotion of the sublime which was implied in Burke's investigation can be better understood if we consider how engineering features in his novels. The most impressive work of engineering in the *Wessex Novels* is the railway tunnel in *A Laodicean*, which is indeed never defined as "beautiful", since Somerset is rather impressed by its massive proportions:

The tunnel that had seemed so small from the surface was a vast archway when he reached its mouth, which emitted, as a contrast to the sultry heat on the slopes of the cutting, a cool breeze, that had travelled a mile underground from the other end. Far away in the darkness of this silent subterranean corridor he could see that other end as a mere speck of light. (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XII, p. 82)

On closer examination, the tunnel is in fact a source of the sublime, since the emotion experienced by Somerset is a kind of admiration mixed with fear, reaching its apex when he is almost run over by a train. Not only does the tunnel excite terror, but it also possesses other features typical of sublime objects. The narrator insists on its majestic proportions, its obscurity and its depth. Moreover, the train is preceded by a "shrill whistle" (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XII, p. 82), and a sudden sound is one of the causes of the sublime listed by Burke. So, as it happened for the description of Egdon Heath, Burkean features of the sublime characterise the tunnel as an artefact particularly appealing to modern men, including George Somerset, who is attracted and at the same time frightened by man's power over nature and time, given that the tunnel is not only powerful but also likely to last for long. What according to Ruskin was the source of our pleasure in works of architecture – "the intelligence and resolution of man in overcoming physical difficulty"<sup>133</sup> – is, powerfully intensified, also the source of the sublime in works of engineering, where man's technical skills aim at responding to the challenges posed by the environment. Our awareness of man's boldest ingenuity is the source of a kind of delight founded, basically, on fear.

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<sup>133</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 9, p. 64. On this point, see Kristine Ottesen Garrigan, *Ruskin on Architecture: His Thought and Influence*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1973, p 73.

Therefore there is a great difference between the kind of fear experienced by medieval masons (and by the inhabitants of Edgon Heath) and the terror which is the cause of the sublime. Confronted with the Cliff without a Name, Knight and Elfride are afraid not so much of the cliff in itself, but of its human appearance. As we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, the cliff frightens Elfride because it “has a horrid *personality*” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 193, my emphasis) and the narrator explains that cliffs have, like human beings, their own personality (see *Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. XXI, p. 192 and also p. 39 of this thesis). Modern men see themselves reflected in the wild landscape of Cornwall,<sup>134</sup> and their own image frightens them. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where there is a perfect interchange between architecture and nature, architecture too is frightening, since men see themselves reflected also in what appears as sublime in it. The first description of Endelstow church (quoted on p. 35 of this thesis) emphasises its sublime character. The church, defined as “lonely, “black and bare”, a “monolithic termination” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, Ch. IV, p. 23), possesses the very qualities of the sublime individuated by Burke. Medieval architecture can frighten modern men also because of the hideous aspects of its ornamental elements, like the gargoyles of the tower of Weatherbury church, thus described in *Far from the Madding Crowd*:

The tower of Weatherbury church was a square erection of fourteenth-century date, having two stone gargoyles on each of the four faces of its parapet. [...] Weatherbury tower was a somewhat early instance of the use of an ornamental parapet in parish as distinct from cathedral churches, and the gargoyles, which are the necessary correlatives of a parapet were exceptionally prominent – of the boldest cut that the hand could shape, and of the most original design that a human brain could conceive. There was that symmetry in their distortion, so to speak, which is less the characteristic of British than of Continental grotesques of the period, though all four were different from each other. A beholder was convinced that nothing on earth could be more hideous than those he saw on the south side – until he went round to the north. (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XLV, pp. 274-5)

One gargoyle in particular frightens the modern observer: “It was too human to be called like a dragon, too impish to be like a man, too animal to be like a fiend, and not enough like a bird to be called a griffin” (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XLV, p. 275).

If, according to Ruskin’s reconstruction of the character of the medieval masons, they humbly acknowledged and accepted their fear, to the point of making the natural animal

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<sup>134</sup> The Cornish landscape in the vicinity of the coast too is a good example of the sublime. As Egdon Heath, it is described as vast, uniform, lonely and powerful. In addition, the wild roar of the sea and sound of the blowing winds are as frightening as the perpendicular façade of the Cliff without a Name.

world even more horrid than it was in nature,<sup>135</sup> disgust and fear are, instead, the reactions of modern observers, whose attitude in front of the gargoyle is not so different from Knight's in front of the trilobite on the Cliff without a Name. While Gothic builders, according to Ruskin's reconstruction of their artistic temper, would have copied its form in their buildings notwithstanding their fear of nature,<sup>136</sup> Knight is horrified by the half-human half-natural creature, and Weatherbury modern parishioners are disgusted by the half-human half-natural gargoyle, since that confusion of human and natural, which appeared so natural to Ruskin's medieval artisans, seems to call in doubt – to modern eyes – man's control over nature. At the heart of the kind of architecture we have discussed in the previous chapter – i.e., an architecture having no relationship with the surrounding landscape – there is precisely modern man's proud assumption of having been able to tame nature, from both a practical and an aesthetic point of view. Yet the absence of proper architecture on Egdon Heath, and also the plot of *The Return of the Native* suggest instead that the dominion of modern man over nature, and over his own natural drives and passions, may be just a self-complacent illusion. Not only has man no share in the sublime spectacle of the heath, but the heath indifferently watches over man's struggles. So Clym fails and, in addition, Egdon “reduce[s] to insignificance [...] the wildest turmoil of a single man” (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. II, p. 312).

Indeed in Hardy's Wessex man has to give way to nature not only in such wild places as Egdon Heath, but also in places where nature is apparently less threatening to both men and architecture, and seems even to enhance the beauty of buildings, providing modern men with another kind of aesthetic pleasure, that is to say the picturesque. In the *Wessex Novels* two places in particular illustrate where the danger of the picturesque lies according to Hardy, i.e. Little Hintock, the setting of *The Woodlanders*, and the spot where the Old House is built in *Desperate Remedies*. Though less hostile to human life than Egdon Heath, Little Hintock is nevertheless a place where nature is stronger than man, as many events in the novel make

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<sup>135</sup> Here it is worth remembering that, according to Ruskin, one of the characteristics distinguishing “noble” grotesque from “base” grotesque is indeed “horror”. Although Ruskin individuates two kinds of grotesque – a ludicrous and a fearful one – playful and terrible elements are usually combined (see John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 11, p. 151). Therefore “noble” grotesque has horror in it, while “base” grotesque reveals a kind of fear which is not genuine, because “the base soul has no fear of sin, and no hatred of it” (*Ibidem*, p. 176). What Ruskin suggests here is that, since nature is God's expression, the fear of nature experienced by medieval men is in fact a sign of their fear of God.

<sup>136</sup> In ‘The Nature of Gothic’, Ruskin divided men into three categories: the Purists, who try to mend nature and consider just what is good in man and in nature; the Sensualists, who perceive and represent exclusively the evil; and the Naturalists, who take both man and landscape in their wholeness. Ruskin claimed that the Gothic builders belonged to the greatest class of men, i.e. the Naturalists. According to Ruskin, the presence of frightening and horrid elements in Gothic art is therefore a sign of the noble sensibility of medieval men (see John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 10, pp. 221-31).



clear. Giles Winterborne, despite his high “level of intelligent intercourse with Nature” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. III, Ch. XI, p. 330), dies because he moves to a “wretched little shelter of the roughest kind” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. III, Ch. VIII, p. 304) which lets the incessant rain come in; Mr. Melbury’s body bears all the marks left by his battle against vegetation (which coincides with his trade in this case) in the shape of cramps and other ills; John South has a nervous breakdown due to the tall elm next to his house and we are informed that “others have been like it afore in Hintock” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. XIV, p. 101); Mrs Charmond and Grace Melbury get lost in the wood. Finally, Fitzpiers is afraid of travelling alone at night in the woodland because nobody would save him if in danger.

In brief, the particular kind of landscape of Little Hintock plays an important role in the plot, in the characterisation of the characters and in the relationships between them. For example, Marty and Giles, being the only two who can read the “hieroglyphs” of this “wondrous world of sap and leaves” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. III, Ch. XI, p. 330), are different from all the other characters, even from the other natives. Architecture too is subject to nature, even if buildings in Little Hintock are, unlike those in Egdon, less modest, and so more significantly contributing to what Ruskin called men’s “mental health, power, and pleasure”. The most pretentious building is obviously Hintock House, the Elizabethan mansion where Mrs Charmond lives. Her mansion is the most remarkable building in the novel but, at the same time, it is also the most threatened by nature. Indeed the house, though described as one of the finest examples of Elizabethan architecture, stands in an unfavourable position, i.e. in a hole: “The situation of the house, prejudicial to humanity, was a stimulus to vegetation, on which account an endless shearing of the heavy-armed ivy went on, and a continual lopping of trees and shrubs” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 58).

The irony resides in the fact that the very vegetation which threatens Hintock House lends it a peculiar beauty. The house, whose front is actually “ordinary” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 57), is turned into “a spot to inspire the painter and poet of still life” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 58) by the creepers and the lichen coating its walls. However, the current occupants of Hintock House have to pay a high price for its picturesque beauty:

It was an edifice built in times when human constitutions were damp-proof, when shelter from the boisterous was all that men thought of in choosing a dwelling-place, the insidious being beneath their notice; and its hollow site was an ocular reminder by its unfitness for modern lives of the fragility to which these have declined. (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 58)

Here the narrator makes us consider the conflict between man and nature in a new perspective. Although the spot where Hintock House was built has always been unfit for a salubrious human life, in the past men were more resistant to inclement weather conditions, in this case dampness. The reason why the original builders of the mansion had chosen such a hollow place was that it was a perfect shelter from gales and storms, but modern men seem to be of more delicate constitution. Moreover, there is also a problem regarding the evolution of building techniques. While human beings have evolved (though for the worse, it seems, becoming more refined and so more fragile), buildings techniques have not or, to be more precise, they have not evolved at the same pace. Indeed, the narrator underlines that “the highest architectural cunning could have done nothing to make Hintock House dry and salubrious” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 58). Felice Charmond has bought “showy Versailles furniture” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 252) and has decorated the interior in a sort of Baroque-Rococo style in order “to counteract the fine old English gloom of the place” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 252). Yet whatever she does, nature cannot be kept outside and she complains to Fitzpiers that she “could hear the scrape of snails creeping up the window glass” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. II, Ch. XI, p. 197). Mrs Charmond, therefore, besides being a fitting example of a fragile modern constitution, is also utterly insensible to the special beauty of the place. The picturesqueness of her own estate does not touch her, although she poses as an inquisitive traveller with writing ambitions. The contrast between the artful and theatrical Mrs Charmond and her house could not be more striking. She is unfit for this kind of habitat, where she happens to live but where she looks like an intruder.<sup>137</sup> In any case, we do not know if she would have been able to cope with the loneliness and dampness of Hintock House in the end because a disappointed lover makes her leave the stage.

However, damp and insalubrious Hintock House certainly is, and Mrs Charmond is not the only one who is unable to tolerate the encroaching vegetation,<sup>138</sup> the nearness of animals and the moisture.<sup>139</sup> A similar example can be found in Hardy’s first novel, *Desperate Remedies*,

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<sup>137</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Yukio Kaneko of the Seinan Gakuin University of Fukuoka for his helpful intervention at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Thomas Hardy Conference, where he pointed out that in Hardy’s novels there are many examples of English country houses now owned by *nouveaux riches* and not by members of the aristocracy.

<sup>138</sup> The encroaching vegetation consists in ivy and other creepers, that is to say parasite plants, as if to remind us that the occupant of the house too is actually a parasite.

<sup>139</sup> From this point of view, Little Hintock is a place where different human beings’ ability to adapt to a natural environment can be observed. Michael Millgate wrote that in *The Woodlanders* Hardy represented a small group of characters different as to birth, class, education, and wealth in an isolated, remote, claustrophobic setting. These characters are then subject to “a wide range of misfortunes which nature, society, sexual drive, human folly, and simple accident can bring”. Moreover, Hardy “transplants exotic growths (Mrs Charmond and Fitzpiers) from elsewhere” and “takes one promising plant (Grace Melbury) from its natural soil, forces it in

where the Old House, now divided into cottages and used as a storehouse, has been replaced by the Great House. The reason is that the Old House is “dismal” and “like most old houses stands too low down in the hollow to be healthy”.<sup>140</sup> Again, the problem with the old mansion is that it lies in a hollow, suitable for vegetation because it is damp but unsuitable for modern people’s dwellings. Unlike Hintock House, the old mansion of *Desperate Remedies* has been neglected and is not inhabited by the upper classes anymore. As a consequence, both the exterior and the interior have been subject to changes and decay. Partitions have been inserted to make the house suitable for the labourers and their families, but the most irreparable damages have been caused by vegetation allied with neglect. Indeed, while at Hintock House there is a continuous lopping of trees and shearing of ivy going on, here the gateway of the Old House is “nearly covered with creepers, which had clambered over the eaves of the sinking roof” (*Desperate Remedies*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 99) and the paving of the court has been damaged by the grass. The result is that, as one of Mrs Aldcyffe’s workmen says, “the whole carcass is full of cracks” (*Desperate Remedies*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 100). So the only difference between the two buildings is that the Old House is further on in the process of absorption into nature because men have given up their battle against nature, while this has yet to happen at Hintock House, even if we are left to wonder about the future of the mansion after Mrs Charmond’s death.

The mansions featuring in *The Woodlanders* and in *Desperate Remedies* share many characteristics, and they are both explicitly described as picturesque spots. What is more, their particular kind of beauty is due not so much to some architectural worth, but to that same luxuriant vegetation which threatens them. This does not mean that the two buildings do not meet Hardy’s approval, Tudor manor houses being, together with Norman Gothic churches, Hardy’s favourite buildings. The Old House of *Desperate Remedies* and Hintock House, though, are gradually being incorporated into the landscape, so if their architectural worth is indisputable, it is now gradually disappearing and being absorbed back into nature. Regarding the Old House, Beatty observed that “in the now damp old manor house, once as much prized as the new house, nature alone is left to adorn and weather the old stones and walls.”<sup>141</sup>

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hothouse conditions, and then transplants it back to its place of origin” (Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* cit., p. 250).

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* [1871], ed. Patricia Ingham, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 60. Further references to this edition (referred to as *Desperate Remedies*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

<sup>141</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 57.

This advancement of nature into the very heart of architecture raises many serious problems. Besides making living conditions difficult, when not impossible, it also raises questions of aesthetic nature. Beatty's statement grasps the problem fully: where does the beauty of these two buildings come from? What kind of beauty are we contemplating when we look at Hintock House or at the Old House? Indeed, it is no coincidence if the two buildings are both defined as "picturesque". Again, we must turn to John Ruskin and his discussion of the "picturesque" in relation to architecture in order to understand Hardy's critique of the "picturesque". In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in particular in 'The Lamp of Memory', Ruskin criticises the widespread opinion according to which vegetation emphasises the beauty of a building. First, he defines "picturesqueness" as "*parasitical* sublimity;<sup>142</sup> *i.e.*, a sublimity dependent on the accidents, or on the least essential characters, of the objects to which it belongs".<sup>143</sup> While sublimity resides in the substance of what we contemplate, picturesqueness is found in its "accidental or external qualities",<sup>144</sup> that is to say qualities which have no necessary relations to the object we contemplate. Ruskin then applies this distinction between sublimity and picturesqueness to architecture. Since picturesque beauty is a "superinduced and accidental beauty",<sup>145</sup> it is usually "sought in ruin, and supposed to consist in decay".<sup>146</sup> When this is the case, the "parasitical" sublimity we seek resides in "the rents, or fractures, or stains, or vegetation, which assimilate the architecture with the work of Nature".<sup>147</sup> It is not an intrinsic architectural value what we appreciate when contemplating picturesque buildings, but an external, accidental quality which has nothing to do with the building itself.

Ruskin's condemnation of picturesqueness is important to understand the aesthetic problem generated by nature invading architecture in Hardy's novels. Even if the descriptions of the two mansion houses clearly underline the beauty of the spots, there is nonetheless a sense in which that kind of beauty is not a genuine one because we appreciate the decay of the buildings caused by nature and the encroaching vegetation more than the buildings as such. It

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<sup>142</sup> In the first volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin thus defined the sublime: "Anything which elevates the mind is sublime, and elevation of mind is produced by the contemplation of greatness of any kind; but chiefly, of course, by the greatness of the noblest things. Sublimity is, therefore, only another word for the effect of greatness upon the feelings; - greatness, whether of matter, space, power, virtue, or beauty: and there is perhaps no desirable quality of a work of art, which, in its perfection, is not, in some way or degree, sublime" (John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Vol. I*, in *The Works of John Ruskin* cit., Vol. 3, p. 128). Therefore Burke's and Ruskin's concepts of the sublime do not seem to coincide.

<sup>143</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 236 (emphasis in the text).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 237.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 240.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 241.

<sup>147</sup> *Ivi*.

is true that nature enhances the beauty of architecture, but that is true up to a certain point, beyond which nature is only defacing architecture. Yet the dividing line is a subtle one: for example in the busy manufacturing town of Casterbridge, houses reveal “mossy gardens at the back, glowing with nasturtiums, fuchsias, scarlet geraniums, “bloody warriors”, snap-dragons, and dahlias”.<sup>148</sup> This is precisely what distinguishes Casterbridge from any other manufacturing town, where nature is only exploited and no sign of love for it is to be seen (see *Mayor*, Ch. IX, p. 59). Something similar is to be found in *A Laodicean*, where the apparently least appealing building in the *Wessex Novels*, i.e. the railway tunnel, impresses George Somerset for two reasons, its being indistinguishable from the surrounding environment and its romantic aspect:

The absurdity of the popular commonplace that science, steam, and travel must always be unromantic and hideous, was proved on the spot. On either slope of the deep cutting, green with long grass, grew drooping young trees of ash, beech, and other flexible varieties, their foliage almost concealing the actual railway which run along the bottom, its thin steel rails gleaming like silver threads in the depths. The vertical front of the tunnel, faced with brick that had once been red, was now weather-stained, lichened, and mossed over in harmonious hues of rusty-browns, pearly greys, and neutral greens, at the very base appearing a little blue-black spot like a mouse-hole – the tunnel’s mouth.<sup>149</sup>

Seen from afar, the tunnel is almost invisible because nature has begun to work on it. The vegetation growing all around the tunnel is so varied and luxuriant that this description could not be out of place in *The Woodlanders* or in *Tess*. For example, when further on George has to dive into “the long grass, bushes, late summer flowers, moths, and caterpillars” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XII, p. 82), we are reminded of Talbothays in summer, where Tess walks amid the “profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime” (*Tess*, Ch. XIX, p. 122). The tunnel built by Paula’s father has, unlike the Baptist chapel described at the beginning of the novel, become part of nature, as the comparison with a mouse-hole suggests. Yet the passage quoted above is slightly ambivalent. The view is aesthetically pleasing only owing – it seems – to the agency of nature, rather than to the tunnel itself. Were it not for the vegetation, the tunnel would not look pleasing at all.

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* [1886], ed. Dale Kramer, with an ‘Introduction’ by Pamela Dalziel, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004 (repr. 2008), Ch. IX, p. 57. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Mayor*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean* [1881], ed. John Schad, London, Penguin, 1997, Book the First, Ch. XII, p. 81. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Laodicean*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

Yet there is a point beyond which vegetation, instead of contributing to the beauty of a building, is prejudicial to it. The Old House may be pleasing to look at, but nobody would like to live there. The circumstance that the old mansion has been adapted for labourers is telling, as if to suggest that the possibility of building a new house in a more salubrious place is a privilege which only the well-to-do can afford. The existence of a new manor house near the old one is a feature unique in Hardy's novels, as Beatty pointed out. This very fact is indicative of "the wealth of its owners", who "were able to abandon the Elizabethan house a quarter of a mile away".<sup>150</sup> The same possibility is of course denied to lower-class people, the actual inhabitants of the picturesque Old House. In 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', Hardy criticised the very idea of picturesqueness and its widespread popularity, and all those who stuck to a romantic idea of the countryside. Hardy admitted that progress was causing serious drawbacks in Dorset, such as the feeling of rootlessness in those who moved to town; yet he also acknowledged that people cannot be condemned to a miserable life just to satisfy our desire for picturesque scenes. In Hardy's words, "the *artistic* merit of their old condition is scarcely a reason why they should have continued in it when other communities were marching on so vigorously towards uniformity and mental equality. It is only the old story that progress and *picturesqueness* do not harmonise."<sup>151</sup>

The kind of picturesque Hardy refers to in this explicit passage is of course one which implies no sympathy in the beholder, an unsympathetic picturesque very similar to the "surface-picturesque" (as opposed to the "true" or "noble picturesque") criticised by Ruskin in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*. While in "noble picturesque" there is a sign of "the sympathy of the artist with his subject",<sup>152</sup> the "lower picturesque ideal is eminently a *heartless* one".<sup>153</sup> Ruskin lists the objects the enthusiast of the surface-picturesque is fond of:

Fallen cottage – desolate villa – deserted village – blasted heath – mouldering castle – to him, so that they do but show jagged angles of stone and timber, are all sights equally joyful. Poverty, and darkness, and guilt, bring in their several contributions to his treasury of pleasant thoughts. The shattered window, opening into black and ghastly rents of wall, the foul rag or straw wisp stopping them, the dangerous roof, decrepit floor and stair, ragged misery, or wasting age of the

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<sup>150</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, 'Introduction' to Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* [1871], *The New Wessex Edition* cit., Vol. I, pp. 11-31, pp. 20-1.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' [1883], in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* cit., pp. 168-91, p. 181 (my emphasis).

<sup>152</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Vol. IV*, in *The Works of John Ruskin* cit., Vol. 6, p. 23.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19 (emphasis in the text).

inhabitants, – all these conduce, each in due measure, to the fullness of his satisfaction.<sup>154</sup>

The signs of decay and neglect dear to the lover of surface-picturesque are produced not only by nature, but also by the age of a building, as we will see in the second part of this thesis. If a building is comparatively old, its bad conditions are a visible sign of its age, which is – paradoxically – also what we appreciate in architecture according to Ruskin, who wrote that the “glory” of a building “is in its Age”,<sup>155</sup> and also according to Hardy, who became a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Yet if the cracks are on a new building in the course of being encroached by vegetation, their effect is very different. Indeed Hardy would have agreed with the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl,<sup>156</sup> who observed that “we are as disturbed at the sight of decay in newly made artifacts (premature aging) as we are at the traces of fresh interventions into old artifacts (conspicuous restorations)”.<sup>157</sup> For example, if we compare the current condition of the castle of the Fitzpiers family in *The Woodlanders* with Hintock House, we become aware of some substantial differences. The castle is further on in the process towards decay; now it is a ruin used by a farmer to shelter his cattle. Looking at it, Grace feels inclined to a sympathetic “melancholy romanticism” (*Woodlanders*, Vol. II, Ch. VII, p. 162), which is a natural reaction in front of a scene of this kind. We cannot but agree with her feeling, since the castle is much older than Hintock House (it is Norman, we are informed) and its decayed condition, being due to the lapse of time, makes it venerable to our eyes. Our sympathetic feeling is enhanced also by the circumstance that it has also become a useful shelter for the cattle. Conversely, there are other examples in the *Wessex Novels* proving that for Hardy premature decay caused by nature does not please our eye, let alone our mind, when it affects buildings serving a practical purpose. One is the ruinous mill not far from Knapwater House in *Desperate Remedies* where Cytherea resolves

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<sup>154</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters Vol. IV*, in *The Works of John Ruskin* cit., Vol. 6, p. 19. However, it must be borne in mind that Ruskin was very critical about the use of the picturesque in painting, but he was much more sympathetic about its presence in architecture. Indeed picturesque qualities were for Ruskin signs of the age of a building and of its relationship with the surrounding environment (see Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 58-60, and Leone Carlo Forti, *John Ruskin: un profeta per l'architettura*, Genova, Compagnia dei librai, 1983, p. 56).

