The Ethics, Politics and Aesthetics of Architecture in Thomas Hardy's Novels

The Ethics, Politics and Aesthetics of Architecture in Thomas Hardy's Novels

By

Qi Junjie

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

The Ethics, Politics and Aesthetics of Architecture in Thomas Hardy's Novels

By Qi Junjie

This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-6008-2
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6009-9

To my son
Ethan

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this book, or, at the risk of sounding pompous, the construction of this scholarly edifice, has not been an easy and smooth process, punctuated as it is by self-doubt, deferrals and illnesses. However, if architecture fulfils a significant memorial function, this scholarly edifice, so to speak, helps to preserve cherished and abiding—if sometimes unexpected—memories. Each of the five chapters resembles a chamber, conjuring up the very smells of the seasons and the specific scenes of my life during which it was written. Much as the past often emerges as a burden in Hardy's works, in these pages it returns as a deep well of feeling—sustaining, regenerating, and ultimately giving shape to a part of my being.

Parts of this book have appeared elsewhere. An early version of Chapter 3 was published as "The Representation of Ruins as both Metaphor and Materiality in Thomas Hardy's Novels," in *Papers on Language and Literature* 58, no. 4 (2024). Part of Chapter 4 was published as "The Gothic Aesthetic in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*," in *Neohelicon* 50, no. 1 (2023). An early version of Chapter 5 was published as "The Architecture of Desire in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*," in *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 38 (2022). I am grateful to these journals for permission to include these works here.

I am immensely grateful to the Thomas Hardy Society and the French Association for Thomas Hardy Studies for their generous support of early-career researchers. Their conferences offered me invaluable opportunities to share my work, engage in rich exchanges of ideas, and gather insights that shaped this book. I am thankful for the joyful, almost dreamlike tours of Hardy's Wessex, where I encountered many of the real-life inspirations behind his fictional buildings. Thanks to Catherine Lanone, Annie Ramel, Isabelle Gadoin, Mary Rimmer, Tracy Hayes, Hugh Epstein and Sue Clark for their generous help and encouragement. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Jean-Pierre Naugrette, who was both my master's and PhD supervisor at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris 3, for first directing my attention to the role architecture plays in Hardy's writing. I am forever indebted to Phillip Mallett, for offering insightful and valuable suggestions on my works, for his steady presence as a mentor in scholarship and in life, for his kind, generous, loving heart, and his eternal friendship.

I owe a great debt to my friends and my colleagues at English Department, Renmin University of China, who provided the intellectual and emotional support that made writing possible: Zhao Ning, Yang Hai, Zhao Yang, Guo Zien, Xu Hongxia, Cai Xiao, Qu Jiaqi. Thanks especially to Zhou Ming, for his unwavering faith in me.

My deepest thanks to my parents, for their love, devotion and support, for raising me to be curious and studious. My loving gratitude to my husband, Huang Xin, for his enduring love, patience and support, for taking on the greater share of household responsibilities and childcare, which made the writing of this book possible.

This book is dedicated to my son, Ethan Huang. It carries with it my abiding love, and the quiet sorrow of time spent apart.

ABBREVIATIONS

A La Recherche	*A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*
Bleak House	*Bleak House*
Blue Eyes	*A Pair of Blue Eyes*
Collected Letters	*The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*
Complete Poems	*The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*
Daisy Miller	*Daisy Miller*
Ethelberta	*The Hand of Ethelberta*
Great Expectations	*Great Expectations*
Hard Times	*Hard Times*
"House of Usher"	"The Fall of the House of Usher"
Jude	*Jude the Obscure*
Laodicean	*A Laodicean*
Life and Work	*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*
Madding Crowd	*Far From the Madding Crowd*
Personal Writings	*Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*
Public Voice	*Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*
Tess	*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
The Art	*The Art of the Novel*
The Mayor	*The Mayor of Casterbridge*
The Portrait	*The Portrait of A Lady*
The Return	*The Return of the Native*
The Wings	*The Wings of the Dove*
Tower	*Two on a Tower*
Woodlanders	*The Woodlanders*