<sup>155</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 234.

<sup>156</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Isabelle Gadoin, thanks to whom I became aware of the analogies between Riegl's ideas about monuments and their preservation and Hardy's opinions about it. For Gadoin's observations about Riegl and Hardy, see Isabelle Gadoin, 'Du mirage à la cité interdite: visions de Christminster dans *Jude the Obscure* de Thomas Hardy', *Academia.edu*, web, 10 October 2014 (<[https://www.academia.edu/9953051/Du\\_mirage\\_%C3%A0\\_la\\_cit%C3%A9\\_interdite\\_visions\\_de\\_Christminster\\_dans\\_Jude\\_the\\_Obscure\\_de\\_Thomas\\_Hardy/](https://www.academia.edu/9953051/Du_mirage_%C3%A0_la_cit%C3%A9_interdite_visions_de_Christminster_dans_Jude_the_Obscure_de_Thomas_Hardy/)>), pp. 1-11.

<sup>157</sup> Alois Riegl, 'The modern cult of monuments: its character and origin', trans. by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, Vol. 25 (1982), pp. 20-51, p. 32.

to marry Manston (see *Desperate Remedies*, Vol. II, Ch. IV, p. 216). Mills, together with barns, are the most useful and, therefore, enduring buildings in Hardy's novels. There is no sympathy then for its ruinous state, and we simply wonder how that could be if "the defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126). In all probability, the mill was abandoned because man lost his battle against nature, as the condition of the near Old House suggests. Another example is the tower on Rings-Hill Speer in *Two on a Tower*. Although the tower dates back to 1782 and is therefore comparatively recent, vegetation has already covered its base, and the staircase "was choked with daws' nests and feathers"<sup>158</sup> when Swithin first enters it, after thirty or forty years of neglect. The process of assimilation of the tower into nature is far advanced because it has never been inhabited, at least until Swithin takes possession of it. The tower is indeed a monument, that is to say an artefact built to commemorate a person (as in this case) or an event, and monuments, being not meant in origin to serve a practical purpose or to be inhabited, are particularly liable to the destroying invasion of nature. And the most terrible consequence of the premature decay of monuments is the loss of the memory they are meant to preserve: although the tower is clearly visible from afar, nobody remembers the person it commemorates. The feeling of melancholy stirred up by the vision of the neglected tower has more to do with memories being lost than with the decay *per se*.

So decaying mills, dwellings and other functional buildings are even more melancholic because they are evidence of the failure of man's daily struggle for survival against nature (and time, as we will see). In the already quoted description of the Yeobrights' house shaken by the winds in *The Return of the Native* quoted on p. 69 of this thesis, the narrator says that "it was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet" (*The Return*, Book Fifth, Ch. VIII, p. 344). Yet there is a substantial difference between Clym's house and decayed manor houses and churches. In the case of Clym's house the main focus is on the individual inside leading a life of struggle against nature. In the case of decayed manor houses and churches, as it will be argued in the second part of this thesis, the main focus is instead on the preservation of memory, one of the main functions of architecture according to Hardy.

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Two on a Tower* [1882], ed. Sally Shuttleworth, London, Penguin, 1999, Ch. I, p. 9.



Yet when Hardy wrote that “life, after all, is more than art”,<sup>159</sup> he seemed clearly to suggest that, when looking at – and evaluating – a building, our first consideration should be of the life of its occupants, if it is likely to be comfortable or not. Hence Hardy’s critique of the picturesque clearly echoes a similar critique by Ruskin. In Hardy’s novels there is an indirect attack on the form of pleasure we derive from the picturesque (whose main ingredients are an encroaching vegetation and the decay caused by the advance of nature to the detriment of architectural objects) overtly condemned by Ruskin, especially in its extreme version which he calls “surface-picturesque”. Nature in the shape of picturesqueness can be even more threatening than the forces at work on Egdon Heath. Apparently mild nature can actually be architecture’s worst enemy both from a practical and an aesthetic point of view. Creepers, combined with humidity and a certain kind of soil, can be as prejudicial to a building and to human life as the strong winds and the impenetrable vegetation on Egdon Heath, while in its mild version, nature might not simply emphasise the beauty of a building, but rather corrupt and modify the architectural object, making it difficult, if not impossible, to tell where the worth of a building lies. When looking at such picturesque buildings as Hintock House, it is not actually proportions, decoration, style, functionality we enjoy, but the ambiguous work of nature, who has obliterated the original appearance of the mansion. The second reason why “picturesque nature” is more threatening than “extreme nature” is to be found in the idle viewers it creates: not the natives who struggle against extreme nature as on Egdon Heath, but idle lookers-on indulging in a kind of unsympathetic aesthetic pleasure, taking delight in decay and rottenness. Similar problems arise when we consider the reactions to the marks left by time on Wessex buildings, which will be the subject of the second part of this thesis.

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<sup>159</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 251.

**Part II**  
**Architecture and Time**

‘...sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. At times even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices’ accent, and also the features of the faces; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place.’

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

“Time is an excellent teacher – unfortunately it kills all its pupils”<sup>160</sup>, once wrote Hector Berlioz. Thomas Hardy would have agreed with this aphorism, which is true for human beings and human artefacts alike. After all, one of Hardy’s favourite maxims was by the German writer Ludwig Börne: “Nothing is permanent but change”.<sup>161</sup> Hardy was particularly interested in the inevitability of changes, which affect not only men, but also what they leave behind them in the hope of being remembered by future generations. From this point of view, time, together with nature, is architecture’s worst enemy. Yet while the destructive power of nature is immediately apparent to anyone, it is not so easy to witness the destructive power of time. Even if time is widely considered as prejudicial as nature to architecture, its mechanisms of destruction are not always immediately recognisable. First of all because a single human life is not long enough to witness the workings and the effects of the passing of time on architectural objects. If the consequences of encroaching vegetation and humidity are observable almost at once, the same cannot be said of the decay produced by time. Yet time is the main “intensifier” of decay, since even the aggression of nature and the erosion caused by winds or by generations of inhabitants become more and more apparent with the passing of years. It is true that in such cases as the tower on Rings-Hill Speer in Hardy’s *Two on a Tower* decay can come up very quickly (so that Michael Irwin actually suggested that in Hardy’s fiction “it is not time, but motion of various kinds that gradually undermine physical substance: the movement of winds and weather, people, insects and animals”),<sup>162</sup> but in general we can say that nature and human beings, who are the main culprits for the wearing out of buildings, do need the agency of the passing of time to obliterate human artefacts.

Yet, on the other hand, the passing of time, even if it implies ruin and decay, is also what adds to the value of a building, and this is true of many of the Wessex buildings as well. The

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<sup>160</sup> “Le temps est un grand maître, dit-on; le malheur est qu’il soit un maître inhumain qui tue ses élèves.....” (Hector Berlioz, ‘Letter to Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint George’, 27 Nov., 1856, in *Correspondance générale* [1972], ed. Pierre Citron, 8 vols., Paris, Flammarion, 1989, Vol. 5, p. 390).

<sup>161</sup> Hardy quoted Börne’s sentence when he received the Freedom of the Borough of Dorchester (see Thomas Hardy, [Speech on Receiving the Freedom of the Borough] cit., p. 321).

<sup>162</sup> Michael Irwin, *Reading Hardy’s Landscapes*, London, Macmillan, 2000, p. 93.

age of a building is indeed one of the aspects we consider when we behold it, its antiquity being one of the factors determining its value. Indeed we usually tend to consider an old artefact as more valuable than a brand-new one because of its very antiquity. Therefore the passing of time poses as many problems of aesthetic and practical kind as the effect of nature. Time, much in the same way as nature, can be simultaneously harmful and beneficial to architecture, although in the case of time the passing of years is beneficial only from an aesthetic and a historical point of view. Indeed while buildings, as we have seen, often benefit from nature also from a practical point of view – since nature provides men both with suitable materials and with building techniques – the passing of time never determines functional improvements, even when ancient building methods prove – as we will see – more effective than modern ones. The age of an artefact is a value *per se*. When we behold an old building we are struck by the fact that it witnessed historical events and that it was able to stand throughout the centuries, whereas the passing of time is always harmful to constructions as far as practical issues are concerned. Hence we cannot say of time what has been said of nature, i.e. that nature can be architecture's best ally. Time is always detrimental to human artefacts. Man is sometimes able to tame natural forces, even if not for long, especially in the most hostile environments. The passing of time, on the contrary, is inexorable; nothing can be done to counteract it. As Samuel Hynes wrote about the pervasiveness of change in the work of Thomas Hardy, "everything changes, because everything exists in Time";<sup>163</sup> and since change is in the order of things all buildings are doomed to decay. All that men can do is to soothe the effects of the passing of time by making repairs and by preserving buildings in the best possible way, but knowing at the same time that buildings cannot stand forever. Although works of architecture are generally built to go beyond the limits imposed to human nature, they are nonetheless as perishable as any other human artefact. Even if the life of a building is usually much longer than a human life, yet constructions are not eternal and men – both those who built them and their descendents – must accept that it is not in their power to save them from the grasp of time.

What has been said until now is true of real buildings, yet when we come to consider buildings as they feature in literature, and in Hardy's novels in particular, things are slightly different. First of all, if the span of human life is too short to fully grasp the devastating effects of the passing of time, the perspective of the omniscient narrator is instead ample

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<sup>163</sup> Samuel Hynes, 'Hardy's Historians', in *Thomas Hardy Annual N° 5*, ed. Norman Page, London, Macmillan, 1987, pp. 102-18, p. 116.

enough. Now, the narrative voices employed by Hardy are undoubtedly good examples of omniscient narrators. Hardy's narrators are endowed with the gift of observing what happens from a wider perspective, their time scale by far exceeding the characters' time scale. Hence they are much better informed about the past (and sometimes even about the future) of a building than the characters are. Hardy's narrators serve the purpose of informing us about the life of a building or groups of buildings, such as villages and towns; thus we become aware that a building seldom retains the function it was originally built for, and that once important constructions were actually converted into humble buildings. The main lesson we learn, though, is that the current appearance of a building should not mislead us into wrong judgements, since buildings almost never retain their original aspect and function over the centuries. The information supplied by Hardy's narrators allows us to know how buildings have changed over the years, thus making the effects of the passing of time visible. If a construction is now crumbling, the narrator is eager to inform us that it has not always been so; he describes its original aspect, which is usually set in stark contrast with the current one, so that the reader is led to feel surprise and to meditate about the fate of human artefacts.

So, as far as architecture is concerned in Hardy's novels, the main function of the descriptions and comments by the narrator is to underline the transient nature of any work of architecture, even the most resistant and bulky ones. If men are seldom inclined to recognise that human artefacts are doomed to oblivion, the narrator proves that no building is everlasting. However, this does not mean that Hardy's omniscient narrators are not touched by the fate of buildings. On the contrary, their portrayals of decaying buildings are always tinged with melancholy and in their words there is a sense of nostalgia for what is being lost.<sup>164</sup> For example, the short story entitled *Enter a Dragoon* begins with the description of a once thriving house about to be pulled down. In this case the narrator, even if not omniscient, since it is a first-person narrator, knows what the building was like in the past:

I lately had a melancholy experience [...]. It was that of going over a doomed house with whose outside aspect I had long been familiar – a house, that is, which by reason of age and dilapidation was to be pulled down during the following week. [...] Seeing that it was only a very small house – which is usually called a 'cottage-residence' – situated in a remote hamlet, and that it was not more than a hundred years old, if so much, I was led to think in my progress through the hollow

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<sup>164</sup> According to Samuel Hynes, the nostalgic tone characterising the narrative voice is due to the fact that the narrator "locates *himself* at a point in history that is *later* than that of the action [...] but not beyond the reach of [his] memory" (Samuel Hynes, 'Hardy's Historians' cit., p. 106, emphases in the text). Moreover, Hynes described nostalgia as "the history of what we have lost", which was exactly "the history that interested Hardy" (*Ibidem*, p. 107).

rooms, with their cracked walls and sloping floors, what an exceptional number of abrupt family incidents had taken place therein – to reckon only those which had come to my own knowledge.<sup>165</sup>

The tone used by the narrator here is nostalgic and melancholic because the house is in a state of decay and neglect, but also because he cannot help thinking that many memories will be consigned to oblivion with the destruction of the house. In a certain sense, it is not so much a mere construction which is being destroyed, but a sort of history book made of stone and wood. This leads us to the second function served by accounts of the stories of buildings in Hardy's novels. The passing of time cannot be hindered; change and decay cannot be prevented in the real world. Yet in literature it is possible to check the advance of time and to eternise places, people and buildings as they are now or as they were in the past. And this is precisely what Hardy does in his novels, as he himself admitted in the speech 'On Receiving the Freedom of the Borough'. Although he acknowledged that he had taken the liberty of distorting the real Dorchester in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, he also stated that "'Casterbridge' is a sort of essence of the town as it used to be, a place more Dorchester than Dorchester itself".<sup>166</sup> This paradoxical statement could be applied to any building and place featuring in Hardy's novels and short stories, where he tried to depict their very essence before they were irremediably lost.

From this point of view, Hardy was certainly successful, but the aim of his novels was not just that of preserving buildings – and the landscape of the South West of England more at large – on paper, before their complete disappearance. For in his fictional world he also tackled the question of how human artefacts could actually be preserved for the future generations in the real world as well. This, as we will see, is an extremely complex issue, since it implies many other questions, the most problematical one being our relationship with time, in particular with the past. What might appear as an obvious statement – that any preservation work presupposes the wish to preserve the memory of the past for posterity – turns out to be a many-sided question. If, according to Hardy, ignoring the past and its lessons is one of the most serious errors we can commit, a passive veneration of the past, or of a small portion of it, is, if carried to extremes, equally detrimental to both past and contemporary architecture and, consequently, to society. A good preservation work, in other words, presupposes a healthy relationship with the past and its legacy, of which buildings represent a

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<sup>165</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'Enter a Dragoon', in *Collected Short Stories*, ed. Francis Bertram Pinion, London, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 675-93, p. 675.

<sup>166</sup> Thomas Hardy, [Speech on Receiving the Freedom of the Borough] cit., p. 320.

considerable part, as buildings are the most tangible and visible historical documents, being always under our eyes and, sometimes, being still in use. A vital relationship with the past requires historical consciousness, but historical knowledge alone is not sufficient to guarantee the true preservation of an ancient human artefact. Indeed the survival of a building depends not only on the relationship future generations entertain with the past, but also on the intrinsic value of the building itself and the role it can play in the present lives of human beings. This is probably the most complex factor determining the survival or, on the contrary, the decay of an artefact, since the word “value” has different meanings and implies both practical and aesthetic qualities.

These are only some of the problems linked to the relationship between architecture and time. In Chapter Four (the first chapter of this second part) I will investigate the complexity of this relationship by making reference to some ancient buildings in the *Wessex Novels*, and the way in which Hardy illustrated how the preservation (or, on the contrary, the destruction) of a building (and therefore of the past) depends on numerous factors which can be both intrinsic and external to the building itself. Chapters Five and Six will deal with two “unhealthy” forms of our relationship with the architecture of the past, that is to say an uncritical aesthetic appreciation of past styles of architecture, and even of some specimen of modern architecture, with no perception of the peculiar historical meaning, and “uniqueness”, of each of them (Chapter Five), or, on the contrary, the utter and exclusive veneration of one single style of the architecture of the past, which becomes the object of a sort of “idolatry” (Chapter Six). I will discuss these two opposite approaches (strictly related, as we will see) through a close study of *A Laodicean* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy’s so-called “architectural” novels.

## Chapter Four

### The Disputable Value of Age in Buildings

In Hardy's novels architecture makes the effects of the passing of time clearly visible. From this point of view, single buildings are not merely fitting backgrounds for the stories, but almost characters possessing their own personalities and their own histories. If they do not seem to evolve or change in the course of the novels, as characters do, it is because the duration of the process of change affecting them is proportional to their existence, which is usually longer than a human life. However, when first describing them, the narrator focuses on their history, underlining the differences between their current appearance and what must have been their original aspect. So, we become aware that buildings in Hardy's novels seldom retain their original appearance – let alone their function – throughout the centuries, even if there are some exceptions, such as the great barn in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

I would like to start from this example because in Hardy's novels there is no other building which has remained the same throughout the centuries. Firstly, buildings undergo changes in their function and/or appearance; secondly, they are abandoned because they are too decayed or because they do not satisfy human necessities anymore. The process of decay gains speed with the departure of men: nobody is left to keep vegetation back and to make repairs, so that buildings are soon turned into ruins. The third and final stage of their existence – when it becomes improper to call them “buildings” any longer – coincides with their return to nature. This process, however, does not affect all human artefacts in the same way, since age, important as it is, is yet not the only reason of their decadence, as we will see. In the panorama of the *Wessex Novels* the great barn is a highly significant case where extremes actually coincide, given that it is one of the most antique buildings in Hardy's novels, but does not at the same time show any sign of wearing out. Moreover, the barn is still used for the purpose for which it was originally built, that is to say to store crops, even if in the novel it is used for shearing sheep as well. It is no coincidence that the description of the barn is probably the longest description of a building Hardy ever wrote in his prose works. Compared to other descriptions of buildings in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and elsewhere, the picture of the tithe barn is by far more detailed and elaborate, which might appear paradoxical, given that the barn is a humble building if compared with manor houses, churches and castles. On a



closer analysis, though, the barn reveals itself as Hardy's ideal building, and its long and rich description seems meant to offer a clue for reading both this novel and the entire cycle.

There are many reasons why the barn is an exceptional building, the most evident one being its antiquity. We are told indeed that the barn is probably the only surviving construction of a group of conventual buildings, which do not exist anymore, and have been forgotten even by the natives. The unaltered barn is set in sharp contrast with the buildings which presumably surrounded it in the past: while the first impresses the observer for its solidity and colossal dimensions, the latter have completely disappeared and only the narrator seems to know of their existence. The reason why the barn is still existent in its original aspect and function is that "the old barn embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126). The "practices" Hardy refers to have to do with the necessity of storing crops, from which flour will be obtained to make bread. The barn will always be useful because human beings will always require food. A castle, on the contrary, can easily inspire "hatred of its purpose" – and here Hardy is thinking of uprisings and revolutions, since castles are associated with inequalities, privileges and oppression. Churches, and religious buildings in general, can suffer from neglect and decay, since they symbolise creeds which are not eternal. When the creed is "worn out" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126), the building is soon deserted by the worshippers. Neither palaces nor religious buildings can embody the identity of a community because the first represent just a privileged class of people, while the latter have no eternal validity because they represent beliefs and doctrines which are destined to be supplanted in due course of time by new ones.

On the contrary, is there anything more lasting than man's need to nourish himself? Eating is man's primary need, but it is not just a bodily need. The "defence and salvation of the body by daily bread" is much more than that: it is a "study", a "religion" and a "desire" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126). In other words, food satisfies not only the body, but also the soul and the mind, much in the same way in which "proper" works of architecture are not mere shelters. Here "bread" stands for food in general, and this is not a coincidence. Bread is an apparently simple nourishment, but in fact it is the result of a long and complex process, made up of many operations, including storing crops. The invention of bread is the proof that all the human faculties, supported by hard study, are involved in the production of food. Thus the barn is a sort of monument to man's ingenuity, to his technical skills put to good use. The need to eat is further ennobled by the appearance of the barn itself. The medieval barn shares

with castles and churches the age of construction and consequently the style, i.e. the Gothic style, as the lanceolate windows and the buttresses suggest. Moreover, the barn is as resistant as a fortified castle and the same attention has been paid to its beauty as in a church. The barn is therefore a church and a fortress at the same time, but it is superior to both of them because both beauty and strength are at the service of humanity, not of an abstract God (as in churches, and here Hardy's agnosticism surfaces) or of a social elite (as in castles). The barn is useful to the whole community, whose members sympathise with the building which allows them to live.

The importance of the barn for the community, however, has to do not only with its functionality, but also with its aesthetic worth. Those who built the barn chose the Gothic style, which is usually associated with religious buildings and castles, because in their opinion, as in the narrator's, a barn is not (and should not be) different from a church or a castle. So even if the barn is an artefact built for a specific purpose, its builders did not ignore the aesthetic side; it is therefore no wonder if they adopted the features characterising the Gothic style. From this point of view, the barn exemplifies what Ruskin had maintained in *The Stones of Venice*, that is to say that in the Middle Ages there was no difference between ecclesiastical and secular buildings. In the second volume Ruskin explained that, although we tend to associate the Gothic with cathedrals and abbeys, "the churches were not separated by any change in style from the buildings round them, as they are now, but were merely more finished and full examples of a universal style, rising out of the confused streets of the city as an oak tree does out of an oak copse, not differing in leafage, but in size and symmetry."<sup>167</sup> According to Ruskin, religious buildings were able to survive only because they were more massive and resistant. In the different case of Hardy's barn the humble building has outlived the other conventual buildings because it has never ceased to be useful to the community and because of its solidity. Indeed its builders were aware that the barn was to serve future generations; hence they made use of the best materials and techniques in order to ensure its survival:

The dusky, filmed, chestnut roof, braced and tied in by huge collars, curves, and diagonals, was far nobler in design, because more wealthy in material, than nine-tenths of those in our modern churches. Along each side wall was a range of striding buttresses, throwing deep shadows on the spaces between them, which were perforated by lancet openings combining in their proportions the precise requirements both of beauty and ventilation. (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126)

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<sup>167</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* cit., Vol. 10, p. 121.

So the medieval barn is as solid as any coeval Gothic cathedral, but it rivals with religious buildings in beauty as well. Its magnificence does not come from decoration, but from a wise control of proportions and from the gigantic dimensions of the construction itself. The narrator says about the pointed arches that their “very simplicity was the origin of a grandeur not apparent in erections where more ornament has been attempted” (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126), and according to Ruskin decoration should be employed only in buildings where man has rest and avoided in those where man has to work, for example in shops.<sup>168</sup> The barn certainly belongs to the second category – i.e. buildings devoted “to purposes of active and occupied life”<sup>169</sup> – but it is also true that the barn is much more than a mere storehouse: it is also the very symbol of Weatherbury, being the bond between the members of the community and between them and their ancestors. The barn represents the past, the present and the future of the close-knit community of Weatherbury. Indeed the current inhabitants regard the building “with a satisfied sense of functional continuity throughout, a feeling almost of gratitude, and quite of pride, at the permanence of the idea which had heaped it up” (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126), which means that they do not feel inferior to their ancestors for not having erected the building. Buildings usually stir up a feeling of pride in those who built them, but seldom in the posterity or in those who had nothing to do with their construction. Quite the contrary here: even if the builders lived centuries before, the “beholder” has the feeling of having always known them and even of being one with them. Should a new barn be required, there is no doubt that the current inhabitants of Weatherbury would build one not dissimilar from the medieval one. In all likelihood, they would employ the same style,<sup>170</sup> the same materials and the same techniques in order to erect a resistant building, being of use not only to themselves, but also – and especially – to their descendents. There is a sense in which the community of Weatherbury is as stable and immutable throughout the centuries as the barn, with which every member identifies. Indeed soon after the long description of the barn the narrator explains that time goes by very slowly at Weatherbury:

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<sup>168</sup> See John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 157.

<sup>169</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>170</sup> Kenneth Clark pointed out that for centuries the Gothic had been the only way of building in England (see Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* cit., p. 13). Moreover, “survival and revival march side by side during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (James Mordaunt Crook, ‘Introduction’ to Charles Lock Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* [1872], ed. James Mordaunt Crook, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1978, pp. 13-57, p. 27).

In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen's *Then* is the rustic's *Now*. In London twenty or thirty years ago are old times: In Paris ten years or five. In Weatherbury three- or four-score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face or tone. Five decades hardly modified the cut of a gaiter, the embroidery of a smockfrock, by the breadth of a hair. Ten generations failed to alter the turn of a single phrase. In these nooks the busy outsider's ancient times are only old, his old times are still new; his present is futurity. (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 127, emphases in the text)

Simplicity of design, solidity, functionality and local materials are the features which have guaranteed the survival of the barn since the Middle Ages. The barn at Weatherbury is undoubtedly a work of architecture in the fullest Ruskinian sense because it is not only solid and useful, but it also contributes to the “mental health, power, and pleasure”<sup>171</sup> of men. The fact that the barn is mainly a functional building is not enough, since in Ruskin's opinion what distinguishes architecture from a mere building is not its use, but the presence of “certain characters venerable or beautiful, but otherwise unnecessary”.<sup>172</sup> If the barn is still intact, though, it is also because in Weatherbury time seems to go by at a slower pace than in London and Paris. This means that architecture, dresses, and even language are not influenced by fashions, which are by definition transient, momentary, short-lived. The inhabitants of Weatherbury do not perceive the barn as an alien construction because they are not different from those who built it (“So the barn was natural to the sharers, and the shearers in harmony with the barn”, *Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 127).

To conclude, the barn represents Hardy's ideal of architecture because it combines functionality with beauty and solidity, so that Sir Joshua Reynolds's maxim that “the excellence of every art must consist in the complete accomplishment of its purpose”<sup>173</sup> seems to befit the barn perfectly. Thanks to the unique combination of beauty and usefulness, the barn has won the battle against architecture's worst enemy, even if time has left some marks on it (its stones are described as “time-eaten”). The age of the barn is rather an added value because decay has not affected the building yet. So the barn is the only building in the *Wessex Novels* where a balance between antiquity and preservation in good condition has been possible. This is all the more surprising if we consider that the barn has probably never required any restoration work, because “functional continuity throughout” was sufficient to protect it from neglect and decay.

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<sup>171</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 27.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>173</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds's sentence is the inscription over the main entrance of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Rather than the technical skills, or the materials employed, it is therefore the kind of purpose for which it was built which has guaranteed the survival of the barn through the centuries. Another example from the *Wessex Novels* proves that for Hardy the use of a building is of paramount importance. The first artefact featuring in *Jude the Obscure* is not a church, nor a university college, but the humble well of Marygreen. The narrator insists on its antiquity by saying that it was “ancient as the village itself” (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. I, p. 11) and that “the well-shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged” (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. I, p. 12). The other important aspect is that the well is still used; it is in the centre of the village because it is of use to the whole community. Its absolute functionality, united to the dignity of its function – to provide water – has guaranteed its survival and prevented any change by the hands of time and men. The well contrasts with the church, which on the contrary has been rebuilt in the style of the Gothic Revival, and now stands alone as the symbol of the past of the village, of ancient practices and values, and of a sort of humanism which were then dying out.

Changes in function are instead very frequent, since old buildings seldom meet the requirements of new generations, who feel the need to erect new buildings and/or transform the existing ones. Even if changes seem regrettable at first, in Hardy’s novels this is the only alternative to neglect and decay, and is also a natural consequence of the passing of time. Each generation has its own necessities and the first “duty” of architecture is to be functional. From this point of view, a building is all the more valuable if it is able to adapt itself to new needs, as if for Hardy human artefacts too were subject to a sort of “natural selection”, according to which buildings of no use decay and disappear, while the “fittest” survive. A sort of Darwinian theory of natural selection as applied to architecture is present since the very beginning in Hardy’s novels.<sup>174</sup> In *Desperate Remedies* the need to build a new house – Knapwater House – to substitute the decaying Old House has been dictated by practical demands, given that the advance of vegetation and humidity could not be prevented anymore.

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<sup>174</sup> There are many studies about the influence exerted by Darwin’s theories on the works of Thomas Hardy. The most important ones are Harvey Curtis Webster, *On a Darkling Plain* [1947], London, Frank Cass & Co., 1964, Roger Ebbatson, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*, Brighton (Sussex), Harvester Press and Totowa (New Jersey), Barnes and Noble, 1982, and Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983 (in particular Ch. 8). Other interesting remarks on Hardy and Darwin are contained in Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, Ch. 9, and in Roger Robinson, ‘Hardy and Darwin’, in Norman Page (ed.), *Thomas Hardy’s Background*, London, Bell & Hyman, 1980, pp. 128-50. On the influence of Darwinian theories on architecture, see Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs* [1979], Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2008, in particular Ch. 6, and Barbara Larson and Sabine Flach (eds.), *Darwin and Theories of Aesthetics and Cultural History*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013.

Even if the Old House is characterised by picturesque beauty, as we have seen, Miss Aldclyffe does not indulge in aesthetic contemplation and considers the pros and cons of having the decaying mansion turned into a “decent residence” (*Desperate Remedies*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 99) for Manston. When surveying the house, she looks at it “not artistically or historically, but practically – as regarded its fitness for adaptation to modern requirements” (*Desperate Remedies*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, pp. 98-9). Beatty well synthesised how Hardy’s idea of the survival of the fittest in architecture surfaces in this episode from *Desperate Remedies*:

Clearly Hardy’s sympathies lie with the Tudor building, but understanding the inevitability of change, he realizes that very few buildings are important enough to be preserved for artistic or historical reasons alone. If buildings are to survive they must continue to perform a useful function; and this is exactly the case with the Old House itself, which is transformed so that Manston can live in it.<sup>175</sup>

It is therefore preferable for a building to be transformed, however painful these transformations may appear at first sight, rather than to be neglected and become ruinous. Yet manor houses, like the Old House, and dwellings generally seem more subject to decay than other buildings in Hardy’s novels. This is due to the same reason why the barn in Weatherbury is still standing in fairly good condition: while barns, mills and also inns (although in a minor degree) serve the whole community or part of it, a mansion (in particular if built after the Middle Ages) is only the stronghold of a single aristocratic family. It is true that the family may become extinguished in the course of the centuries and the house pass into *nouveaux riches*’ hands, as in the case of Hintock House and Knapwater House itself, but in any case palaces, castles, manor houses, etc. do not contribute to the whole community’s welfare. However, not all mansions are doomed to decay, if they are able to adapt themselves to a new kind of society. Again, the microcosm of *Far from the Madding Crowd* contains the most telling example of a manor house changing its function or, to be more precise, beginning to serve a purpose. Bathsheba’s homestead was a manor house which has been transformed into a farm:

By daylight the farm house now occupied by Bathsheba Everdene presented itself as a stone building of the Jacobean stage of Classic Renaissance as regards its architecture, and of a proportion which told at a glance that, as is so frequently the case, it had once been the manorial hall upon a small estate around it, now altogether effaced as a distinct property and merged in the vast tract of a non-residential landlord which comprised several such modest demesnes. (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. IX, p. 63)

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<sup>175</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 57.

Although Weatherbury farm is said to be just one of many “modest demesnes”, the description suggests that this is not a plain house by highlighting its main architectural features, such as the “fluted pilasters” and the “pairs of chimneys [...] linked by an arch (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. IX, p. 63). In other words, Weatherbury farm may be modest now, but in the past it must have been an example of good taste, refinement and, above all, richness. The smallness of the estate which surrounded it is a sign that the owners were not big landowners, responsible for the life of a community, yet their dignified house suggests that they were nonetheless eager to show their prosperous state of affairs. Once venerable, the house has now become a farm, but this change is far from being condemned in the novel. On the contrary, the estate now serves the entire community because many people are employed in the farm, Gabriel included. Weatherbury farm is, together with the barn and the malthouse, the place where the different class of people meet and interfere. Consequently, Bathsheba’s house is also the setting where many of the most important events in the novel take place. The mingling of lower and upper classes characterising the community of Weatherbury farm is exemplified by the shearing-supper in Ch. XXII. For the occasion, “a long table was placed on the grass-plot beside the house, the end of the table being thrust over the sill of the wide parlour-window and a foot or two into the room” (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXII, p. 134). The image of a unique table linking the inside and the outside of the house, the parlour and the grass-plot, the upper classes (Bathsheba and Boldwood sit inside) and the labourers, is indicative of the transformations undergone by the mansion, which has become a place where the employees feel at home. As Beatty pointed out, the detail revealing the farm-labourers’ sense of belonging to Weatherbury farm is their habit of coming to the house from the back door.<sup>176</sup> Indeed the only visible sign that the house is now a farm is that the front entrance is not used any longer:

A gravel walk leading from the door to the road in front was encrusted at the sides with more moss – but of a silver-green variety – the surface of the gravel being visible to the width of only a foot or two in the centre. This circumstance, and the generally sleepy air of the whole prospect here, together with the animated state of the reverse facade as a rule, suggested to the imagination that on the adaptation of the building for farming purposes the vital principle of the house had turned round inside its body to face the other way. (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. IX, p. 64)

It is a detail of apparently no consequence like this that tells instead the story of how the mansion has changed. The fact that the front door is no longer used, while the back of the

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<sup>176</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 154.

house has become the new façade, might seem an unimportant piece of information, but this element explains the reason why Bathsheba's house has escaped decay. The house has been able to change its function; a mansion "originally planned for pleasure alone" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. IX, p. 64) has become a farm contributing to the village economy.<sup>177</sup> Here it is worth noticing that the house is considered as a living being, almost as a man, in the sense that the transformation was not made by the occupants, but by the house itself, whose "vital principle [...] had turned round inside its body to face the other way". So it is as if the house, not unlike a human being, were made up of two components, i.e. an outer shell, the material building, and an essence, corresponding respectively to body and soul. In the case of Weatherbury farm, both body and soul have survived intact, with the only difference that the "soul" of the house has turned round inside the "body". The main consequence is that the once busy front is now characterised by a "sleepy air", contrasting with the "animated state" of the back. There is no reason to regret the past here, given that the house has kept its appearance and is now useful to the community. Yet the final remark by the narrator seems to introduce a sense of melancholy and even disappointment for the changes generally inflicted upon ancient buildings: "Reversals of this kind, strange deformities, tremendous paralyses, are often seen to be inflicted by trade upon edifices – either individual or in the aggregate as streets and towns – which were originally planned for pleasure alone" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. IX, p. 64).

Again, buildings are dealt with as if they were living beings, and accordingly the changes they undergo are like the effects of some disease.<sup>178</sup> The use of such expressions as "strange deformities" might suggest that transformations are to be deplored because they damage buildings. In fact "reversals" and "deformities" are to be preferred to "tremendous paralyses", i.e. abandonment followed by decay, because changes in function is the only way for a manor-house to survive. In each case, there is sort of irony in the fate undergone by buildings "originally planned for pleasure alone": either they face decay when they are deserted, or, as in the case of Bathsheba's house, they become useful for trade purposes. A building which had been built by a rich landowner for pleasure (and, therefore, not contributing to the village economy) has paradoxically turned into the opposite, i.e. a busy farm, bustling with

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<sup>177</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 153. See also Fisher's remarks on the correspondence between Weatherbury farm and its owner, Bathsheba (see Joe Fisher, *The Hidden Hardy*, London, Macmillan, 1992, pp. 54-5).

<sup>178</sup> Personification of buildings, combined with an idea of corruption, is a frequent device in Hardy's novels (see Richard C. Carpenter, 'Hardy's "Gurgoyles"', *Modern Fiction Studies* VI, 3 (Autumn 1960), pp. 223-32, p. 228).



employees, whose function is the production of goods, in particular cereals. From a self-contained microcosm isolating its occupants from the other social classes, Bathsheba's house has become instead the centre of the community life. As J. B. Bullen pointed out,

Weatherbury farmhouse stands at the heart of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. From this centre radiates a network of other buildings, houses, barns, huts and tents, each one of them endowed with special characteristics that link them to a particular character or the rural community at large. This architectural network extends across Wessex to include a wide range of building types from the grandest to the most humble, from the ancient to the modern, from the beautiful to the ugly and from the decorative to the utilitarian.<sup>179</sup>

In a certain sense, the term "paralysis" is not inappropriate even for such buildings as Weatherbury farm, given that it was able not only to survive intact but also to preserve the stability of the community. The farm is now what the convent must have been in the past (i.e. the heart of the village life and of its economy), with the only difference that the inhabitants do not pay tithes any longer. It is significant that the barn – the only surviving conventual building – is used by Bathsheba and her employees, but in fact belongs to the whole community, as Weatherbury farm itself, which is Bathsheba's "bower" but also a trade centre. Yet Bathsheba's farm is not the only case in Hardy's novels of a manor house transformed by trade into a building serving the whole community. The most telling example, showing that Hardy was far from regretting changes of this kind, is represented by Overcombe Mill in *The Trumpet-Major*. At the very beginning of the novel we are informed that Anne Garland and her mother live "in a portion of an ancient building formerly a manor-house, but now a mill, which, being too large for his own requirements, the miller had found it convenient to divide and appropriate in part to these highly respectable tenants."<sup>180</sup> Although both the mill and Weatherbury farm were once manor houses, there is a significant difference between them. While Weatherbury has retained its original aspect, apart from the front which has become the back and vice versa, no visible traces are left witnessing that the building at the core of *The Trumpet-Major* was a manor house in origin.

In the second chapter Overcombe Mill is described in detail. The building is divided into two parts of which the mill occupies just one, the other being let to the Garlands. Hence the two parts are like two separated microcosms because they are used for very different

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<sup>179</sup> J. B. Bullen, *Thomas Hardy: The World of His Novels* cit., p. 24.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major* [1880], ed. Richard Nemesvari, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991 (repr. 1998), Ch. I, p. 8. Further references to this edition (abbreviated *Trumpet-Major*) will be given in brackets after quotations in the text.

purposes. Yet the building, lying on the riverbank, is situated on a spot which is more suitable for a mill rather than a manor house, at least as far as practical issues are concerned. Neither in *Far from the Madding Crowd* nor here is the reason of the desertion of the original owners of the two manor houses overtly explained, but in all probability the families who had them built decayed and/or became extinguished. If the manor house in Overcombe has become useful to the community, it is explicitly thanks to the presence of a river nearby. This is why it is perceived as a mill, with no signs of its ever having been a manor house, even if the portion inhabited by the Garlands, which is private and more secluded, retains some of the original features of the Tudor manor house, such as the gables (see *Trumpet-Major*, Ch. II, p. 16), while the Lovedays' part has undergone substantial changes.

As in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, changes in the function of a building are not to be deplored, provided that they are dictated by a well-founded necessity. There are no doubts that the mill serves an important function in the community of Overcombe, and it would be reductive to say that the purpose of this mill is just to produce flour. Overcombe Mill is indeed much more than that: at the beginning of the novel the soldiers encamp on the down above the mill and soon afterwards they create a path leading to the river at the back of the building. Thus the mill and its pond are transformed into the most crowded, colourful and busy spot in the surroundings during the regiment's stay. Overcombe Mill becomes the point of reference of the soldiers because it provides them with water but also because it is the epitome of stability, comfort and domestic life. The mill, with his contribution to the "defence and salvation of the body by daily bread", is the symbol of life, so it is no wonder if it becomes the place where the soldiers, who are obliged to face death far from their homes, meet and have rest. So the building which once was a manor house is now doubly useful because it serves both the community and the soldiers – hence the nation – at the same time.

Indeed the novel portrays an exceptional period in the otherwise static life of Overcombe, when the threat of Napoleon's invasion turned Weymouth/Budmouth and its surroundings into the focus of attention of the whole nation. The exceptionality of the situation is experienced not only by people, but by buildings too. Apart from the mill, other constructions in Overcombe have changed their function in order to suit the requirements imposed by the war. In Ch. X John Loveday takes Mrs Garland and her daughter to the camp, where they visit the "large barn which had been appropriated as a hospital" and a "cottage with its windows bricked up, that was used as the magazine" (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. X, p. 87). It is significant that a barn, the building devoted to the "defence and salvation of the body", has been turned

into a hospital, the place where human bodies are taken care of. These two buildings – the barn and the cottage – are now used for purposes very different from those for which they were built, but they will resume their original function as soon as the war ends. This is a unique occurrence in Hardy's novels, where changes in the life and nature of buildings usually take place in the course of many years and are meant to last for long, maybe for generations, as with Weatherbury farm. Usually, when a building is first described by the narrator, we become aware that it now serves a different purpose, but we are not told when the change took place, nor if the building will ever resume its original function in future; and the reader is left to try to find out the missing information on his own. Yet *The Trumpet-Major* is Hardy's only historical novel, dealing with a specific period in the history of Britain. Thus a minor detail such as a barn being converted into a hospital contributes to the depiction of the background of the story and to emphasise the fact that the novel is about an exceptional moment in the life of Overcombe, and of England more at large. During the war, under the threat of an invasion, healing the wounded and storing weapons are the main priorities, so that adapting old buildings for different and temporary purposes is justified by a real emergency, hence there is no condemnation in the narrator's voice for these unusual changes in function inflicted on the two buildings.

The Napoleonic wars belonged to the past when Hardy wrote his novels, but at the time of the fear of Napoleon's invasion not only English people, but also English buildings, were forced to change their habits. In the novel there is a vivid representation of the way in which people of every age, profession and class were obliged to learn to protect themselves and the nation. The common effort required by the exceptionality of the situation is underlined and paralleled by the fate of buildings, which somehow "helped" the inhabitants of Overcombe, the army and, therefore, the whole nation in their own little way. David Gervais pointed out that "the only way Hardy could write about the nation was to have George III come to Casterbridge",<sup>181</sup> since *The Trumpet-Major*, unlike Walter Scott's historical novels, is a "private, domestic, provincial novel",<sup>182</sup> where the historical events are there to provide a background for the romantic adventures of the three protagonists.<sup>183</sup> It is as if the historical

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<sup>181</sup> David Gervais, *Literary Englands: Versions of 'Englishness' in Modern Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 65n.

<sup>182</sup> Enrica Villari, 'Il vizio moderno dell'irrequietezza' cit., p. 118 (my translation).

<sup>183</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 117. Interesting remarks about the peculiar kind of historical novel represented by *The Trumpet-Major* and an analysis of Hardy's life-lasting relationship with history are contained in Reginald James White, *Thomas Hardy and History*, London, Macmillan, 1974, in David Cecil, 'Hardy the historian', in *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Margaret Drabble, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976, pp. 154-61 and in Samuel Hynes, 'Hardy's Historians' cit .

events at the core of the novel were worth telling because they affected the microcosm formed by Overcombe and Budmouth. The fact that such a remote and cosy place as Overcombe experienced – just for once – such a turmoil means that the threat of Napoleon’s invasion and the war must have been an exceptional moment for the nation for real. The stress therefore is not so much on the consequences on the nation, but on Overcombe, its inhabitants, and its buildings.

The three buildings from *The Trumpet-Major* discussed until now (barn, cottage and mill) are opposed to the other important building appearing in the novel, i.e. Oxwell Hall, Benjamin Derriman’s house, the example of a building (another manor-house) unable to adapt itself. Decadence and neglect characterise not only the building itself, but also its surroundings. On approaching the mansion, Anne Garland first encounters a rotten gate “without a bottom rail, and broken-down palings lying on each side” leading into a “neglected meadow” (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 46). The carriage-road, overgrown with grass, suggests that in the past the estate must have been as busy as Weatherbury farm or even more. Finally, Anne beholds Oxwell Hall, characterised by a “weatherworn front” (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 46). The narrator informs us that the mansion, “once the seat of a family now extinct” (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 46), had actually changed its function some years before, when it was turned into a farm house. This is the use to which it is still applied by Mr Derriman, a tenant-farmer who was able to purchase the mansion thanks to his wife’s dowry. However, after his only son’s death he was unable to carry on his plans of turning the Oxwell estate into a profitable farm, which now stands as the emblem of decadence. However, the narrator comments that Oxwell Hall is “as interesting as mansions in a state of declension usually are” (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 46), as if hinting at the circumstance that a decaying mansion might be considered as more interesting than a thriving one. Indeed Hardy devotes a long paragraph to the description of Derriman’s house in order to illustrate the effects of the passing of time on a building which was unable to become useful to the whole community:

As for the outside, Nature, in the ample time that had been given her, had so mingled her filings and effacements with the marks of human wear and tear upon the house that it was often hard to say in which of the two, or if in both, any particular obliteration had its origin. The keenness was gone from the mouldings of the doorways, but whether worn out by the rubbing past of innumerable people’s shoulders, and the moving of their heavy furniture, or by Time in a grander and more abstract form, did not appear. The iron stanchions inside the window-panes were eaten away to the size of wires at the bottom where they entered the stone, the condensed breathings of generations having settled there in pools and rusted them. The panes themselves had either lost their shine altogether, or become iridescent as a peacock’s tail. (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 47)

Even if two main elements have concurred to the decay of Oxwell Hall, i.e. nature and human beings, the narrator wants us to become aware that time is the primary cause of the decay of Oxwell Hall and of many other ancient buildings. The mansion is so advanced in the process of absorption into nature because nobody has worked to keep vegetation back for many years; consequently, it is no wonder that nature has almost completely obliterated the original aspect of the building, considering “the ample time that had been given her”. Similarly, the wear caused by generations of people has its root in the passing of time as well. The very word “generation” has to do with the duration of human life and with the passing of time, thus suggesting that the mouldings of the doorways and the stanchions inside the window-panes are worn out because many years have passed. The powerful image of the stanchions corroded by the pools formed by the “condensed breathings” of generations of occupants has the function of making the passing of time nearly visible.