INTRODUCTION

The origin, ontological nature and meaning of architecture have been enduring and controversial subjects in philosophical, aesthetic and cultural debates since classical antiquity. Contributing to this contested terrain is a cluster of semantically and etymologically related terms—building, dwelling, edifice, construction, structure, and others—that complicate and enrich the conceptual landscape surrounding architecture. At the very beginning of *An Outline of European Architecture* (1942), Nikolaus Pevsner declares: "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in, is a building; the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal". [1] The difference between architecture and building, in Pevsner's figuring, hinges upon the aesthetic dimension that the former acquires. Pevsner's view is hardly revolutionary, evoking as it does John Ruskin's famous claim that architecture is defined by ornamentation, the superfluous, unnecessary yet expressive element added to a building. Indeed, architecture has long been regarded as one of the fine arts within the philosophy of art, also known as modern aesthetics since Kant. In the second volume of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), Hegel establishes a hierarchy of the five fine arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry—ranked according to their capacity to give expression to *Geist*, the spirit. Poetry, and by extension literature, occupies the highest place in this schema, "the absolute and true art of the spirit and its expression as spirit", [2] because it most fully subordinates external sensuousness to inner meaning. By contrast, architecture stands at the lowest rung of this hierarchy because its matter is stone, wood, and other heavy materials, which are "inherently non-spiritual". Thus considered, architectural forms are only "provided by productions of external nature", hence only an "external reflection of spirit".[3] Still, Hegel

[1] Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (London: J. Murray, 1948), xix.
[2] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 2. Trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 626.
[3] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 624.

holds that architecture is "the beginning of art",[4] the *archè* of the other arts. In the words of David Kolb, "For Hegel, architecture stands at several beginnings. It is the art closest to raw nature. It is also the initial art in a progressive spiritualization that will culminate in poetry and music".[5]

It is within this conceptual framework of incorporating the philosophy of architecture into aesthetics that Roger Scruton, in his *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (1979), calls for an aesthetic understanding of architecture by returning to first principles in contemporary architectural theory, particularly the intentional, perceptual, and symbolic dimensions of architectural form. At the heart of Scruton's aesthetic approach to architecture lie the notions of the "aesthetic experience" and the "aesthetic judgement"[6] of architecture, which stand in stark contrast to such views as "a building is to be understood primarily in terms of its utility", and that "aesthetic constraints, while they are possible, are by no means necessary, in the builder's enterprise".[7] However, it is exactly this aesthetic approach to architecture that Karsten Harries challenges in his *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997). By drawing significantly on Kant and the American philosopher Paul Weiss, Harries refutes the commonly held belief of architecture as a self-sufficient whole, an aesthetic object of the art for art's sake tenet. For Harries, one defining feature that differentiates architecture from the other fine arts is that it must be both beautiful and functional. This being the case, "considerations of utility will almost inevitably take precedence over a concern for beauty".[8] Accordingly, the aesthetic and artistic vision of architects has to be considerably compromised by nonaesthetic matters. Harries goes a step further by observing that even paintings and sculptures, typically regarded as self-sufficient aesthetic objects supposedly created for pure aesthetic delight, have historically served religious, spiritual and ideological purposes. Therefore, Harries remarks, "the aesthetic approach to art, which insists that art be for art's or for beauty's sake and makes self-sufficient presence constitutive of both can hardly be considered the norm by which the production of what we generally call art has been or should be judged".[9]

---

[4] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 624.
[5] David Kolb, "Hegel's Architecture". In *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 29.
[6] Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (London: Methuen, 1979), 1.
[7] Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, 19.
[8] Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 24.
[9] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 20.

The functionality of architecture points to the issue of its origin. As early as the Augustan Age, Vitruvius attempted to provide an account of the origin of architecture. According to Vitruvius, human beings, in their primitive stage, resembled wild animals, but gradually grew out of their savage condition by using fire, developing language, forming social life and eventually, building shelters. Vitruvius visualizes the process during which the primitive man, step by step, grew adept at building increasingly better shelters:

> Some made them of green boughs, others dug caves on mountain sides, and some, in imitation of the nests of swallows and the way they built, made places or refuge out of mud and twigs. Next, by observing the shelters of others and adding new details to their own inceptions, they constructed better and better kinds of huts as time went on … And since they were of an imitative and teachable nature, they would daily point out to each other the results of their building, boasting of the novelties in it; and thus, with their natural gifts sharpened by emulation, their standards improved daily.[10]

Here Vitruvius emphasizes man's imitation of animals, drawing an analogy between human building and the nest-making behaviour of animals. However, if animals build nests primarily for protection, reproduction and shelter from environmental hazards and predators, Vitruvius's account of how humans learned to build gestures towards a human impulsive, a human need that goes beyond mere animal instincts and drives. This is borne out by the fact that in Vitruvius's narrative of man's construction of the first shelters, the formation of human social life predated and dictated the need to construct shelters. What is even more revealing is the sentence that immediately precedes the passage quoted above: "And so, as they kept coming together in greater numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals in not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendour of the starry firmament…".[11] It is based on the weight Vitruvius attaches to the human activity of gazing upon the splendour of the starry firmament that Harries opens up the discussion of the social and spiritual function of architecture, the significance of dwelling, and hence the ethics of architecture. In the words of Harries, "by linking the origin of the first house to the awe-inspiring sight of the inaccessible timeless order of the stars, Vitruvius gestures toward what distinguishes even the first house from any animal shelter: beyond addressing physical needs inseparable from our bodily