So while the beholder is impressed by the innumerable signs of wear borne by the mansion, time is evoked – according to the narrator – in its “grander and more abstract form”. This statement seems paradoxical at first sight, given that rubbings, rust and mould are irrefutable but little signs of the passing of time. However, in the case of Oxwell Hall time has combined with human beings and nature in such a subtle way that it is almost impossible to understand which was time’s specific contribution to the decay of the building. Oxwell Hall well exemplifies the reason why the effects of time can easily be confounded with those caused by nature and men. The most obvious cause is that, as we have already observed, time is an abstract entity, whose consequences on buildings can only be deduced, but in Hardy’s novels, and in *The Trumpet-Major* in particular, we are induced to reflect on another aspect of time. Changes in function, decay and other transformations undergone by human artefacts take place in the course of many years, sometimes even centuries. So, especially if there are no documents testifying of the original aspect of a building and of the changes occurred in the past, it is almost impossible for human beings to understand how time has contributed to its transformation. In other words, the effects of the passing of time on works of architecture are perceivable only indirectly, for instance through the consequences of the advance of nature, and the signs of wear caused by men.

Given the irretrievable state of decay of Oxwell Hall, we are induced to wonder if Mr Derriman would ever have been able to turn it into a thriving farm. The description of the mansion by the narrator seems to suggest that the beginning of the decline of the building must date back to many years before Derriman purchased it, so that his failure is due to the

fact that the building had been neglected for too long to be put to good use again for new generations. It is no coincidence that the narrator compares the mansion to natural objects rather than to human artefacts in order to suggest that Oxwell Hall can hardly be considered as a work of architecture any longer:

The rambling and neglected dwelling had all the romantic excellencies and practical drawbacks which such mildewed places share in common with caves, mountains, wildernesses, glens, and other homes of poesy that people of taste wish to live and die in. Mustard and cress could have been raised on the inner plaster of the dewy walls at any height not exceeding three feet from the floor; and mushrooms of the most refined and thin-stemmed kinds grew up through the chinks of the larder paving. (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 47)

Oxwell Hall shares more features with mountains and other “homes of poesy” than with buildings. Not only the exterior, but also the interior of the mansion has been attacked by vegetation, hence the comparison with caves and glens. In short, Oxwell is undoubtedly a “romantic” place, but here the narrator recurs to the stereotypes of the picturesque to ridicule those “people of taste” who “wish to live and die” in such a “rambling and neglected dwelling”. Those who delight in crumbling buildings encroached by vegetation would never really be able to live in such an unhealthy house as Oxwell Hall; theirs is just a “wish” which would not stand the test of reality. Again, Hardy insists on the dangers of unsympathetic picturesque. In this case, the object of his criticism are those who are unable to distinguish between aesthetic and practical values when beholding a building bearing the marks of the passing of time. In Chapter Three of this thesis I discussed Hardy’s opinion about the morbid aesthetic pleasure aroused by nature invading architecture. Hardy’s attitude towards the consequences of the passing of time on human artefacts is similar, as the ironic tone underlying the description of the interior of Oxwell Hall suggests. Hardy does not deny the aesthetic pleasure inspired by a building bearing marks of decay caused by the passing of time, but he is critical about those who utterly ignore the practical drawbacks of living in a unhealthy dwelling. As with buildings affected by the invasion of nature, the “unsympathetic picturesque” is all the more harmful when the building in question is still inhabited. Indulging in pure aesthetic pleasure in front of inhabited decayed buildings means being unable to imagine how dismal the life of people living in that condition must be, whereas that same “parasitical picturesque”, to adopt Ruskin’s expression, is less despicable in relation to uninhabited decayed buildings.

Therefore, buildings in a state of decay caused by nature or the passing of time or both can trigger a conflict between aesthetic and practical values, and between “age-value” and

“present-day values”. The picturesque attitude, delighting in ruins and in decrepit buildings, attaches absolute importance to the “age-value” *per se* of a human artefact. Here the clash between “age-value” and “present-day values” is apparent: “age-value” denies any amelioration and work aiming at the preservation of a building in a sound state, while “present-day values”, in particular “use-value”, require that “an old building still in use must be maintained in such a condition that it can accommodate people without endangering life or health”, given that “material life is a prerequisite for psychic existence, and indeed is more important because there is no psychic life without a physiological basis.”<sup>184</sup> Riegl claims then that the modern occupants of an old house cannot be required to live in or to use an unhealthy building just for the sake of people who revere “age-value” *per se*. Old buildings must be repaired or converted to satisfy modern needs because there is no mental well-being without physical comfort. Ruskin’s point of view implies similar consequences: since a work of architecture is a building which contributes to the “mental health, power, and pleasure” of men, we can deduce that a building which proves prejudicial to both the body and the mind cannot be considered as architecture.

Now, to go back again to Oxwell Hall, we are led indeed to wonder if Derriman’s house can still be considered as architecture. There are no doubts that the narrator regrets that such a fine mansion is now decayed, but he nonetheless acknowledges that no one could lead a healthy life there. The proof that Hardy agrees with Riegl and Ruskin about the close link between physical and mental comfort in relation to architecture comes when Derriman is presented. The mouldered and humid house is inhabited by a man who seems to mirror the place he lives in:

[Mr Derriman] was a wizened old gentleman in a coat the colour of his farm yard, breeches of the same hue, unbuttoned at the knees, revealing a bit of leg above his stocking, and a dazzlingly white shirt-frill to compensate for his untidiness below. The edge of his skull round his eyes-sockets was visible through the skin, and he had a mouth whose corners made towards the back of his head on the slightest provocation. (*Trumpet-Major*, Ch. VI, p. 48)

The owner of Oxwell Hall is as untidy and “wizened” as his dwelling, another instance of the close link between buildings and their occupants in Hardy’s novels. Derriman’s personality too is indeed in perfect accord with his external appearance. His meanness and his loneliness match perfectly with his bodily appearance; his behaviour, however understandable at times, is as squalid as his aspect. The man and his house share the same characteristics:

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<sup>184</sup> Alois Riegl, ‘The modern cult of monuments’ cit., p. 39.

they are both corroded by time and, suffering from neglect, are threatened by decay,<sup>185</sup> and his hard-heartedness and his bodily deterioration are due in great part to his living in an unhealthy, lonely house.

So, Hardy shared Riegl's idea that "age-value" must give way to "use-value" when the mental and physical wellbeing of current generations is at stake. From this point of view, time is for real architecture's worst enemy, if living conditions are made difficult or even impossible by the very age of a building. Even if at the end of *The Trumpet-Major* Oxwell Hall is inherited by Anne Garland, an event which seems to be the beginning of a new life for both the protagonist and the building, the novel ends without showing if Anne succeeds in turning the mansion to good use. Given the advanced state of decay of Oxwell Hall, Anne's task appears as an arduous one and the risk of failure contributes to the melancholic tone of the ending.

This leads us to the last stage of the life of a building, that is to say abandonment and subsequent decay. If a building cannot be converted to suit modern requirements or if nothing can be done to preserve it for new generations, abandonment is the most obvious consequence, and in the *Wessex Novels* there are many examples of buildings which are in ruins because they are not used anymore. It is significant that utter decay affects two categories of human artefacts in particular, i.e. churches (and other religious buildings such as abbeys) and castles, which in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Hardy opposed, as we have seen, to the barn, his model of the perfect architecture. Ruins of abbeys and castles abound in the *Wessex Novels*, from *Desperate Remedies* to *The Well-Beloved*, but the most telling examples are the abbey-church at Wellbridge in *Tess* and Castle de Stancy in *A Laodicean*, the representative of those buildings that may inspire, as Hardy wrote in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, "hatred of [their] purpose".

I will discuss Castle de Stancy in the next chapter. As for Wellbridge abbey-church, we must consider that it is put in the foreground in the novel together with two more constructions, that is to say the farmhouse, once a mansion of the D'Urberville family, and the mill. This group of buildings is highly significant, since they exhibit together the three main different effects of time on ancient buildings: the abbey-church is in utter decay, the mill has

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<sup>185</sup> As Simon Gatrell pointed out, "both man and house are crippled by miserliness, and the house seems as clearly condemned to slow decay and ultimate destruction as Derriman" (Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* cit., pp. 52-3). According to Gatrell, *The Trumpet-Major* represents "the beginning of a search for correspondence between theme and character and building" (Simon Gatrell, 'Middling Hardy' cit., p. 158).



preserved its original function, the farmhouse is instead the result of a change in function. The mill shares similar features with both the great barn in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and Overcombe Mill in *The Trumpet-Major*. Angel's plan after his wedding is to spend a fortnight in the mill in order to see the working of a flour-mill and to learn "his time-honoured mode of procedure" (*Tess*, Ch. XXXII, p. 204). Not only the function of the building, but also the techniques used to grind crops have never changed throughout the centuries; besides, Angel decides to come to this very place to complete his professional training but he is soon disappointed because in the mill old-fashioned methods and machinery are still used, whereas Angel's aim is to be informed about modern techniques (see *Tess*, Ch. XXXVI, p. 240). On this crucial point, Angel's opinion differs from the narrator's, who had conveyed a quite different idea of the mill. To begin with, the mill is the only surviving construction of a monastic establishment. This piece of information cannot but bring to mind the great barn in Weatherbury. Moreover, at Wellbridge the existence of the monastic establishment is still witnessed by the relics of the old abbey-church on the opposite side of the river, and the survival of part of the abbey allows Hardy to further stress the contrast between the mill and the other conventual buildings, of which only the decayed church remains. The narrator's observation about their different fate echoes explicitly the statement about the superiority of the barn on castles and churches in *Far from the Madding Crowd*: "The mill still worked on, food being a perennial necessity; the abbey had perished, creeds being transient" (*Tess*, Ch. XXXV, p. 233).

This remark differs from the one contained in *Far from the Madding Crowd* for its peremptory tone and for its epigrammatic style, but the meaning is the same: the mill will never stop working and will never become outdated because man will always need to nourish himself. Creeds, on the contrary, are doomed to wear themselves out in the course of the centuries and, as a consequence, works of architecture connected with them cannot but share their fate. It is true that old religious buildings can sometimes be adapted for new creeds, but this kind of "architectural conversion" is rather an exception in Hardy's novels. An instance is represented by the church of the island in *The Well-Beloved* which had been originally built near the foundations of a pagan temple (see p. 29 of this thesis), but in general religious artefacts incur decay when the creed or religion they embody is replaced by a new one. The fact that Angel deems Wellbridge mill out-of-date is indicative of his personality. Indeed Angel is a modern man, the intellectual exemplifying the predominance of the so-called "theoretical man" – a Nietzschean notion – whose vital energy has been stifled by excessive

spiritualism.<sup>186</sup> In the novel he is defined as “more spiritual than animal”, “rather bright than hot” (*Tess*, Ch. XXXI, p. 192). Tess is “appalled” by his “will to subdue the grosser to the subtler emotion, the substance to the conception, the flesh to the spirit” (*Tess*, Ch. XXXVI, pp. 245) and by the “hard logical deposit” hidden in the “remote depths of his constitution” (*Tess*, Ch. XXXVI, p. 241).<sup>187</sup> In other words, Angel is both one of the many victims of the “modern vice of unrest” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85) and an advanced product of civilisation, so it is no wonder if he despises the traditional methods and tools used to grind crops in the old mill at Wellbridge. Angel is aesthetically fascinated by the past in the shape of Tess’s aristocratic ancestors, pagan religion and Hellenic ideals, that is to say by “age-value”, but he completely disregards “historical value”, hence he is unable to see the mill in the right perspective, that is to say as a precious document of man’s ingenuity before the advent of technology.

Being Angel a modern man, his disappointment with the mill casts a shadow on the survival of the building in the future. The mill has always served its function, but its future seems uncertain; new techniques and modern machinery may decree its abandonment, coinciding with the beginning of decay, unless another function is found for the building, as in the case of Wellbridge manor-house. The house where Angel and Tess find lodgings was “once a portion of a fine manorial residence, and the property and seat of a D’Urberville, but since its partial demolition a farm-house” (*Tess*, Ch. XXXIV, p. 216). The detail of a seat of a D’Urberville being converted into a farm-house is meant to underline one of the main themes of the novel, that is to say the rise and fall of aristocratic families. Just as the Durbeyfields have long since “learnt” to survive outside the feudal system, so one of their ancestors’ mansions was able to adapt itself to a new kind of society. The parallel between Tess and Wellbridge is further emphasised by the strong relationship both house and girl entertain with the past and between each other. Tess is characterised by a strong will, which makes her rather stubborn and proud, as her refusal to visit her parents-in-law to ask for money proves. Her origins are made apparent by her very surname, a mispronunciation of “D’Urberville”. On the other hand, Wellbridge farm-house still looks like a manorial residence, possibly even more than Bathsheba’s house in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, especially as far as the interior is concerned. The portraits of some D’Urberville ladies are still there because, being painted

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<sup>186</sup> See Enrica Villari, ‘«La fatale ostilità tra carne e spirito». Paganesimo, cristianesimo e tragico moderno in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* e *Jude the Obscure*’, in *Il Paganesimo nella Letteratura dell’Ottocento*, a cura di Paolo Tortonese, Roma, Bulzoni, 2009, pp. 207-28, in particular pp. 210-3.

<sup>187</sup> This aspect of Clare’s personality is analysed by David J. De Laura in his “‘The Ache of Modernism” in Hardy’s Later Novels’, *ELH* 34, 3 (1967), pp. 380-99, in particular pp. 385-92.

on panels built into the masonry, they cannot be removed, as if to suggest that the past could by no means be obliterated. Moreover, the resemblance between Tess's features and those of the two ladies represented in the portraits is striking, although two hundred years separate Tess from her two supposed aristocratic ancestors.

The close link between Tess, the D'Urberville mansion and their common history casts a shadow on both the past and the future of the building. Tess and Wellbridge farm share an original sin, that of their kinship with treacherous, merciless, arrogant ancestors.<sup>188</sup> The past of Wellbridge house cannot be cancelled and the building continues to symbolise oppression, cruelty, social inequalities and privilege even if much time has passed, and the oppressors are no longer ancient aristocrats but rather modern representatives of a rising, rich middle class. As for the future, it is probable that the building will have to "pay", just as Tess, even though it now serves another function and is of use to the whole community. Yet the conversion of Wellbridge house into a farm has not entirely succeeded and the building seems condemned to stand as an eternal reminder of the crimes perpetrated by Tess's forefathers. In Beatty's opinion, Wellbridge farm wavers between two roles, i.e. that "of monument to an ancient family now no longer powerful and well-nigh extinct" and that of being useful to the agricultural community.<sup>189</sup>

If the situation of Wellbridge farm is an ambivalent one, that of the third and last building – the abbey church – is clear. The conventual buildings are now a mere "heap of ruins" (*Tess*, Ch. XXXVI, p. 240) because they represent a worn-out creed. The loneliness, isolation and uselessness of the abbey is indicated by the narrow footbridge whose handrail had been washed away by the autumn rains (see *Tess*, Ch. XXXVII, p. 248). Given the oddity of the episode of Angel carrying Tess to the abbey and laying her in the empty coffin, it is easy to see the remains of the convent as a mere background for a highly emotional scene with gothic overtones. The meaning of the episode in the context of the novel is certainly much more complex, since it foreshadows Tess's sacrificial death and the scene at Stonehenge. However, it is also true that the only function the abbey now serves is that of a sort of setting. The church is a ruin, but the stone coffin of an abbot still remains, as if to allow Angel to stage his ominous performance. Of the disturbing effect this scene may have on readers Hardy must have been conscious and his having recourse to some of the typical elements of Gothic

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<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the narrator thus describes the two ladies portrayed in Wellbridge farm: "The long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of *merciless treachery*; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other, suggesting *arrogance* to the point of ferocity, haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams" (*Tess*, Ch. XXXIV, p. 217, my emphasis).

<sup>189</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 344.

literature, such as the coffin without the lid, the ruined abbey, a somnambulist and a tumultuous river, is not unintentional.<sup>190</sup> The presence of these stereotyped elements reinforces the impression that the abbey is by now an “empty” building, too decayed to serve a practical function, but picturesque and ghastly enough to be a proper setting for a mock-burial. On the night of Angel’s “performance”, the church seems to become “useful” again, but this is only a momentary illusion, just as Angel’s revived love for Tess.

The notion of “use-value” or “usefulness” seem to have in Hardy a larger, more inclusive, meaning than in Riegl. The great barn illustrates what an ideal “useful” building is for Hardy. First of all, it is an artefact serving practical purposes well, so that no new building is required. Secondly, being beautiful, it contributes to the “mental health, power, and pleasure” of man, and this is what a good work of architecture should do. And since for Hardy aesthetic worth cannot be separated from usefulness, the barn is all the more beautiful because it perfectly satisfies man’s necessities. Finally, the barn possesses historical significance, since it is indeed a story in itself: by just looking at it the beholder becomes aware of the kind of society in which it was built, and of its organisation, traditions, and system of values. The barn is a faithful document of the past, it is a piece of that unrecorded history which, for Hardy, was as valuable as the history of recorded events. So the great barn proves that, once again, Hardy shared Ruskin’s opinion that buildings have three main duties: acting (protecting men), talking (“to record facts and express feelings”), and being graceful and pleasing.<sup>191</sup> Indeed the barn is superior to buildings which have changed function right because it “talks”, because it is just what it appears to be, while even Bathsheba’s house “deceives” the beholder: the appearance does not correspond to its current function. The reason why the correspondence between the design of a building and its purpose is a value in architecture was thus expressed by A. W. N. Pugin in the *Contrasts*:

It will be readily admitted that the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended, and that the style of a

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<sup>190</sup> On Hardy’s use of Gothic elements, see James F. Scott, ‘Thomas Hardy’s Use of Gothic’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 17 (1963), pp. 363-80, in particular pp. 365-6. Scott says that in Hardy, as in Gothic writes, “the sublime ruin adds a spatial dimension to the mood of melancholy or terror evoked by a particular complex of events” (p. 366).

<sup>191</sup> On Ruskin’s concept of the “usefulness” of a building, see Gill Chitty, ‘Ruskin’s Architectural Heritage: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Reception and Legacy’, in Rebecca Daniels and Geoffrey K. Brandwood (eds.), *Ruskin and Architecture*, Reading, Spire Books in association with the Victorian Society, 2003, pp. 25-54, p. 45.

building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected.<sup>192</sup>

Despite Pugin's recommendation, though, 19th-century architects often gave less importance to the use of a building than to its external appearance, a tendency James Fergusson thus criticised:

In modern designs there is always an effort either to reproduce the style of some foreign country or that of some by-gone age; frequently both. The form of the buildings is more or less moulded according to these foreign elements, while the ornamentation, being always borrowed, seldom expresses the construction, and scarcely ever the real truthful objects, to which the building is applied.<sup>193</sup>

For Hardy as well, the ideal building is characterised by the perfect correspondence between its outer appearance, its shell, and its "vital principle", i.e. its use. So buildings undergoing changes in their function become inevitably a little less "beautiful" in Pugin's sense, since the original strict link between "the purpose for which it was erected" and its shape is no longer there to be clearly "read".

Hence Hardy's concept of "use-value" seems to be broader than Riegl's because it has to do with all the other values, including "historical value". On the other hand, as we have already hinted, Hardy is more critical than Riegl about "age-value". In the *Wessex Novels* the contemplation of decay *per se* is condemned, especially if the buildings are still used or inhabited. And since buildings do not generally stand intact throughout the centuries as the barn does, men have to provide to their preservation. So in the *Wessex Novels* Hardy tackled a question of paramount importance for him and for Victorian society, that is to say why and how buildings should be preserved and/or restored. As we will see, Hardy did not provide a clear-cut solution, but he illustrated the most common mistakes we are liable to in our attitudes towards ancient buildings and to the culture of the past.

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<sup>192</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *Contrasts, or, a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing The Present Decay of Taste* [1836], London, James Moyes, 1836, p. 1.

<sup>193</sup> James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* cit., Vol. I, p. 3.

## Chapter Two

### The Critique of Eclecticism: A *Laodicean*

The Victorian Age was characterised by two opposite attitudes towards the architecture of the past. On the one hand, since a general nostalgia for the past times was a widespread sentiment among Hardy's contemporaries, the most visible consequence was the adoption of the style of the Gothic Revival for most public and ecclesiastical buildings. On the other hand, Queen Victoria's reign was also a period of great transformations, which marked a decisive break with the past. In architecture this epochal change corresponded to the adoption of new materials, such as iron and glass, in the wake of Joseph Paxton's design of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>194</sup> So a sort of veneration of the past, yet not of the past *tout court*, but of just a small portion of it, that is to say the Middle Ages, coexisted with the opposite attitude of a significant appreciation of the role new technological inventions could play in the architecture of the future, which seemed instead to imply disregard or even rejection of the past. Yet the two attitudes were in fact only apparently divergent, since it is true that during the Victorian Age many buildings or parts of them were subject to indiscriminate demolitions, but very often the reason was that they failed to conform to the commonly accepted style, i.e. Decorated Gothic. Opposite as they might appear at first sight, both attitudes led indeed to the same end, according to Hardy, had their origin in a partial and defective knowledge of the past.

In the *Wessex Novels* the obsession with the Middle Ages and the Gothic is criticised as hiding a substantial ignorance of history, and historical knowledge is fundamental for the preservation of the past and its legacy. This statement seems to clash with Hardy's well-known preference for the Gothic style. Yet although Gothic, in particular the Early English Gothic, was Hardy's favourite style,<sup>195</sup> he "was not a rigid Gothacist"<sup>196</sup> and was by no means

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<sup>194</sup> For an analysis of the Crystal Palace and the way Paxton's contemporaries received it, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design. Victorian and After* [1968], London, Thames and Hudson, 1982, Ch. 3.

<sup>195</sup> That Norman and Early English Gothic were Hardy's favourite styles can be guessed, first of all, from his letters. For example, in the already quoted letter to Jane Ashley, Hardy wrote that fortunately in the church of Bere Regis the substitution of the Early English chancel arch with a more ornate one was prevented by the restorer (see 'Letter to Jane Ashley', 2 Dec. 1890, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* cit., Vol. VII, p. 115). Then, in a letter to Thackeray Turner, secretary of the SPAB, Hardy sadly commented on the decision to demolish the Early English chancel arch and hagioscopes of the church of Stratton (see 'Letter to Thackeray Turner', 29 Nov. 1890 in *Ibidem*, Vol. I, p. 220). Moreover, Hardy's predilection for Norman and Early Gothic buildings can be guessed from his favourite cathedrals – Winchester, Lincoln, Peterborough and, above all, Salisbury (see Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect* cit., p. 80). Indeed in the *Life* Hardy

a supporter of the demolitions of Georgian features still going on in churches even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in a letter to A. R. Powys, secretary of the SPAB, Hardy complained about “the conviction that anything later in date than the end of Gothic architecture may be destroyed with impunity”,<sup>197</sup> and in ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ he wrote that for church restorers “it was always a principle that anything later than Henry VIII. was Anathema, and to be cast out”.<sup>198</sup> Hardy certainly preferred the Gothic style for aesthetic reasons, and being himself an architect, he was capable of appreciating such features of the Gothic as the irregularities, the strong connection with the surrounding environment, the use of the grotesque, and the spontaneity of the medieval masons celebrated by Ruskin. Yet Hardy’s pleas against demolitions of monuments and other features dating to later centuries prove that in his opinion aesthetic values, and in particular age-value, should not prevail over historical value when the preservation of the memory of the past through architecture was at stake.<sup>199</sup> Buildings are historical documents, and for Hardy the preservation of buildings with all the subsequent additions added by generations of occupants was of paramount importance for a specific reason. In his opinion, buildings and other artefacts are the only means available to common people to perpetuate their memory. This is the reason why humble buildings, such as cottages and mills, are invaluable historical documents, as worth remembering and respecting in his opinion as ecclesiastical buildings and manor houses. On the other hand, as churches serve a whole community, they are the most historical buildings, in the sense that they witnessed both national and private events, thus allowing both high and common people to perpetuate their memory. Hardy clearly expressed this idea in ‘Memories of Church Restorations’, where he defined churches as “chronicles in stone”,<sup>200</sup> since they contain monuments, effigies, inscriptions and other marks left by generations of parishioners.<sup>201</sup>

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recorded the vision of Salisbury Close by night, which, “under the full summer moon on a windless midnight, is as beautiful a scene as any I know in England – or for the matter of that elsewhere” (*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 314). Hardy’s 1897 visit to Salisbury Cathedral inspired also the poem ‘A Cathedral Facade at Midnight’ (see *CP* 667).

<sup>196</sup> John Betjeman, ‘Hardy and architecture’, in *The Genius of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Margaret Drabble, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976, pp. 150-3, p. 153.

<sup>197</sup> ‘Letter to A. R. Powys’, 14 Sept. 1919, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* cit., Vol. VIII, p. 174.

<sup>198</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 245. As Beatty observed (see Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy: Conservation Architect* cit., p. 72), Hardy certainly shared Holman Hunt’s opinion about Victorian restoration works, which often meant destruction of any feature not Decorated in style (see William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols., London, Macmillan, 1905, Vol. I, p. 325).

<sup>199</sup> On the importance of preserving churches with all their “imperfections”, see Samantha Briggs, ‘Thomas Hardy and the Evolution of Architecture’, *AA Files* 67 (2013), pp. 29-35, p. 29.

<sup>200</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 241.

<sup>201</sup> A similar claim had been made by Victor Hugo in “Guerre aux démolisseurs”, a pamphlet against demolitions of medieval buildings going on in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. There Hugo wrote that to

Hardy realised that “church restorations”, when these meant indiscriminate demolitions, was just another injustice inflicted on those people who had no other means to hand the memory of their way of life on to posterity. Indeed Hardy asserted that it was usually “the headstones of the poorer inhabitants – purchased and erected in many cases out of scanty means – that suffered most in these ravages.”<sup>202</sup>

The importance Hardy attached to humble buildings and small parish churches implies a peculiar concept of “history”, which is as much inclusive as his own notion of “usefulness”. For Hardy “history” does not simply coincide with national history, but includes other kinds of histories, usually overlooked as less significant and, therefore, not worth remembering. To be more precise, with the only exception of the Napoleonic wars in *The Dynasts*, history seldom coincides with grand events and renowned personalities in Hardy’s works. More than that, in his novels and short stories both the characters’ past experiences and local history are given more prominence than national events, both past and contemporary, which are rather left in the background, as in the case of *The Trumpet-Major*. Personal history, family history, local history and grand history are all equally important for Hardy because they are different expressions of the perennial movement of Change. As Samuel Hynes pointed out, Hardy “needed vastly different *scales* of history”, from “personal history” to “cosmic history”, to express his idea of history as “inevitable and directionless Change”.<sup>203</sup> So architecture has indeed two functions Hardy particularly cherished and respected – that of keeping the living in touch with their past, on the one hand, and that of making the dead sure they will be remembered, on the other. In other words, architecture is a privileged space where past and present are allowed to communicate, since buildings and their stories remind current generations where they come from. Hence the importance of preserving buildings.

As a consequence, good preservation works presuppose that all the kinds of history recorded by buildings are respected and correctly interpreted. Establishing such an unbiased relationship with the past and its architecture, though, is more difficult than it may seem at first sight, since veneration or, on the contrary, rejection of the past or part of it are the two most common errors we are liable to, as a close study of architecture in *A Laodicean* will make clear. In this novel Hardy openly explored his contemporaries’ relationship with time through architecture, which here becomes the *leitmotif* of the story. The subtitle of *A*

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“ces admirable monuments du moyen-âge [...] s’attachent à la fois la mémoire des rois et les traditions du peuple” (Victor Hugo, “Guerre aux démolisseurs!” [1825-32], in *Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1934, pp. 153-66, p. 153).

<sup>202</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 244.

<sup>203</sup> Samuel Hynes, ‘Hardy’s Historians’ cit., p. 116 (emphasis in the text).



*Laodicean*, so peculiar in the panorama of the *Wessex Novels*, reads ‘A Story of To-Day’, which clearly indicates that Hardy’s aim was rightly that of dealing with the present time, and the centrality of the architectural theme proves that he intended to do so through buildings. There is however a seeming paradox at the core of this novel, i.e. that the plot and the setting are dominated by a medieval castle, while modernity is represented by three artefacts apparently less important in plot: the railway tunnel, Myrtle Villa, and the Baptist chapel. One of the central issues in the novel is indeed Paula’s indecision about the best way to restore Castle de Stancy, the real protagonist of the novel. In fact the debate about the restoration of ancient buildings, and the presence of three extremely modern artefacts, opens a fierce debate in the novel about the present and future of architecture, caught between the two extremes of an uncritical veneration of the past and an equally uncritical rejection of it. As it is widely acknowledged, Hardy’s illness while he was writing *A Laodicean* actually prevented him from further developing the discourse on the present and future of architecture, which is abruptly interrupted by the peregrinations through Europe taking up most of the novel.

I will start by discussing Paula’s and George’s attitudes towards the architecture of the past in order to illustrate what Hardy identified as their limits. Both Paula and George are attracted to the past not despite, but just because they *are* a modern woman and man; yet there are some substantial differences between them. As for Paula, she is attracted to both Gothic and classical architecture at the same time, but her preference is based exclusively on purely aesthetic principles. This distinctive feature of her personality emerges since the very beginning of the novel, during the episode of her baptism. In front of the minister and of the congregation of the Baptist chapel, Paula feels obliged to receive the baptism, but eventually she refuses to behave against her will. The reason is that, although Paula represents a “modern type of maidenhood” and even looks “ultra-modern by reason of her environment” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 11), she does not feel at ease in the dissenting chapel, preferring instead Sleeping-Green’s Anglican church, whose medieval associations have more grip on her than the more modern religious zeal of her father’s faith embodied in the Baptist chapel. Paula is fascinated in particular by the tombs of the De Stancy family and by the pew attached to the castle. So Paula’s preference for the parish church is not based on religious principles, and more than once the reasons of her desertion of the Baptist chapel in favour of the “mother-church” are hinted at as rather frivolous. Her fascination is of an entirely aesthetic kind: she admits that her father’s “ancestors” are all eminent men of science, but she would rather be a member of the De Stancy family, for whom she has a “*prédilection*

*d'artiste*” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XIV, p. 97, emphasis in the text). In other words, she likes the church and the canopied effigies of the De Stancys because the Baptist chapel and the tunnel built by her father cannot, in her eyes, stand the comparison with the medieval artefacts, at least from a merely aesthetic point of view.

Yet shortly before Paula had told Somerset that actually she was not medievalist, but Greek (see *Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. X, p. 70), and her plan to introduce a Greek peristyle in the cloister of the castle seems then to confirm her preference for classical art. In fact Paula feels sometimes Greek, sometimes medieval, but the truth is that she is none of them for the reason that she is instead undeniably a modern woman: she introduced the telegraph into the castle and is really satisfied with it. Paula is unable to decide between Classicism and Gothic, ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, because both historical periods appeal to her, and since it is their art what fascinates her, she thinks that eclecticism is the solution. Paula’s eclecticism about architectural matters clearly corresponds to her Laodiceanism in love and, more at large, in life, so that the so-called “battle of styles” (Gothic vs. Classical) going on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is here exploited by Hardy to portray a modern type of woman, essentially modern but irremediably attracted to a romantic past. Even though she is a modern woman, she cannot suppress her fascination with the past and its symbols. What in Paula is just indecision about her own identity, with comic effects at times, will become a tragic internal conflict in Sue Bridehead, as we will see in the next chapter. Although Paula does not entirely reject progress, she never speaks of adopting new materials and a new style for the restoration of the building she owns, given that the idea of a completely new style, bearing no resemblance with the architecture of the past, never crosses her mind. After the episode of the letter attacking her restoration plan, Paula seems to abandon her eclecticism in favour of historical accuracy. She tells Somerset she now wants to be “romantic and historical” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XIV, p. 95) and accordingly begins to lean towards medievalism, but soon afterwards she contradicts her historical pursuit by admitting that it is her “*prédilection d’artiste*” which makes her appreciate the medieval tombs. Indeed Paula never adopts an unbiased historical perspective in the course of the novel, and her veneration of the past for its own sake culminates in the end, when she significantly tells Somerset: “I wish my castle wasn’t burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!” (*Laodicean*, Book the Sixth, Ch. V, p. 379). This statement indicates that Paula will never cease to be a “Laodicean”, in architecture as much as in love. In other words, she will continue to reject her true identity as John Power’s daughter and as modern woman and to cherish signs of the past

for reasons which are aesthetic rather than historical – “historical” in the sense Hardy intended it. From this point of view, Paula resembles very much Kierkegaard’s modern man/woman, in whose personality the aesthetic principle occupies a larger space than the ethical principle (the domain of choice), and who keeps postponing the moment of making a choice and thus continues to live aesthetically, that is, without ever choosing absolutely and so having the tendency to choose something different the next moment. The person who lives in a purely aesthetic dimension has an indefinite personality because he or she is never the same person.<sup>204</sup> Although Hardy probably never read Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, which was translated in English in 1944, the similarity between Paula’s Laodiceanism and Kierkegaard’s discussion of the predominance of the aesthetic in the composition of personality is striking. Paula’s eclecticism is alarming because it is a sign that she has not established her identity yet, and, what is worse, she does not seem to have evolved at the end of the novel. She remains a “Laodicean”, that is to say a person with a purely aesthetic conception of life.

Somerset is no less “Laodicean” and no less modern than Paula. In the first chapter we are told that Somerset “had suffered from the modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness as much as any living man of his own age” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. I, p. 7), a sort of intellectual “modern vice of unrest”. Like Paula, he cannot decide which past style of architecture he likes best, and his current fondness for English Gothic might be temporary, given that he has always ceased admiring a style when it became too popular. We learn that in the past George has been fond of the French Gothic, the Palladian, the Jacobean and the Queen-Anne: as Paula, George values any style of architecture, provided that they belong to the past, even if the “encounter” with the railway tunnel probably marks the beginning of his appreciation of modern architecture too, as we will see. Somerset too is unable to forsake his fondness for the Gothic style and to adopt a new style for his plans. It should be remembered that in the novel there is a building designed (not restored) by Somerset, i.e. a church at Nice. We learn from Paula that the building is in Early English Gothic (see *Laodicean*, Book the Fourth, Ch. I, p. 237), that is to say his (and Hardy’s) favourite style. In short, even when Somerset is in charge of building something new, he is unwilling to adopt a new style and has recourse to a past national style, which, by the way, is out of place in southern France.

Hence Somerset is the representative of all those architects who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century turned to the architecture of the past to find a suitable style for modernity, with results often lacking

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<sup>204</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Equilibrium between the Aesthetical and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality’, in *Either/Or* [1843], trans. by David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson and Walter Lowrie, 2 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1944, Vol. II, pp. 131-278.

spontaneity and originality. The study of the ancient styles of architecture, in particular of the English Gothic, was strongly encouraged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Hardy himself well knew, through manuals and books with numerous illustrations of the most significant examples of Gothic architecture. These books were clearly aimed at would-be architects, who were required to make sketches of ancient buildings if they wanted to revive the spirit animating medieval masons.<sup>205</sup> At the beginning of the novel we observe George performing exactly this task, that is to say studying, measuring and sketching a Gothic church to improve his architectural skills. However, it soon becomes clear that copying is not enough to become a good architect. Lamb himself, for example, warned against the risks of copying without infusing vitality into works of art,<sup>206</sup> while James Fergusson wrote that “if they [architects] were allowed to exercise their intellects, and not forced to trust only to their memories, they might do something of which we should have cause to be proud”.<sup>207</sup> Before being commissioned the restoration of the castle, George sadly acknowledges that he has spent too much time studying and sketching instead of applying himself to more practical tasks. The narrator draws our attention to the “questionable utility” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. I, p. 7) of this kind of training, which will be criticised also by Havill as unproductive later in the novel. Indeed the young Hardy himself had “felt that his creative instincts were being stifled by the mechanism of his work as a draughtsman”,<sup>208</sup> and in character and story of Somerset

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<sup>205</sup> One of these books, Rickman’s *Attempt to Discriminate the English Styles of Architecture*, is mentioned in the novel. Rickman’s work, containing numerous plates, can be considered as the first systematic treatise on Gothic architecture, since the features characterising the different styles are analysed in detail. Moreover, Rickman tried to date the styles, which were labelled in an unequivocal way (Thomas Rickman, *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture in England, from the Conquest to the Reformation* [1817], Oxford and London, Parker, 1862). Rickman’s work was followed by many illustrated books devoted to medieval architecture. Some of these works, with which Hardy was probably familiar, are listed in the bibliography of this thesis, in the section entitled “Nineteenth-century theorists of architecture”. On the influence these handbooks exerted on the young Hardy, see Claudius J. P. Beatty, ‘Introduction’ to *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 3 and Timothy R. Hands, ‘Architecture’, in *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Hardy*, ed. Norman Page, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 13-8, p. 13. For a close study of the role played by the works cited above and by other architectural writers in the success of the Gothic Revival, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *Some Architectural Writers of the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972 (in particular Ch. V, on Thomas Rickman).

<sup>206</sup> See Edward Buckton Lamb, *Studies of Ancient Domestic Architecture* cit., p. 3. On the frontispiece Lamb placed a passage from Voltaire’s *Candide* where the act of copying is criticised because it turns art into mere manufacture.

<sup>207</sup> James Fergusson, ‘Author’s Preface to the First Edition’ (1862) of *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* cit., Vol. I, pp. ix-xviii, p. xii.

<sup>208</sup> Richard H. Taylor, ‘Introduction’ to *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard H. Taylor, London, Macmillan, 1978, pp. xi-xxv, p. xix.

he represented the negative side-effects produced by the increasing specialisation of architects and their training.<sup>209</sup>

So the source of the problem of the two protagonists is that they keep looking back to the past, avoiding any confrontation with the actual modernity of their time. From this point of view, the fire which destroys the castle might have been an opportunity for both Paula and Somerset. On the one hand, Paula, being forced to build a completely new mansion, might have been forced to overcome her indecision about the best ancient style of architecture. Notwithstanding this, the destruction of the medieval castle does not induce her to consider the merits of the modern way of building, in spite of her father being a railway contractor. Somerset, on the other hand, might have tested himself on building a new mansion in a new style. He suggests instead building a new house, eclectic in style, next to the remains of the castle, and planting more ivy in order to enhance the picturesque atmosphere of the spot. However, we do not know what the new mansion will look like because its erection is not told in the novel, and this is the reason why Beatty remarked that “the question of the restoration and enlargement of the castle is neatly by-passed at the close by a conflagration, which determines Paula to attempt no further work on the castle but leave ‘the edifice in ruins’.”<sup>210</sup> What is certain is that it will resemble a medieval or a classical building or both, since Paula and George never get rid of their Laodiceanism, symbolised by their professed eclecticism. And it is also certain that they will not adopt the style of the three modern buildings/artefacts featuring in the novel, that is to say, in order of appearance, the Baptist chapel, Myrtle Villa and the railway tunnel.

Yet Paula and George’s “Laodiceanism” are slightly different. While Paula considers buildings just from an aesthetic point of view, George often proves to be more inclined to look at architecture from different perspectives. Although at the beginning of the novel he is defined as a man with a “heart susceptible to beauty of all kinds” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch I, p. 4), his encounter with the Baptist chapel tells much about his personality. At first, Somerset is struck by the plainness of the building and significantly exclaims: ““Shade of Pugin, what a monstrosity!”” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 8). However, after recovering from the initial shock, he (and the reader with him) begins to consider the building from other perspectives than the “purely aesthetic” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 9),

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<sup>209</sup> For a detailed account of the evolution of the figure of the architect throughout the centuries, see Barrington Kaye, *The Development of the Architectural Profession in England: A Sociological Study*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1960.

<sup>210</sup> Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 244.

and changes his mind about it. Although the chapel “had neither beauty, quaintness, nor congeniality to recommend it” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 9), he is surprised by the warm and sincere religious feeling animating the congregation. Indeed George is able to suppress his spontaneous love for traditional beauty in order to evaluate both people and buildings also from other points of view than the purely aesthetic. For example, he is aware that Paula’s features are not perfect, but this is not what strikes him. He realises “how beautiful a woman can be as a whole without attaining in any one detail to the lines marked out as absolutely correct” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 12). Then the narrator reports what Somerset thinks of Paula’s peculiar beauty – an appreciation which could perfectly suit architecture as well: “The spirit and the life were there; and material shapes could be disregarded” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 12). If indeed George first considers just the “material shape” of the chapel, then he becomes aware that that plain building may be endowed with “spirit” and “life”. Indeed the Baptist congregation seems to be animated by a strong religious belief, symbolised by the “shabby plot of ground, from which the herbage was all trodden away by busy feet” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 10) around the church.

So there is reason to believe that George is able to look at buildings (and people) more in depth, without limiting himself only to the “material shapes”, thus coming to appreciate even modern architecture, as his open-minded attitude towards the railway tunnel proves. At the beginning he is prejudiced against it, because the tunnel originates ““a clash between ancient and modern”” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. IV, p. 27). And facing Paula’s lack of pride in her father’s achievements and her disappointment for belonging to a family of *nouveaux riches*, Somerset confesses to her: ‘From a modern point of view, railways are, no doubt, things more to be proud of than castles,’[...] ‘though perhaps I myself, from mere association, should decide in favour of the ancestor who built the castle’ (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XI, p. 80). So George acknowledges the usefulness of the railway and the inevitability of change, but he still prefers ancient architecture for “mere association”, that is, because of its historical value or, maybe, its age-value. Yet he seems to change his mind when he approaches the tunnel and realises that it is for real an example of good architecture. Before the sudden arrival of a train, he admires “the construction of the massive archivault, and the majesty of its nude ungarnished walls” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. XII, p. 82). The tunnel is, like the Baptist chapel, devoid of any decoration, but it could not be otherwise, since this is actually a work of engineering, rather than a work of architecture.

Finally, George overcomes his own prejudices against the third modern building, Myrtle Villa, which could hardly appeal to an admirer of ancient architecture:

It was almost new, of streaked brick, having a central door, and a small bay window on each side to light the two front parlours. A little lawn spread its green surface in front, divided from the road by iron railings, the low line of shrubs immediately within them being coated with pallid dust from the highway. On the neat piers of the neat entrance gate were chiselled the words "Myrtle Villa". Genuine roadside respectability sat smiling on every brick of the eligible dwelling. (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. V, p. 36)

At first George reads the anonymous cottage as the symbol of the fate undergone by the decayed family of the De Stancys, commenting "'How are the mighty fallen!'" (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. V, p. 36). Two features in particular irritate Somerset: the neatness of the place and "the air of healthful cheerfulness" (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. V, p. 36) pervading it. The word "neat", recurring three times within few lines, connotes the house as a typical example of bourgeois respectability, or rather hypocrisy to the protagonist's eyes, convinced as he is that the air of cheerfulness must necessarily be false. How could in fact the noble Sir William De Stancy possibly enjoy his new bourgeois life in a bourgeois dwelling? The modern cottage is indeed the opposite of the castle: here "the proceedings in the kitchen" can be "distinctly heard in the parlours" (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. V, p. 36) and a passer-by can pierce the entire house with a glance, while high turrets, thick walls, winding passages and narrow loopholes make the castle inscrutable and almost impregnable. Yet when George enters the house and meets Sir William, he realises that the modernist building is not only comfortable, but also in perfect accord with his owner, who is not masking himself as a bourgeois, but is for real satisfied with his new life. This modern cottage may look anonymous from the outside but, as Somerset himself is forced to acknowledge, it is the occupant that makes it unique and shapes it in his own image and likeness. Strange as it may appear, Myrtle Villa perfectly fits Ruskin's (much quoted here) evaluation of architecture as what contributes to the "mental health, power, and pleasure"<sup>211</sup> of man, to the point that it is there that Sir William has recovered from his illness. So Sir William has learnt to look ahead and has rid himself of the burden of the past by selling the castle and buying the cottage after many years spent away from the sight of his castle.

Now, Somerset's peculiar attitudes towards the three modern artefacts featuring in the novel helps us to identify analogies and differences between the young architect and Paula. If

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<sup>211</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 27.

Somerset is able to put aside his love for beauty to consider other aspects of architecture, Paula is not. She tries to be historical, but she fails. It is easy to see Paula's error if we compare her uncritical attitude towards the Middle Ages with a remark made by the narrator when Somerset finds out that the telegraph wire comes from the castle:

There was a certain unexpectedness in the fact that the hoary memorial of a stolid antagonism to the interchange of ideas, the monument of hard distinctions in blood and race, of deadly mistrust of one's neighbour in spite of the church's teaching, and of a sublime unconsciousness of any other force than a brute one, should be the goal of a machine which beyond everything may be said to symbolise cosmopolitan views and the intellectual and moral kinship of all mankind. [...] But, on the other hand, the modern mental fret and fever which consumes people before they can grow old was also signified by the wire; and this aspect of to-day did not contrast well [...] with the fairer side of feudalism – leisure, light-hearted generosity, intense friendships, hawks, hounds, revels, healthy complexions, freedom from care, and such a living power in architectural art as the world may never again see – civilization having at present a stronger attachment to lath and plaster than to walls of a thickness sufficient for the perpetuation of grand ideas." (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 18)

The evaluation of the relative merits of past and present is, in short, much more complex and ambivalent than it may seem at first sight.<sup>212</sup> Paula is fascinated by the "fairer side of feudalism", but fails to recognise the oppressive side of it. And when she despises modernity, she does so for the wrong reason, i.e. because it is "unromantic", and not because of the "mental fret and fever which consumes people before they can grow old" in modern times.

As for Somerset, his knowledge as an architect helped him (as probably it helped the young Hardy) to see the necessary link between styles of architecture and historical periods. He does not lack a historical perspective, but he has probably an incomplete view of history, in which there is no appreciation of the present time, and of its possible links with the past. Hence his tendency to idealise the past on the one hand, and his inability to wholeheartedly approve of modern architecture on the other. At times his uncritical admiration for the architecture of the past induces him to undervalue the practical side of architecture and of his profession, as he himself acknowledges while he is sketching the Gothic church at the beginning of the novel and as Havill points out to him during their first meeting. To George's admission that he has never built a chapel, but has sketched many churches, Havill replies:

'Ah – there we differ. I didn't do much sketching in my youth, nor have I time for it now. Sketching and building are two different things, to my mind. I was not brought up to the profession – got into it through sheer love of it. I began as a

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<sup>212</sup> See J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye* cit., pp. 128-9.



landscape gardener, then I became a builder, then I was a road-contractor. Every architect might do worse than have some such experience. But nowadays 'tis the men who can draw pretty pictures who get recommended, not the practical men. Young prigs win Institute medals for a pretty design or two which, if anybody tried to build them, would fall down like a house of cards; then they get travelling studentships and what not, and then they start as architects of some new school or other, and think they are the masters of us experienced ones.' (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. VIII, p. 62)

Havill's apology of his own buildings lacks any knowledge of the architecture of the past, and of its relationship with history, and as such can only be condemned by Hardy. Yet it is true that architects should have some practical knowledge, since architecture is not an abstract art, as Hardy himself, being the son of a master-mason, well knew. Somerset instead lacks this kind of knowledge because he has spent many years studying and sketching ancient buildings. If Somerset applies himself with so much zeal to measuring and sketching Gothic churches and Castle de Stancy itself, it is because he believes that those buildings can teach him whatever an architect – even a “modern” one – should know about architecture. Somerset is partly Hardy's *alter ego*, and he is putting into practice Paley's suggestion that students of architecture should not only observe, but also copy mouldings and other architectural features.<sup>213</sup> In short, Somerset is behaving in accordance with the firm belief of one of the most important British architects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Butterfield, who thought that “the examination of old buildings was by far the most valuable part of an architect's education”.<sup>214</sup>

Yet Somerset's reverential relationship with the architecture of the past is sometimes brought to a sterile, and uncritical, excess. The son of an Academician, Somerset is sincerely fond of architecture, although at the beginning of the novel we are informed that in the past he had gone through a period of disgust for his profession (see *Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. I, p. 5). Somerset had indeed realised that ideal perfection in architecture “was never achieved [...] and never would be” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. I, p. 5). Notwithstanding this, he seems to have overcome this sense of hopelessness and disgust and come to believe that sketching is fundamental not only to acquire knowledge, but also to learn how to be humble. By measuring and sketching, Somerset has learnt that a flawless style of architecture never

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<sup>213</sup> See Frederick Apthorp Paley, *A Manual of Gothic Moldings* [sic] [1845], London, Gurney and Jackson, 1891, p. 8. According to Beatty, there are two hints in particular proving that Somerset is Hardy: Paley's manual, with which Hardy was familiar, and the European tour Hardy made with Emma in 1880 (see Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 269 and, for Paley's influence on Hardy, Claudius J. P. Beatty, 'Introduction' to *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 5n and Claudius J. P. Beatty, *Thomas Hardy's Career in Architecture* cit.).

<sup>214</sup> Paul Thompson, *William Butterfield*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 82.

existed. So it is clear for him that modern architecture should avoid the mistake of thinking itself the most accomplished one just because practical and technological innovations were unknown to ancient architects. Havill incurs rightly in this error, despising both the past and its architecture, and deeming the study of ancient buildings nothing but a waste of time. As already argued in Chapter Two of this thesis, it is true that an architect should also be a practical man, but the excessive concentration on pragmatic questions has negative consequences on creativity. Indeed Havill does not hesitate to accept Dare's suggestion to have a look at Somerset's plan for the restoration of the castle. Havill's reaction in front of the plan, and the narrator's explicit comment, underline that Havill is a mediocre architect:

To Havill the conception had more charm than it could have to the most appreciative outsider; for when a mediocre and jealous mind that has been cudgelling itself over a problem capable of many solutions, lights on the solution of a rival, all possibilities in that kind seem to merge in the one beheld. (*Laodicean*, Book the Second, Ch. II, p. 123)

Havill is suddenly and uncritically struck by the originality of Somerset's plan because he has no imagination at all. His excessive concentration on practical questions prevents him from conceiving the ingenious idea of building a new palace annexed the ruinous castle. From this point of view, Havill is a sort of degenerated Stephen Smith, since his awareness of lacking creative power arouses in him feelings of resentment and envy.

Havill's disrespectful attitude towards the architecture of the past and his lack of creativity are concretely expressed in the Baptist chapel he is so proud of:

The building was, in short, a recently-erected chapel of red brick, with pseudo-classic ornamentation, and the white regular joints of mortar could be seen streaking its surface in geometrical oppressiveness from top to bottom. The roof was of blue slate, clean as a table, and unbroken from gable to gable; the windows were glazed with sheets of plate glass, a temporary iron stove-pipe passing out near one of these, and running up to the height of the ridge, where it was finished by a covering like a parachute. (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 8)

The use of such materials as brick and iron and the plain style suggest that Havill wanted to make a clear break with the way of building of the past. The Baptist chapel is described immediately after a Gothic church: in this way, the contrast between ancient and modern architecture is pushed to extremes, and modern architecture seems to have no chances to compete with the architecture of the past. Yet the doubt that the chapel might not be the best accomplishment of modern architecture never crosses Havill's mind. From an aesthetic point of view, there are no doubts that the chapel cannot stand the comparison with the ancient

buildings featured in the novel. Although Castle de Stancy stands as a “fossil of feudalism”, it exemplifies “such a living power in architectural art as the world may never again see – civilisation having at present a stronger attachment to lath and plaster than to walls of a thickness sufficient for the perpetuation of grand ideas.” The castle was meant to last for long in order to perpetuate “grand ideas”, which is what exerts a strong fascination on Paula. Current architecture, on the contrary, seems either to lack “grand ideas” or to have given up any ambition to perpetuate them. Artefacts built in “lath and plaster” (an obvious reference to the chapel) are clearly not meant to last for long, and that casts a shadow on modern buildings in the novel, in particular on the Baptist chapel. The detail of the “temporary iron stove-pipe” in its description further characterises the chapel as a sort of provisional building.

The general sense of precariousness does not affect the building alone, but also the creed it embodies. This surfaces in particular in the dialogue between Somerset and the landlord of the inn at Sleeping-Green. The young architect asks the landlord if he is a churchman, and the other replies:

‘Yes, sir, but I was a Methodist once – ay, for a length of time. ’Twas owing to my taking a house next door to a chapel; so that what with hearing the organ bizz like a bee through the wall, and what with finding it saved umbrellas on wet Sundays, I went over to that faith for two years – though I believe I dropped money by it – I wouldn’t be the man to say so if I hadn’t. Howsomever, when I moved into this house I turned back again to my old religion. Faith, I don’t see much difference: be you one, or be you t’other, you’ve got to get your living.’  
(*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. IV, p. 33)

From the landlord’s words we can infer that the Baptist and the Methodist faiths are as precarious as the buildings where they are professed. The choice between one creed or another is determined by the wish/necessity to protect oneself on wet Sundays or by a pleasant tune coming from a chapel. There are no sound religious beliefs at the core of the landlord’s faith; indeed, he says he turned back to his old religion when he moved. The landlord’s statement echoes and reinforces a remark about Somerset’s first impression of the chapel. The young architect had been sketching a Gothic church before the scene of Paula’s baptism, and the narrator draws our attention to “the dissimilitude between the new utilitarianism of the place and the scenes of venerable Gothic art which had occupied his daylight hours” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. II, p. 9). The fact that the chapel is defined as “utilitarian” is significant, since we are led to ask ourselves if it is right for a religious building to be “utilitarian”. The novel does not provide explicit answers, but some hints are put forward. The chapel seems comfortable enough – it is provided with central heating – and

perfectly serves two functions: the first is to hold the worshippers, who find it more comfortable to attend the Baptist service instead of going to the mother-church; secondly, with its sobriety verging on unattractiveness and its extreme functionalism the chapel spreads the seeds of utilitarianism, given that useless ornamentation, expensive materials and original creations have carefully been avoided.

Yet in this choice the stern spiritualism typical of the dissenting faiths seems to have played no role. Power offered the local inhabitants a building in a style he would never have adopted for his own residence. Indeed Charlotte De Stancy tells Somerset that John Power, who was interested in the castle, built the chapel for the inhabitants of the locality (see *Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. IV, p. 27). So the “staunch Baptist” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. IV, p. 27) too was attracted to medieval architecture and was disposed to spend a lot of money to purchase the castle, on which account he even diverted the railway. Hence the beauty, solidity and historical associations of Castle de Stancy had a grip on the railway magnate as well, but for the chapel he chose a completely different kind of architecture – less solid, less appealing and, above all, less expensive. For John Power is basically a successful capitalist with an excellent instinct for business,<sup>215</sup> unlike Sir William De Stancy, who “spent a mint o’ money in a visionary project of founding a watering-place; and sunk thousands in a useless silver mine” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. V, pp. 41-2). Finally, the Baptist congregation too is characterised by a worrying materialism. For example, the landlord mentioned before says there are many Baptists in the area because, thanks to adult baptism, poor families save the expense of a Christian burial for their children, should they die in infancy (see *Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. IV, p. 32).

So the main flaw of the kind of modern architecture to which the chapel belongs is its being “utilitarian” rather than “useful” in the Hardyian sense discussed in the preceding chapter, because it is not meant to last for future generations and it does not serve the higher spiritual function of architecture indicated by Ruskin, i.e. to contribute to the “mental health, power, and pleasure” of men. Usefulness, in other words, was being replaced by

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<sup>215</sup> For the figure of John Power, Hardy might have had in mind Sir Samuel Morton Peto, a railway magnate, who built also the line of the Southampton and Dorchester railway. In 1844, Peto purchased an estate at Somerleyton in Suffolk and rebuilt it. Peto was also a philanthropist and, being prominent Baptist, built several Baptist chapels throughout the country, including Bloomsbury and Regent’s Park Baptist churches in London (see John G. Cox, ‘John Power was Sir Samuel Morton Peto’, *Dorset: The County Magazine* 69, (1979), pp. 15-7). According to Beatty, Hardy had instead in mind Colonel William Petrie Waugh, who owned Brownsea Island. Waugh restored the castle on the island and built a new church, bearing a certain resemblance with the Baptist chapel built by Power (see Claudius J. P. Beatty, ‘Colonel Waugh and *A Laodicean*’, *The Thomas Hardy Year-Book*, 1 (1970), pp. 19-21).

utilitarianism, whose perspective has a marked negative connotation in Hardy's novels. Indeed the critique of utilitarianism, which has its origin in *A Laodicean*, surfaces in later and more mature novels by Hardy, for example in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where the gaol in Wintoncester, characterised by its "formalism" and by a "an ugly flat-topped octagonal tower" (*Tess*, Ch. LIX, p. 397), reminds us of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon,<sup>216</sup> a central-plan structure where the inmates were unable to understand if they were being watched or not.<sup>217</sup> The most explicit attack on the principles of utilitarianism, though, is to be found in *The Well-Beloved* where, as we have seen in Chapter Two of this thesis (see p. 53), Pierston's exclusive concentration on utilitarian matters coincides with his becoming utterly insensible to beauty. Thus utilitarianism and pursuit of ideal beauty are revealed as two opposite extremes, equally detrimental from both an aesthetic and a moral point of view, since both the absolute rejection of beauty, as in the case of Havill, and the excessive and exclusive worship of it, as in the case of Jocelyn, give birth to works of art which are not only lifeless, but also insincere.

As Timothy Hands pointed out, *A Laodicean* "shows most plainly" that for Hardy, as for Ruskin, "architecture and morality remain deeply infused."<sup>218</sup> Even the chapel built by Power proves that: its "material shapes" should not "be disregarded", since they bear the marks of their creators' morality. This seems to be the most important lesson Hardy learnt from Ruskin, and indeed the chapel does not meet the requirements characterising good architecture set down by Ruskin in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. The general impression is that of a building not meant to last for long, as said above, because of the materials used and the temporary stove-pipe. This contradicts the 'Lamp of Memory', given that, according to Ruskin, man can live and worship without architecture, but cannot remember without her.<sup>219</sup> Ruskin wrote that one of the duties we have towards national architecture is to make the architecture of the day historical,<sup>220</sup> in the sense that architecture should embody the salient

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<sup>216</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Jeanne Clegg, who pointed out to me the affinity between Tess's prison and the Panopticon.

<sup>217</sup> Hardy's Wintoncester appears as a superposition of A.W.N. Pugin's two illustrations from the 1841 edition of his *Contrasts*, where he contrasted a medieval alms-house with a modern workhouse inspired by Bentham's Panopticon (see Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *Contrasts* [1836], in *Contrasts, and The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* [1841], with an 'Introduction' by Timothy Brittain-Catlin, Reading, Spire Books, 2003 and, on Pugin's illustrations, see Phoebe Baroody Stanton, *Pugin*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1971, pp. 88-91). Indeed Timothy Hands wrote that Tess's final chapter "is an entirely Puginesque Contrast" (Timothy R. Hands, 'Architecture' cit., p. 17).

<sup>218</sup> Timothy R. Hands, 'Architecture' cit., p. 16. See also Richard H. Taylor, who stated that "Hardy endorses Ruskin's insistence that art is a direct function of the moral temper of the age and that the cultural and moral condition of society is most truly reflected in its architecture" (Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* cit., p. 105).

<sup>219</sup> See John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 224.

<sup>220</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 225.

traits of its age and of the culture which produced it, as in the case of the great barn at Weatherbury. And the chapel is not historical in that full sense, because it is a document of mere utilitarianism which was not representative of the whole complexity of Victorian culture. Besides, to become historical a building must survive, and such works as the chapel are not likely to last for long, with serious consequences for both architecture and the community. In an essay devoted to Ruskin and the modern city, Phillip Mallett thus explained Ruskin's objection to the use of such non-local materials as glass and iron in architecture: "Such an architecture would hold no memory of the past, and be able to carry none into the future. It would be isolated both from nature and from the processes of human time: a dead architecture, devoid of human associations".<sup>221</sup>

I will deal more extensively with the role played by the "human associations" of architecture in the next chapter, but it is here important to underline that *A Laodicean* clearly suggests that for Hardy not less than for Ruskin works of architecture must establish a link between past, present and future. If architecture does not serve this function, it is not only utilitarian, as opposed to "useful", but also "dead", since it tells nothing about the past and carries no memories into the future. This seems to be the case of the chapel, whose temporary nature parallels the transience of the creed professed by the members of the congregation. For Hardy all creeds are doomed to become extinguished, but modern ones – just as their places of worship – seem even more transient, as if the "modern vice of unrest" had affected religion and religious people as well. So the Baptist chapel does not represent a real alternative to the deserted parish church containing the tombs of the De Stancys because the worshippers, the architect and the benefactor do not share any communal values embodied in its forms, but are instead all equally moved only by individual worldly concerns.

The Laodiceanism of the two protagonists has therefore more complex reasons than the mere predominance of the aesthetical over the ethical in the composition of their personalities. Both Paula and George are trapped in their eclectic love of the past, because the extreme functionalism and utilitarianism of some contemporary architecture does not appeal to them. If the narrator treats them with a sort of benevolence, it is because Hardy himself must have shared their indecision, and must have been equally doubtful about the future of architecture. Doubts emerge in particular in the way the railway tunnel is dealt with. At first, such works as the tunnel seem to represent a solution to the impasse contemporary architecture was facing,

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<sup>221</sup> Phillip Mallett, 'The city and the self', in *Ruskin and Environment: the Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Michael Wheeler, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. 38-57, p. 51.

caught between the uncritical veneration of the past, of which George Somerset is a representative in the novel, and the blind confidence in progress whose fictional representative is Havill. These two opposite attitudes towards time and art are equally detrimental to architecture, as we have seen, but science in the shape of engineering might bring new life to an art which was experiencing a deep identity crisis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A new style was wanting, and Fergusson's impatient statement that all the styles employed in architecture since the Reformation were nothing but imitations of the true ancient ones<sup>222</sup> was in all probability shared also by Hardy and his *alter ego* George Somerset. Indeed even Somerset, an enthusiast of Gothic architecture (or, to be more precise, of ancient architecture in general), is impressed by the tunnel, and at the end of his visit he firmly believes that he has found a valid modern successor for the medieval castle. What he appreciates in the tunnel is its solidity, its grandeur and the fact that it is likely to survive through the centuries, just as the castle, but the main feature which makes him change his mind about modern architecture is its peculiar newness and originality. Indeed if the tunnel does not look back at any ancient style of architecture, it does not at the same time represent such a radical break with the architecture of the past as the chapel. The main contribution works of engineering could bring to modern architecture seemed indeed to Hardy to have less to do with aesthetics than with usefulness in the Hardyan sense, and with the practical concerns architecture had begun to disregard to concentrate on ornamentation, to the point that Fergusson stated that, since engineers are obliged to build on "common-sense principles", "the one great hope of a return to a better state of things is, that the engineers may become so influential as to force the architects to adopt their principles".<sup>223</sup> Hence it is no wonder that engineering, whose task is to provide useful artefacts, such as bridges, railways and railway stations, roads, etc., was seen as what might infuse a revitalised spirit into architecture.

Yet not even the tunnel seems to represent a valid starting point for the architecture of the present. First of all, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the tunnel is majestic to the point of being sublime, whereas the elements of beauty are scanty and accidental. But there is another reason, which has to do with the circumstance that engineering and architecture are essentially two distinct disciplines. The difference between them is still a thorny question to define in clear-cut terms, and an intense debate about the relative tasks of an architect and of an engineer was taking place among Hardy's contemporaries. Ruskin's belief that engineering,

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<sup>222</sup> See James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* cit., Vol. I, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, p. 409.

being a science, should not be assimilated to architecture, which is an art, was widely acknowledged. Yet James Fergusson, in his *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture*, devoted an entire chapter to civil and military engineering, where he also tried to set the boundary between the two disciplines and to identify their common ground:

The Engineer would only be the Architect who occupied himself more especially with construction, and the more utilitarian class of works; the Architect, properly so called, would be the artist who attended to the ornamental distribution of buildings, and their decoration when erected.<sup>224</sup>

According to Fergusson, engineers deal with mere building, while architects should create works of art, contributing to the “mental health, power, and pleasure” of men. Human artefacts in *A Laodicean* seem paradoxically to pervert this division of tasks between engineering and architecture. A religious building which should be “proper” architecture – the Baptist chapel – is utterly informed by utilitarian concerns; conversely, a work of engineering, i.e. the railway tunnel, is described in terms usually reserved to architecture. It is true that the tunnel has no decoration, but its massive proportions and its “nude ungarnished walls” are sublime enough to make it an object of aesthetic delight. So we become aware that practical concerns in buildings are not always signs of moral decadence; on the contrary, in *A Laodicean* “grand ideas” seem to find expression only in the tunnel, i.e. a work of engineering. Thus we are led to suspect that the concentration on utilitarian matters, criticised in its excess in the character of Havill in *A Laodicean* and in Pierston’s abrupt conversion in *The Well-Beloved*, is in fact a value in engineering and, in a minor degree, in architecture as well. By infusing – as hoped for by Fergusson – something of the “common-sense principles” on which engineers are obliged to build into the art of modern architecture, the spirit of the latter could possibly be revived.

Yet there is also reason to believe that things might evolve differently. Hardy suggested that the gap between the two fields of architecture and engineering was bound to widen, given that one of the symptoms of progress was specialisation of work. In *The Hand of Ethelberta* Hardy had ridiculed the excessive specialisation affecting masons and craftsmen in London (see p. 15 of this thesis), adding that the diffusion of this tendency in provincial areas was only a question of time. Instead of bringing new life to architecture, therefore, engineering was likely to further move away from it to concentrate exclusively on utilitarian artefacts, thus leaving architecture either to the uncritical veneration of past styles or, on the contrary, to

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<sup>224</sup> James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* cit., Vol. II, p. 409.



an equally uncritical rejection of the past in the attempt of inventing newer and newer alternative styles.

## Chapter Six

### **‘The Letter Killeth’: *Jude the Obscure* and the Critique of Idolatry**

If in *A Laodicean* both Paula’s and George Somerset’s undecided attitudes towards architectural styles are symptoms of the “modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness”, the protagonist of Hardy’s last novel is set in stark opposition to that modern attitude because he is obsessively dominated by the absolute love and reverence for one unique architectural style: the medieval Gothic. And if Paula’s contradictory personality – her “*prédilection d’artiste*” for the architecture of the past despite her being the daughter of a railway magnate and in love with such modern inventions as the telegraph and the train – contributes to the sometimes light tone of the novel, where Paula’s Laodiceanism is the main cause of misunderstandings and wrong interpretations of her behaviour, Jude’s obsession and absolute loyalty to one single pursuit in his whole life contributes instead to the tragic quality of *Jude the Obscure*.

In this novel, so very different in tone from *A Laodicean*, architecture becomes for real the filter through which the reality is seen, in particular by the eponymous hero. *Jude the Obscure* turns around architecture even more than *A Laodicean*, and here it is worth pointing out a substantial difference in the way the two novels address the architectural question: while the male protagonist of *A Laodicean* is an architect, Jude Fawley is a stone-mason. So Jude as well has to do with buildings – as Edward Springrove, Stephen Smith, and George Somerset – but his relationship with architecture and with the values it embodies diverges from the relationship entertained by the professional architects featured in Hardy’s novels. Jude’s relationship with buildings is closer and more passionate, since works of architecture are never for him mere works to be admired, copied or restored. From his childhood to his death, Jude is almost obsessed with buildings because they always stand for something else – people, ideals, dreams, desires. Jude’s fantasies of Christminster, however, are so removed from actual reality and so doomed never to come true that buildings (and sometimes other objects too, such as books and pictures) serve the function of making his dreams visible and tangible. In other words, Jude’s relationship with the city of learning can be defined as a

dangerous idealisation which turns into an even more dangerous idolatry. In the novel the process leading from idealisation to idolatry is gradual but inexorable.

Throughout his short life, Jude strives after knowledge, but he never manages to acquire it because his inner world continually shapes and reshapes the real world. Everything is seen through the filter of his imagination, which tends to idealise people and places to the point of making idols of them. As John R. Doheny wrote, the “penchant for idealisation is Jude’s main problem in life: he creates an ideal of Sue; he creates an ideal of Christminster; and he even creates an ideal of himself”.<sup>225</sup> And this process of idealisation is set in motion by what we might define an architectural vision, i.e. Jude’s first vision of Christminster in the novel:

Some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed. The air increased in transparency with the lapse of minutes, till the topaz points showed themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that were faintly revealed. It was Christminster, unquestionably; either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere. (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. III, p. 21)

This image of the city changes the course of his life and accompanies him until his death; even after his bitter disappointment with the reality of the city, Jude will always be unwilling to substitute this idealised vision of Christminster with its factual image. What is striking about this description of the city as it appears to Jude’s eyes is the abundance of architectural details, because buildings have already begun to exert a deep fascination on him. Thus the city created by Jude’s imagination is a sort of richly decorated shrine containing parts of buildings – windows, roof slates, spires, etc. – to be worshipped. As Isabelle Gadoin pointed out, “l’apparition n’est pas seulement posée comme fantasme, elle est décrite comme culte, comme objet sacré, lieu vénéré”.<sup>226</sup> Jude never regards the city in its entirety, but fractionated into separate elements whose common feature is their being Gothic in style. Even from the octagonal chamber of the Sheldonian Theatre, his eyes perceive “spires, halls, gables, streets, chapels, gardens, quadrangles” which compose the “*ensemble* of this unrivalled panorama” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. VI, p. 116, emphasis in the text). Yet that is not, of course, the whole “ensemble”, as Christminster is made up also of buildings not Gothic in style.

This can be considered the origin of Jude’s fetishisation of the city, an attitude which culminates with the episode of Jude and Sue selling the Christminster cakes at Kennetbridge spring fair. A “fetish” is an inanimate object endowed with magical or spiritual powers, and

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<sup>225</sup> John R. Doheny, ‘The Characterisation of Jude and Sue: the Myth and the Reality’, in Phillip Mallett (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 110-32, p. 112.

<sup>226</sup> Isabelle Gadoin, ‘Du mirage à la cité interdite’ cit., p. 6.

this is exactly what Christminster is for Jude, as many critics have noticed. Edward Barnaby wrote that “Jude’s desires and attitudes are largely defined by his fetishized relationship with architecture”,<sup>227</sup> while Gadoin observed that “la multiplication des images miniatures de la ville (maquette d’architecte, modèles réduits, ou même petits biscuits...) suggère d’ailleurs l’obsession fétichiste”.<sup>228</sup> Since the very beginning, Christminster appears as inanimate, lifeless: seen from afar, the city is always surrounded by a heavenly halo concealing individual lights (see *Jude*, Part First, Ch. III, p. 23) and houses. Then, in Jude’s dreams, Christminster *is* its medieval buildings, its colleges and churches, but only seldom its inhabitants, apart from Phillotson and, afterwards, his cousin Sue. When Jude finally moves there the inhabitants seem to have disappeared, and the city appears ominously silent and lonely. This prompts Jude to people cloisters and alleys with the ghosts of eminent personalities from the past of Christminster. To be more precise, the city is not completely inanimate, but “the great palpitating centres of Christminster life” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. VIII, p. 178) are now its taverns and not its colleges. Although Jude himself becomes a customer of those inns, he continues to associate Christminster only with its colleges, as if unwilling to admit that Christminster is also its squalid taverns and its suburbs, like Beersheba, where he has lodgings.

The impression that the medieval core of the city he worships is actually dead is strengthened when Jude sees it by daylight, on the first morning after his arrival:

Passing out into the streets on this errand he found that the colleges had treacherously changed their sympathetic countenances: some were stern; 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. [...]

What at night had been perfect and ideal was by day the more or less defective real. Cruelties, insults, had, he perceived, been inflicted on the aged erections. The conditions 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. (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, pp. 83-4)

Yet the identification between Jude and his vision of Christminster is so complete that he almost feels on himself the wounds inflicted on the city’s “aged erections”, as if they were not only a human body, but his own body.<sup>229</sup> In Jordan Anderson’s words:

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<sup>227</sup> Edward Barnaby, ‘The Realist Novel as Meta-Spectacle’, *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38, 1 (2008), pp. 37-59, p. 46

<sup>228</sup> Isabelle Gadoin, ‘Du mirage à la cité interdite’ cit., p. 9.

<sup>229</sup>

In a very real sense, Christminster within the novel is Jude, and Jude is Christminster, or at least what Christminster once was in its ideal; they are doubles. They have both been destroyed by the brutality of the world and its societal divisions, its vain favor of societal approval in the place of loving one another.<sup>230</sup>

In Jude's idealisation of Christminster we see at work what J. Hillis Miller identified as the power exerted by distance on human desires in all the *Wessex Novels*, where inaccessibility always intensifies desire.<sup>231</sup> In *Jude* this tendency is particularly marked<sup>232</sup> and is even carried to extremes because an abyss always separates Jude from his objects of desire, and the more inaccessible they are, the more he strives to attain them. Seen from the Brown House on the hill near the desolate village of Marygreen, Christminster does indeed look like a mirage, a celestial apparition, the "heavenly Jerusalem", "a city of light" where "the tree of knowledge grows" (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. III, pp. 20 and 25).<sup>233</sup>

Yet on his first morning at Christminster, when he sees the city by daylight, he begins to realise that a thick wall separates himself from knowledge; moreover, in the stonecutter's yard Jude understands that an abyss separates the reality of Christminster from his dream, and that the crumbling colleges may well be the embodiment of the superseded kind of education provided by universities.<sup>234</sup> Yet he remains faithful and loyal to his ideal, and accordingly seeks refuge in the past and its architecture. This is the point when his ideal definitely turns into an idol, that is to say when the medieval city *par excellence*, i.e. Christminster/Oxford,<sup>235</sup> loses its meaning as the centre of the medieval culture and religion Jude dreams of having access to, and is reduced to a soulless object of veneration.

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<sup>230</sup> Jordan Anderson, 'The Architecture of the Grave', *The Hardy Society Journal* 1, 1 (March 2005), pp. 24-31, p. 31.

<sup>231</sup> See Joseph Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* cit., and also Enrica Villari, 'Il vizio moderno dell'irrequietezza' cit., pp. 63-7. A more recent study on desire in Hardy's work is Jane Thomas, *Thomas Hardy and Desire: Conceptions of the Self*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>232</sup> See Lance St. John Butler, *Thomas Hardy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 79.

<sup>233</sup> Enstice observed that "between the world of Marygreen and the world of Christminster is set a yawning gulf, unbridged by any natural or human feature." (Andrew Enstice, *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 158).

<sup>234</sup> According to Mark Rollins, the epigraph "the letter killeth" can refer also to university education, criticised in the novel as arbitrary and restrictive (see Mark Rollins, 'Another Way "The letter killeth": Classical Study in *Jude the Obscure*', *The Hardy Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (spring 2011), 2011, pp. 49-63). On the numerous meanings of the word "letter" implied in the epigraph to the novel, see Dennis Taylor, 'Introduction' to Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* cit., pp. xvi-xxxiv.

<sup>235</sup> As Hardy himself wrote in the *Life*, Christminster, "being a city of learning", "was certainly suggested by Oxford, but in its entirety existed nowhere else in the world but between the covers of the novel under discussion" (*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 295). The identification of Christminster with Oxford was questioned only by C. J. P. Beatty, who suggested that Hardy might have had London in mind because "the harsh treatment meted out to Jude in Christminster reflects the experiences Hardy undoubtedly went through in the capital city, and have [...] nothing to do with Oxford – about which he knew very little at first hand." (Claudius J. P. Beatty, 'From the 'Lamb and the Flag' to Christminster' cit., p. 45).

Idolatry is indeed one of the *leitmotifs* of the novel. Not only Jude, but also Phillotson and Sue fall prey to the veneration of images, in particular photographs. Jude and Phillotson contemplate photographs of Sue; Jude has photographs of his ecclesiastical carvings; Sue has photographs of Phillotson and of the Christminster undergraduate on her dressing-table at the Training College. Yet the most overt reference to idolatry is the episode of Sue buying the statuettes of Apollo and Venus and placing them on the chest of drawers in her room with a candle on each side of them (see *Jude*, Part Second, Ch. III, pp. 93-5). This episode suggests that Sue is no less an idolater than Jude, with the only difference that she idolatrisés classical rather than medieval art.

Yet in Jude's attitude towards the city of learning there is a more systematic form of idolatry, very similar indeed in its essence and dynamics to what Proust identified as Ruskin's "idolatry". In the 'Preface' to his translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*, Proust addressed the thorny question of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in Ruskin, and accused him of idolatry, which he defined, in a way that perfectly suits Jude's devotion to Christminster, as "the serving with the best of our hearts and minds some dear and sad fantasy which we have made for ourselves".<sup>236</sup> Proust added that the tendency to idolatrise is typical of all human beings, but in Ruskin's works it becomes the object of a fierce battle, since he was dominated by the very conflict between his wish to be true to his moral doctrines and the tendency to make an idol of beauty. So the peculiar feature of Ruskin's idolatry is that Ruskin actually managed to "deceive" us and himself into believing that his doctrines were moral doctrines, when in fact he had chosen them for their beauty, although he did so almost unconsciously. The result is that in Ruskin morality is in fact always subordinated to aesthetics,<sup>237</sup> But since he fiercely contrasted this tendency (and even in his life "at the outset morality claims its rights within the very heart of aesthetics"<sup>238</sup>), Ruskin's idolatry is only lurking behind his ethics and is consequently quite hard to detect.

Now, in Jude's dream of Christminster as the city of light the architectural beauty of its medieval buildings plays a fundamental role. Yet the ethical element of Jude's medievalism is equally marked, and reinforced by its opposition to Sue's dream of Hellenism.<sup>239</sup> But in the

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<sup>236</sup> Marcel Proust, 'Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*', in *On Reading Ruskin: Prefaces to La Bible d'Amiens* [1904] and *Sésame et les Lys* [1906], with *Selections from the Notes to the Translated Texts*, ed. and trans. by Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe, with an 'Introduction' by Richard Macksey, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, pp. 5-61, p. 50.

<sup>237</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>239</sup> On the opposition between Sue's Hellenism and neo-paganism and Jude's medievalism and neo-Christianity, see Enrica Villari, '«La fatale ostilità tra carne e spirito»' cit.

course of the novel the conversion of Christminster from an ethical ideal into an idol to worship slowly takes place and in the second part of the novel the transformation is complete: when Jude realises that Phillotson was not able to enter university and now lives in a village nearby, that he himself is not likely to enter university, and that Sue despises Christminster, and its medieval past in particular, the city loses both its meaning as the city of learning and light and all possible meaningful links to his own life. And since he continues to worship it, he turns into an idolater because, in Proust's words, when an object is "stripped of the spirit that is in it, it is no more than a sign deprived of its meaning, that is to say, nothing; and to keep on adoring it [...] is, properly speaking, idolatry".<sup>240</sup>

Signs deprived of their meanings are exactly what the medieval buildings and stones of Christminster progressively become in Jude's obsessive acts of worship. The impression is strengthened when Jude sees the city by daylight, on the first morning after his arrival (see quotation on p. 139 of this thesis). As soon as he realises that "the spirits of the great men had disappeared" from the venerated medieval core of the city, he decides that its buildings "wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man" need to be healed. Yet from this moment on, the narrator has recourse to images of death, rottenness, and disease to describe the current state of the city, in order to suggest that Christminster is dead, and that both its buildings and what they originally stood for are subject to change and death. What most disappoints Jude is not the fact that a thick wall separates himself from knowledge (as he is fatally attracted to the unattainable), but the fact that Christminster is not sacred at all. As Isabelle Gadoin wrote, Jude's discovery that "les monuments périssent, ou du moins sont soumis, de même que toute chose, à l'activité destructrice de la nature" is frightening for a worshipper of architecture.<sup>241</sup> In Christminster Jude realises that buildings, ideals and creeds are as mortal as any other human creation, but still he desperately needs something to cling to. Indeed not even the vision of the decaying buildings shatters Jude's dream. Quite the contrary: he feels that his idol has been offended by time, weather and human beings, and he accordingly strives to become a stonemason, a job which would allow him to restore the venerable buildings to their original splendour.

Jude himself makes a rather precise diagnosis of his problem – i.e. his fatal attraction towards anything inanimate, rotten, decaying, fragile, mummified – during a discussion with Sue. His cousin tells him that Christminster "is a place full of fetichists and ghost-seers",

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<sup>240</sup> Marcel Proust, 'Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*', p. 56.

<sup>241</sup> Isabelle Gadoin, 'Du mirage à la cité interdite' cit., p. 7.

and he replies: “Well, that’s just what I am, too. [...] I am fearful of life, spectre-seeing always” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. IV, p. 151). Christminster probably appeals to him for this very reason, for its buildings on which “cruelties” and “insults” had been inflicted by men, time and nature, and indeed O’Malley defined Jude’s “medievalizing obsessions” at the beginning of the novel as a sort of “necrophilia”.<sup>242</sup>

In the novel Jude’s increasing fetishisation of architecture, and in particular of Gothic buildings, culminates in the scene in which Sue and Jude sell gingerbread at Kennetbridge spring fair. The Christminster cakes reproduce traceried windows, pinnacles and towers of its colleges. As in Jude’s first vision of the city from the Brown House, Christminster is fragmented into a series of architectural elements standing for the whole – “the whole” in Jude’s eyes, of course. Sue tells Arabella that it was an idea of Jude’s, who, being ill, can make them staying indoors (see *Jude*, Part Fifth, Ch. VII, p. 312). Since indeed Jude’s aunt had a bakery, Jude is good both at carving and at baking. And Jude reproducing the architectural elements of the medieval buildings of Christminster in the forms of cakes is a powerful image of their complete transformation into idols. Given that his illness compelled him to give up restoration – a job allowing him to take care of buildings – the only way left to him to maintain his relationship with architecture is to create models made of bread. However, as Beatty pointed out the cakes in the shapes of windows and other elements are a caricature of the “crumbling” city because they are made of materials equally friable.<sup>243</sup>

Yet what is most disturbing in this scene is that Jude produces and then sells his cakes to people who are, like him, attracted to Gothic architecture for vague aesthetic reasons. Barnaby observed that “Jude is ultimately reduced to exploiting the public taste for Gothic kitsch”.<sup>244</sup> And since kitsch, “offer[ing] instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort, without the requirement of distance, without sublimation” is “unadulterated beauty, a simple invitation to wallow in sentiment”,<sup>245</sup> the Gothic cakes are perfect kitsch. For indeed what gives more instantaneous gratification than food? The cakes provide Jude (and Jude’s customers) with emotional gratification where no intellectual effort is required. Since they are made to be eaten, it is consumption in its purest form. All distance is abolished between

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<sup>242</sup> Patrick R. O’Malley, *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 203.

<sup>243</sup> See Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture* cit., p. 366

<sup>244</sup> Edward Barnaby, ‘The Realist Novel as Meta-Spectacle’ cit., p. 48.

<sup>245</sup> Winfried Menninghaus, ‘On the ‘Vital Significance’ of Kitsch: Walter Benjamin’s Politics of ‘Bad Taste’’, in Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, Melbourne, re.press, pp. 39-57, p. 41



object and observer or, to be more precise, consumer. And since there is no distance, there is no historical perspective. Indeed Jude's historical perspective is always partial and biased in the novel, and in Hardy's view the historical perspective was the best antidote against the human tendency to idolatrise, as he had learned as a young architect and restorer when he had discovered that an absent, biased or partial historical perspective was at the core of all the sterile modern approaches to the architecture of the past and of the present.

The main flaw in Jude's historical perspective is his utter ignorance of the present. As Ian Gregor wrote, Jude's "first encounter is not with the present of Christminster, but with its past".<sup>246</sup> This flaw lays the foundations for his future disappointment: since the Christminster of his imagination belongs to the past, he tries to prolong his dream by ignoring the real Christminster, coinciding more with its suburbs than with the old town centre; moreover, the fact that he reaches Christminster when it is getting dark delays his encounter with the present of the city until the next morning, when the city reveals its real appearance (see quotation on p. 139 of this thesis). At this point, the thought that by taking care of architecture he can contribute to the restoration of moral values too begins to make its way in his mind. Jude firmly believes, like Pugin, that "the belief and manners of all people are embodied in the edifices they raised".<sup>247</sup> Hence his idolatrisation of Christminster monuments: he becomes convinced that by renovating the edifices it is also possible to renovate the "belief" and "manners" they embody. Before moving to Christminster, working as a stonemason is for Jude just a means to fulfil his dream of entering university, and he considers his job as a restorer as temporary. This is how Jude chooses his profession:

What was most required by citizens? Food, clothing, and shelter. An income from any work in preparing the first would be too meagre; for making the second he felt a distaste; the preparation of the third requisite he inclined to. They built in a city; therefore he would learn to build. [...]

Not forgetting that he was only following up this handicraft as a prop to lean on while he prepared those greater engines which he flattered himself would be better fitted for him, he yet was interested in his pursuit on its own account. (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. V, p. 35)

At first Jude proceeds by elimination to choose his profession (for example he rejects preparing food, which he will end up doing), but he soon realises that he does like restoring dilapidated churches. Yet unfortunately the thought that his profession is no less respectable

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<sup>246</sup> Ian Gregor, *The Great Web. The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction*, London, Faber and Faber, 1974, p. 212.

<sup>247</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* [1841] and *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England* [1843], Leominster, Gracewing, 2003, p. 4.

than scholarly study never crosses his mind. To be more precise, in the stonemason's yard in Christminster Jude is about to revalue his profession but he fails to draw the right conclusions because he is blinded by his faith to his ideal. What is worth pointing out here is that Jude clearly knows what is most required in a city, i.e. food, clothing and shelter; notwithstanding this, he never applies himself to erect new buildings, but he prefers to restore ancient ecclesiastical buildings instead. In other words, he does not attach much importance to "newness-value" and "use-value", both in Riegl's restricted sense of values of practical use and functionality, and in Hardy's broader sense (see p. 116 of this thesis), to which I will return later. Jude is far from considering the "defence and salvation of the body by daily bread" a "study, a religion, and a desire" (*Madding Crowd*, Ch. XXI, p. 126), and he defines the necessity to find a job as a "mean bread-and-cheese question" (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 83), that is to say an encumbrance on his way to higher aims. Similarly, the only buildings worth studying and restoring are churches and colleges, i.e. places devoted to intellectual and religious ends. Significantly, the only barn to which reference is made in *Jude the Obscure* is the Brown House, which is there just to allow the hero to get a glimpse of his dream-like Christminster.

Even the sight of the crumbling colleges does not push Jude to consider their possible or impossible "use-value", and the consequent utility of restoring them. In the stonemason's yard he begins to feel proud of his profession, but only because it allows him to concretely contribute to the moral renovation of the city: "It was, in one sense, encouraging to think that in a place of crumbling stones there must be plenty for one of his trade to do in the business of renovation" (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 84). As Casagrande observed, the word "restoration" has two meanings in Hardy's works, i.e. an architectural and a moral one,<sup>248</sup> and in *Jude* the two meanings tend automatically to overlap. In the quotation above, "renovation" has not just the meaning of substitution of deteriorated stones with new ones, but that of reviving the spirit animating those who had erected the colleges. Jude intends restoration as a sort of spiritual mission aimed at recreating the past in its entirety, or, to be more precise, aimed at perpetuating the past as if change could be disregarded. In the stonemason's yard Jude comes very close to an authentic appreciation of his profession as a stonemason in a place of "crumbling stones", but he fails to draw the right conclusions from what he sees because he first considers stone-cutting, carving, and manual work in general as "a prop to

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<sup>248</sup> See Peter J. Casagrande, *Unity in Hardy's Novels: 'Repetitive Symmetries'*, London, Macmillan, 1982, pp. 2-3.

lean on”, as a means to earn some money to enter university, and then as a way to contribute to the spiritual renovation of the city. So he never regards his trade for what it really is, that is to say an honest job where he can achieve good results all the same and, above all, where he can use his imagination to serve art, although the thought crosses his mind for a fraction of a second:

For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges. But he lost it under stress of his old idea. He would accept any employment which might be offered him on the strength of his late employer’s recommendation; but he would accept it as a provisional thing only. (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, pp. 84-5)

Although working as a restorer is for Jude “a provisional thing only”, his attitude towards restoration is highly interesting because it is evidence of both the closeness and the distance between Jude and Hardy. Jude’s first impression is that modern stonemasons manage to restore buildings to their original appearance by just substituting timeworn features with brand-new ones. Indeed the stonecutter’s yard is defined as “a little centre of regeneration” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 84), since the material substance changes, while the original shapes are preserved. At first this appears to Jude as a sort of miracle because it seems to prove that time can be defeated, and that Christminster is eternal for real. But Jude is not *entirely* spell-bound by this kind of restoration because the new forms, necessarily characterised by “keen edges and smooth curves” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 84), do not appear to him as fascinating as the ancient ones: “These were the ideas in modern prose which the lichened colleges presented in old poetry. Even some of those antiques might have been called prose when they were new. They had nothing but wait, and had become poetical” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 84).

In Jude’s opinion only ancient works of architecture are poetical, while recent ones are, literally and figuratively, prosaic, for the very reason of being new. Jude does not simply venerate medieval buildings simply for their shapes, but for the matter they are made of and for their age. The fact of being timeworn and weather-beaten adds charm to human artefacts, a charm recently-erected buildings cannot boast. “Newness-value” has therefore no grip on Jude, who is instead a supporter of “historical-value”, as Gadoin observed,<sup>249</sup> and/or “age-value”, as the narrator seems to suggest in the passage quoted above. Indeed, if on the one hand Jude’s wish to faithfully preserve buildings in their original shape is, according to Riegl,

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<sup>249</sup> See Isabelle Gadoin, ‘Du mirage à la cité interdite’ cit., pp. 8-9.

typical of the supporters of “historical value”,<sup>250</sup> on the other hand decay, death, and rottenness in architecture exert a strong fascination on Jude (see above, p. 142) because they are usually evidence of the antiquity of a building. In a certain sense, Jude is at the same time disturbed and delighted by the sight of the timeworn colleges, as if a battle between “historical value” and “age-value”<sup>251</sup> were taking place within himself.

So Jude wonders if it is possible, in restoration, to remain faithful to the original by preserving just its shape, and substituting old crumbling materials with new ones. Jude, as we have seen, has doubts about it for, we might say, aesthetic reasons: brand new materials are not poetical to him. In ‘Memories of Church Restoration’, Hardy addressed the same question, which was a crucial one as far as theories of restoration were concerned. Hardy too asked himself whether old materials should be substituted, and drew this first conclusion:

It is easy to show that the essence and soul of an architectural monument does not lie in the particular blocks of stone or timber that compose it, but in the mere forms to which those materials have been shaped. We discern in a moment that it is in the boundary of a solid – its insubstantial superficies or mould – and not in the solid itself, that its right lies to exist as art. The whole quality of Gothic or other architecture – let it be a cathedral, a spire, a window, or what not – attaches to this, and not to the substantial erection which it appears exclusively to consist in.<sup>252</sup>

According to Hardy, therefore, the “soul” of a work of architecture is in its shapes, not in its materials, hence substitution of damaged stones with new ones does not imply deception.

Yet Hardy was always very critical about “restoration”, even when this did not mean reconstructing missing parts, but just substituting crumbling stones and other decaying parts with new ones. In *A Laodicean*, for example, there is a hint that Hardy probably considered substitution of old materials with new ones as a kind of deception. In a dialogue between Paula and Havill, the architect suggests that in a vaulting of the castle some old stones should be removed and substituted with new ones. Paula is of a different opinion, because the new stones would not be original, and people will be deceived when they “‘have become stained like the rest’” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. VIII, p. 60), so that she prefers “‘an honest patch’” (*Laodicean*, Book the First, Ch. VIII, p. 60) instead. Despite what he wrote in ‘Memories of Church Restoration’, Hardy certainly sides with Paula here, since in his letters, when asked for advice about the necessary interventions to be made in decaying churches, he often advised taking down damaged walls or parts of them, and preserving and marking the

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<sup>250</sup> See Alois Riegl, ‘The modern cult of monuments’ cit., p. 34.

<sup>251</sup> On the clash between “historical value” and “age-value”, see *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>252</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 250.

original stones one by one to replace them where they exactly were.<sup>253</sup> Original materials should be replaced with new ones only if they are too damaged, as Hardy advised about St Catharines' Chapel at Abbotsbury,<sup>254</sup> since indeed his main concern was to protect buildings from decay and collapses in order to keep them in use. Hence he often suggested repairing or substituting damaged roofs and floors,<sup>255</sup> especially in the case of decaying parish churches, which are the centre of community life.

So Hardy seems to have lent Jude some of his doubts about restoration, which he never supported in the sense intended by his contemporaries and defined by Viollet-le-Duc in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* as follows: "Restaurer un édifice, ce n'est pas l'entretenir, le réparer ou le refaire, c'est le rétablir dans un état complet qui peut n'avoir jamais existé à un moment donné".<sup>256</sup> Hardy's criticism of Viollet-le-Duc's abstract notion of restoration surfaces not only in 'Memories of Church Restoration', but also in his letters, where he clearly stated that "'Reparation" is far better than "Restoration"',<sup>257</sup> which in Hardy's time "include[d] projects as considerable as rebuilding, redesigning, or even total destruction."<sup>258</sup> Yet the identification between Hardy and Jude ends here, because Jude fails to grasp the reason why at Christminster restoration works are useless, if not harmful. To explain why restoration of medieval buildings with new materials should be avoided, Hardy compares Gothic art to nature. Although Gothic architecture is characterised by a strong relationship with the surrounding landscape (see Chapter One of this thesis), the continuous substitution of dead matter which continually goes on in the natural world<sup>259</sup> cannot be applied to Gothic art, which is "a dead art".<sup>260</sup> Gothic art

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<sup>253</sup> For example, Hardy advised doing so for the tower of East Lulworth church (see 'Letter to Thackeray Turner', 28 Sep. 1897, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* cit., Vol. II, pp. 176-7).

<sup>254</sup> Regarding the chapel, Hardy wrote that "to prevent its falling, the alternatives are the Scylla & Charybdis of putting in new stones, or cementing over the old ones, exposure having crumbled them a good deal" ('Letter to Thackeray Turner', 27 Sep. 1908, in *Ibidem*, Vol. III, p. 337).

<sup>255</sup> See, for example, the interventions Hardy suggested for the White Horse Inn at Maiden Newton and Stratton church (see 'Letter to Thackeray Turner', 12 Oct. 1897, in *Ibidem*, Vol. II, pp. 178-9 and 'Letter to Jane Ashley', 2 Dec. 1890, in *Ibidem*, Vol. VII, pp. 115-6).

<sup>256</sup> Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, "Restauration", in *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* [1854-68], Paris, F. De Nobele, 1967, 10 vols, Vol. 8, pp. 14-34, p. 14.

<sup>257</sup> 'Letter to the Revd. G. H. Moule', 28 Jan 1920, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* cit., Vol. VI, p. 5. Hardy's attitude towards restoration is comparable to Ruskin's, who wrote that restoration "is a Lie from beginning to end" (John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* cit., p. 244). On the opposition between Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, in particular regarding restoration, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc: Englishness and Frenchness in the Appreciation of Gothic Architecture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1969.

<sup>258</sup> Timothy R. Hands, 'Hardy's Architecture: a General Perspective and a Personal View', in Phillip Mallett (ed.), *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 95-104, p. 96.

<sup>259</sup> See Thomas Hardy, 'Memories of Church Restoration' cit., p. 250.

<sup>260</sup> Ivi.

possesses – Hardy wrote – two main qualities, “a material and a spiritual one”.<sup>261</sup> The first is the uniqueness of every Gothic detail, of which an exact copy cannot possibly exist, the second coincides with the “human associations”<sup>262</sup> of any building. Hardy underlines that the power exerted by the human associations of an artefact on the beholder has little to do with its aesthetic qualities, since it is a historical document independently of its beauty and of its style. The superiority of the human associations on the aesthetic worth has important consequences for the question of preservation as Hardy intended it:

The protection of an ancient edifice against renewal in fresh materials is, in fact, even more of a social – I may say a humane – duty than an æsthetic one. It is the preservation of memories, history, fellowships, fraternities. Life, after all, is more than art, and that which appealed to us in the (maybe) clumsy outlines of some structure which had been looked at and entered by a dozen generations of ancestors outweighs the more subtle recognition, if any, of architectural qualities.<sup>263</sup>

We can hardly say that Jude adores and wants to preserve the medieval colleges of Christminster for their human associations rather than for their aesthetic value. It is not the memories of the great and little historical events connected with them that he wants to preserve, but their outer shell, and the obvious corollary of his reasoning is that preserving the values embodied in the architecture of the past seems to him as “easy” as preserving buildings. Jude fails to see both Gothic art and the restoration of medieval buildings in the right perspective. Restoration disappoints him because he sees that “at best only copying, patching and imitating went on here; which he fancied to be owing to some temporary and local cause” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85). As for Gothic art, Jude is convinced that after all Gothic architecture is still alive. But the narrator reminds us instead that, since “mediævalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. II, p. 85), trying to revive it or to keep it alive was a vain attempt, and not only at Christminster. In the 1895 ‘Preface’ to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy had written that in Cornwall “to restore the grey carcasses of a mediævalism whose spirit had fled seemed a not less incongruous act than to set about renovating the adjoining crags themselves” (*Pair of Blue Eyes*, 1895 ‘Preface’, p. 3). As we have seen in Chapter Two of this thesis, the taste for the Gothic Revival had reached even the remotest parish in Cornwall, but a great boost had been given by the Tractarian

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<sup>261</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘Memories of Church Restoration’ cit., p. 250.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 251.

<sup>263</sup> *Ivi*.

Movement,<sup>264</sup> or Oxford Movement, so Christminster is for real the capital city of the new standardised style which was being adopted for both new and ancient buildings throughout the country. Jude's naive reaction in the stonemason's yard is doubly surprising, since he had been living for several years at Marygreen, whose old church was pulled down and substituted with "a tall new building of German-Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes" (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. II, p. 12).

Now, we may wonder why Jude realises that restoration is just "copying, patching and imitating" only when at Christminster and not before. The reason lies in the fact that Jude has no sense of history because he himself lacks a history. Jude does not know what Marygreen's original church was like, as his father took him to South Wessex when he was still a baby, and although he returns to live at Marygreen when his father dies, he never really belongs to the hamlet. Like Sue, Jude is rootless, and Hardy seems to suggest that personal history (or, to be more precise, the memory of it) is the necessary condition to comprehend all the other kinds of history, including national history. Jude comes to know the history of the Fawleys only after his marriage with Arabella, but it is in fact second-hand knowledge, since he has no memory of his past. Moreover, there is a sense in which Jude is unable to take roots in Marygreen because the village itself has lost its history. Not only the demolition of the old church, but also agricultural practices contributed to depriving the community of the memory of their past "beyond that of the few recent months" (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. II, p. 14). Finally, the substitution of the old graves with "ninepenny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years" (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. I, p. 12) are, as Gatrell observed, "a final insult"<sup>265</sup> by the hands of an irresponsible "obliterator of historic records" (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. I, p. 12).<sup>266</sup>

Therefore Jude grows up without history (or, better put, "histories"). The Gothic is to him the only architectural style, and he disregards both classical and modern architecture, represented respectively by the Sheldonian Theatre (designed by Wren) at Christminster/Oxford, and by railway stations.<sup>267</sup> Accordingly Jude's idea of history coincides

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<sup>264</sup> On the relationship between the Gothic Revival and Tractarianism, see Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* cit., Ch. VIII.

<sup>265</sup> Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy's Vision of Wessex* cit., p. 56.

<sup>266</sup> On the importance of village and country churchyards for the sense of continuity within families and communities in Hardy's works, see Sophie Gilmartin, 'Geology, Genealogy and Church Restoration in Hardy's Writing', in Phillip Mallett (ed.), *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy* cit., pp. 22-40.

<sup>267</sup> Remo Ceserani observed that Victorian railway stations were often characterised by a combination classical and modern elements: their function and structure are modern, while their ornamentation is neoclassical (see Remo Ceserani, 'Su alcuni simboli della tradizione e della modernità in Thomas Hardy: la cattedrale e la stazione ferroviaria', in *Tre saggi su Thomas Hardy*, a cura di Paolo Pepe, Roma, Bulzoni, 2010, pp. 17-47, p. 43).

with the Middle Ages, a sort of golden age of knowledge, when men ““with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends”” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. IV, p. 151) could fulfil their dream. By concentrating exclusively on the medieval past of the colleges, and by admitting no change at Christminster, Jude blinds himself to the complexity of history and misses an important point, that is to say that history implies development.

The very opposite of the medieval buildings and stones of Christminster venerated by Jude, from which all life and history have fled, is represented in the novel by the Fourways. As Jude himself begins to see, less eminent places like the Fourways have “more history than the oldest college in the city” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. VI, p. 117) because memories of international, national and individual events lie there stratified. The Fourways is a place which retains the memory of events occurred during many centuries, and here Jude begins to understand that such places as crossroads, where different classes of people mix, are more historical than medieval colleges and other places associated with an elite. Yet the most important lesson he learns is that the stratified kind of history of the Fourways is more valuable than the history impressed on colleges because it represents the real essence of the city, i.e. its continuity over the centuries.

In Hardy’s last novel, whose protagonist is isolated from life by his fatal dreams of architectural ideals and idols with no connection with his or any history, the spot which comes closer to the great barn, Hardy’s ideal building which originally was and still is the centre of the life of the community in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, is not a building, but a crossroads called “the Fourways”:

It [the Fourways] was literally teeming, stratified, with the shades of human groups, who had met there for tragedy, comedy, farce; real enactments of the intensest kind. At Fourways men had stood and talked of Napoleon, the loss of America, the execution of King Charles, the burning of the Martyrs, the Crusades, the Norman Conquest, possibly of the arrival of Cæsar. Here the two sexes had met for loving, hating, coupling, parting; had waited, had suffered, for each other; had triumphed over each other; cursed each other in jealousy, blesses each other in forgiveness.

He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious than the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster. That was one of the humours of things. The floating population of students and teachers, who did know both in a way, were not Christminster in a local sense at all. (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. VI, pp. 117-8)



The significance of the Fourways, where important events were “merely” discussed and trivial incidents took place,<sup>268</sup> lies in the close relationship between locality and history. Even if a gap separates “the floating population of students and teachers” coming from all around England from the inhabitants of the city, who are “Christminster in a local sense”, the Fourways is the monument of a larger community than the Weatherbury community. Indeed there the locals meet and come to know foreigners, which is the reason why the Fourways still represents a sense of continuity in time and space, between the past and the present of Christminster, and between Christminster and the larger history of Europe.

This means that in spots like the Fourways and the field at Marygreen, where “in every clod and stone there really lingered associations enough and to spare” (*Jude*, Part First, Ch. II, p. 14), one realises that, in Tinker Taylor’s words, ““there [is] more to be learnt outside a book than in”” (*Jude*, Part Second, Ch. VII, p. 120), another clue to understanding the epigraph to the novel, “the letter killeth”. Yet, although here Jude realises that his knowledge of the past of the city is partial, he is reluctant to agree with Sue when she tells him that Christminster ““is an ignorant place, except as to the towns-people, artisans, drunkards, and paupers”” who, unlike the people in the colleges, ““see life as it is”” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. IV, pp. 150-1). On the same occasion, Sue says that she has ““no respect for Christminster whatever, except, in a qualified degree, on its intellectual side”” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. IV, p. 150). In her opinion, the city blinds itself to modernity and refuses to acknowledge that change – in a broad sense (intellectual, religious, social, and architectural too) – is inevitable. The medieval past envelops the city, but this is leading to its physical and intellectual destruction: ““And intellect at Christminster is new wines in old bottles. The mediævalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go”” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. IV, p. 150). Sue makes a clear distinction between the past and the present of Christminster, between its religious and its intellectual souls, between the ideal (by now irretrievable) and the harsh reality, whereas Jude acknowledges Christminster’s decay, but he is so convinced that restoration, both architectural and spiritual, is still possible that he begs Sue not to talk like that.

Sue is perfectly aware that Jude’s partial and incorrect view of the past prevents him from understanding the present, let alone envisaging the future, and that he is not likely to change his mind. Indeed not only does Jude commit the same mistake with the history of Melchester and Shaston, but he continues to blind himself to the present of Christminster. As for Shaston,

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<sup>268</sup> See Andrew Enstice, *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind* cit., p. 163.

its picturesque description in guide-book style gives an idea of the way Jude sees it, that is to say as the cradle of English history and culture. As for Melchester, he idealises it as a place “almost entirely ecclesiastical in its tone” because of the cathedral, but failing to see that the town is far from being “a quiet and soothing place” (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. I, p. 130), especially for the pupils of the Training College, and probably it is no coincidence that Sue launches her last and fiercest attacks to the Middle Ages rightly at Melchester. To Jude who suggests sitting in the cathedral, she replies:

‘Cathedral? Yes. Though I think I’d rather sit in the railway station’. [...] ‘That’s the centre of the town life now. The Cathedral has had its day!’  
‘How modern you are!’  
‘So would you be if you had lived so much in the Middle Ages as I have done these last few years! The Cathedral was a very good place four or five centuries ago; but it is played out now...I am not modern, either. I am more ancient than mediævalism, if you only knew.’ (*Jude*, Part Third, Ch. I, pp. 134-5)

Sue opposes to the cathedral the railway station, the symbol of modernity. Significantly, she has recourse to architecture, that is to say Jude’s obsession, to persuade him that he must acknowledge change. The reason why the cathedral is now “played out” is that it lost its “use-value” long ago in favour of the railway station, where “use-value” has the meaning intended by Hardy. Sue does not mean that the station, unlike the cathedral, serves a practical function, but that the cathedral does not embody the values of modernity and is, therefore, outdated. The station is now what the cathedral was “four or five centuries ago”, i.e. a symbol recognised by the whole community, “the centre of the town life”. In my opinion, when Sue insists that she is not modern, she means that the station is more similar to the agora in ancient Greek towns than to a medieval cathedral, in that it fosters the circulation of people and ideas. Moreover, the station may represent for Sue an escape route and, consequently, freedom, in opposition to the Training College, whence she escapes risking her life.

Sue launches her second attack against medievalism through medieval architecture when she and Jude plan a day trip not far from Melchester. She begs Jude not to go to see ruins, and he replies by suggesting Wardour Castle, a Palladian country house, but also Fonthill Abbey, which was already a ruin at the times when the novel is set. This detail reveals both Jude’s attraction for decaying buildings, and ruins in particular, and his undying attachment to a medieval past, although inauthentic. The passing reference to Fonthill Abbey in the novel reminds us that Jude’s contemporaries’ wish to renovate the past through architecture is doomed to fail, just as Fonthill Abbey collapsed in 1825. Secondly, it stands as a warning against those who disregard the “use-value” of buildings in favour of aesthetic values and

“age-value”. Unfortunately Jude does not give heed to this warning, nor to Sue’s reprimands. The final part of the novel opens with a chapter where Jude’s idolatry of the medieval Christminster appears in all its seriousness. As Sue had predicted at Kennetbridge (see *Jude*, Part Fifth, Ch. VII, p. 313), Jude is never cured of believing in Christminster, as his foolish conduct on Remembrance Day proves. When he tells Sue that the celebration must not interfere with their business, i.e. finding lodgings for them and the children (see *Jude*, Part Sixth, Ch. I, p. 323), he is telling a lie, since he clearly planned his return in order to be present on that very day. At this point, there are no doubts that Jude worships the city for its own sake, as he completely ignores his beloved Sue’s repeated exhortations to go and find lodgings.

The tragic conclusion seem to suggest that the unique “function” the Christminster colleges now fulfil is consoling Jude on his deathbed. Jude remains faithful to his ideal until his death and never acknowledges that “everything changes, because everything exists in Time”.<sup>269</sup> If Paula, George and Havill entertain different flawed relationships with time, Jude even denies its existence, and this leads to his denying *his* own existence. The lack of a personal history first condemns Jude to thirty years of life-in-death, and finally deprives him of his future. The duration of Jude’s existence, the name of the city he is obsessed with (Christ-minster), and the numerous biblical references in the novel foster a parallel with Jesus Christ. This implies that the figure of Jude Fawley should be read as a metaphor, and his experience as an allegory of the modern tendency to deny change. After all, Carol Andersen observed that this kind of approach to Hardy’s characters, plots, settings, etc. is the only possible one to grasp the full meaning of the symbolic structure of his great novels.<sup>270</sup>

In this thesis I tried to illustrate the complexity and significance of the motif of architecture in some of Hardy’s novels, without distinguishing between Hardy’s “great” and “minor” novels. Although it cannot be denied that only in the ‘Novels of Character and Environment’ (and, as we have seen, “environment” includes also the built environment) Hardy was able to perfectly integrate architecture, theme and characters, such novels as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* reveal that since the beginning of his literary career Hardy

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<sup>269</sup> Samuel Hynes, ‘Hardy’s Historians’, in *Thomas Hardy Annual N<sup>o</sup>. 5*, ed. Norman Page, London, Macmillan, 1987, pp. 102-118, p. 116.

<sup>270</sup> Andersen wrote that “we must abandon the attitude that the landscape and rustics function only to supplement the plot, or to give “atmosphere,” or that the characters are so depicted to give realism to the plot, or that the plot, itself, may be taken as a literal statement of “what the author means.” Rather, we must take all the ordinary elements of the novel (landscape, characters, plot) and accept them as metaphorical equivalents of the theme (Carol Reed Andersen, ‘Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy’ cit., p. 195).

intended to transform the buildings featuring in his novels into “objective correlatives” of the themes of each novel. Moreover, by studying the motif of architecture in Hardy’s ‘Romances and Fantasies’, ‘Novels of Ingenuity’, and ‘Novels of Character and Environment’ simultaneously, it is possible to observe how Hardy eventually managed to turn architecture into a powerful metaphor. In *Jude the Obscure* the pervasiveness of the architectural motif is comparable only to the pervasiveness of the natural world in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, for architecture mediates Jude’s relationship with reality and defines his own self. It is for this reason that *Jude the Obscure* and *A Laodicean* are two complementary novels. If the “modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness” (with its implied negation of a definite choice) is Hardy’s version of the predominance of the aesthetical over the ethical in the composition of modern personality, Jude’s absolute choice of the Gothic style runs parallel to the ethical connotations of his steady dreams of culture and knowledge. Yet in Jude’s obsession with the medieval buildings of Christminster Hardy illustrated a much more fatal corruption of our relationship with the past, that is to say the negation of change and, therefore, of history. Jude does not realise that only in literature change can be denied, because only in literature it is possible to eternise moments, people, and buildings, saving them forever from life and history, i.e. from the insults and damages of use, weather and time. However – Hardy seemed to suggest through his rich web of architectural correlatives in his novels – in literature as well the price to pay might be rather high. Since everywhere, as it happens with Morel’s invention, “the letter killeth” and only the spirit gives life.

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In this section I have included works – marked with the symbol \* – which Hardy must have been familiar with, owing to his architectural training. In the *Life* Hardy explicitly said that he was familiar with the Brandon brothers' *Analysis of Gothick Architecture* and *Open Timber Roofs of the Middle Ages*.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, Hardy had studied also *Parish Churches*.<sup>272</sup> Such influential architects as E. B. Lamb, W. E. Nesfield, and Norman Shaw produced works aimed at training architects. Hardy was certainly familiar with Shaw and Nesfield's works, since he chose books by these architects in 1863 when he won the Architectural Association prize.<sup>273</sup> As for Rickman's *Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture*, Paula Power in *A Laodicean* consults this very text (see *Laodicean*, Book First, Ch. XI, p. 76). Other works Hardy was probably familiar with are Paley's *Manual of Gothic Moldings*<sup>274</sup> and, in all likelihood, A. C. Pugin's *Specimens of Gothic Architecture*. All these works, however, do not appear in the attempted reconstruction of Hardy's library at Max Gate,<sup>275</sup> probably because the young Hardy did not possess them. Indeed these books, containing numerous plates, were expensive and often published in limited edition.

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<sup>271</sup> See *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* cit., p. 79.

<sup>272</sup> See Timothy R. Hands, 'Architecture' cit., p. 14.

<sup>273</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 13.

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## Estratto per riassunto della tesi di dottorato

L'estratto (max. 1000 battute) deve essere redatto sia in lingua italiana che in lingua inglese e nella lingua straniera eventualmente indicata dal Collegio dei docenti.

L'estratto va firmato e rilegato come ultimo foglio della tesi.

Studente: Elena Rimondo

matricola: 810503

Dottorato: Lingue, Culture e Società Moderne

Ciclo: XXVIII°

Titolo della tesi<sup>1</sup>: Buildings of the Past and the Present: Architecture in Thomas Hardy's Novels

Abstract:

Questo studio sostiene che l'architettura nei romanzi di Hardy ha la funzione di illuminare i temi principali di ciascun romanzo, fornendo al lettore delle chiavi interpretative. Il modo in cui gli edifici sono rappresentati nei *Wessex Novels* è legato a numerose questioni di ordine pratico, estetico e morale, che possono essere raggruppate in due categorie: lo spazio e il tempo. Nei *Wessex Novels* l'architettura rivela come il rapporto tra l'uomo e l'ambiente circostante da una parte, e il rapporto tra l'uomo e il passato dall'altra, abbia subito una profonda trasformazione dal Medioevo all'età vittoriana. Nei romanzi di Hardy l'architettura diventa il luogo d'incontro (e spesso di scontro) tra atteggiamenti opposti nei confronti della natura e il passato. Atteggiamenti che tendono a polarizzarsi in un momento particolare dell'esistenza di un edificio, vale a dire in occasione di eventuali interventi di restauro/conservazione. Hardy individuò nella necessità di adottare una corretta prospettiva storica il presupposto sia per l'effettiva preservazione della memoria del passato, che per la creazione di un'architettura moderna dotata di "valore d'uso".

This study argues that the function of architecture in Hardy's novels is to enhance the main themes of each novel, providing readers with interpretative clues. The way buildings are represented in the *Wessex Novels* is connected with numerous issues of a practical, aesthetic and moral nature. These can be divided into two main categories: space and time. In the *Wessex Novels* architecture reveals how the relationship between men and their surrounding landscape, on the one hand, and between men and the past on the other, underwent a radical transformation from the Middle Ages to the Victorian Age. In Hardy's novels architecture brings together opposing attitudes towards nature and the past, which often give rise to clashes. Those attitudes tend to polarise in a specific moment in the life of a building, that is to say when a restoration/conservation plan is taken into consideration. According to Hardy, a complete and unbiased historical perspective was the necessary condition for both the true preservation of the memory of the past and the creation of a modern kind of architecture endowed with "use-value".

Firma dello studente

Elena Rimondo

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<sup>1</sup> Il titolo deve essere quello definitivo, uguale a quello che risulta stampato sulla copertina dell'elaborato consegnato.