[10] Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Trans. M. H. Morgan (Cambridge: Harvard university Press, 1914), 38-39.
[11] Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 39.

existence, it also addresses spiritual needs. Not only the body but the soul too needs a house".[12]

In the chapter entitled "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), Heidegger examines the relationship between building and dwelling through their shared linguistic roots. By pointing out that the Old English and High German word for building is *buan*, and the verb *bauen* means to dwell, Heidegger re-establishes the semantic link between building and dwelling that has been long forgotten. In this sense, building seems to be synonymous with dwelling. However, Heidegger asserts that "not every building is a dwelling", an assertion that leads him to investigate further the nature of dwelling by tracing the modern German word *wohnen*, which means to dwell in English, to the Gothic word *wunian*, which signifies "to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace".[13] Going a step further, Heidegger claims that the "fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range … dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth".[14] On this basis, Heidegger formulates the concept of fourfold—the "simple oneness" of earth, sky, mortals and gods—and brings it to bear on the discussion of dwelling by declaring that "[t]o preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to escort mortals—this fourfold preserving is the simple nature, the presencing, of dwelling".[15]

Heidegger's philosophical and poetic inquiry into the relationship between building and dwelling provides the underpinning conceptual framework for Harries's exploration of architecture's ethical dimension. Of course, Harries remains ambivalent as to Heidegger's claim that dwelling is a staying within the fourfold, especially the contemporary relevance of its emphasis on a sacred order and a primordial built space in a modern and technologized social milieu. Still, Harries must have felt the presence of a kindred spirit in Heidegger's idea that the nature of building is letting-dwell, an idea that helps him to expound on the difference between dwelling and mere residing, to elucidate the significance of genuine dwelling, and thereby to advance his own ethical vision of architecture. For Harries, what distinguishes architecture from building does not lie in aesthetics, but in the idea of genuine dwelling, that is, "being at home in the world".[16] The ethical function of architecture, thus considered, pivots upon inspiring the feeling

[12] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 138.
[13] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 143, 147.
[14] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 147.
[15] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 156.
[16] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 154.

of being-at-home, of being-in-the-world, upon edifying the soul, providing a spiritual shelter, a function that a purely aesthetic approach or formalism apparently falls short of fulfilling. As Harries puts it: "'Ethical' derives from 'ethos' … 'Ethos' here names the way human being exist in the world: their way of dwelling".[17]

Harries's criticism of seeing architecture as a purely aesthetic object, hence stripped of an ethical function, has been widely echoed by later scholars. For instance, Maurice Lagueux poses the question that whereas most disciplines pay increasing attention to ethical questions, exemplified by the new discipline bioethics, a parallel development in architecture has not taken place. The lack of such development, Lagueux believes, is attributable to the primary status of architecture as an art rather than a science, hence dedicated to aesthetic rather than ethical values. However, Lagueux takes issue with this stance by making a significant distinction between what he calls the "internal and external ethical problems".[18] Whereas ethical concerns remain external to disciplines like biomedical sciences and most applied sciences, they are internal to the practice of architecture. Thus considered, the ethical problems raised by the practice of science are not the direct concern of scientists themselves, but architects bear direct and full responsibility for the impact their buildings have on the lives of the inhabitants. This pattern applies with equal force to the distinction between architecture and the other arts. If, for instance, works of painting or film raise ethical problems, these problems should be debated and addressed outside the realm of art; however, Lagueux insists that "the bulk of ethical debates raised by architecture concerns problems that are so intrinsically linked with the very practice of architecture that architects can hardly dissociate the success of their work from the solution they bring to those problems".[19] Lagueux contends that this distinction rests on architecture's "fundamentally functional character", the responsibility of architects for designing "the obligatory framework in which social life takes place".[20]

Whereas Lagueux differentiates architecture from the other arts based on this distinction between internal and external ethical problems, Noël Carroll contends that art in general is connected to ethics. Therefore, diverging from Lagueux's argumentative configuration which stresses the difference between architecture and the other arts, Carroll affirms their essential

[17] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 4.
[18] Maurice Lagueux, "Ethics versus Aesthetics in Architecture," *The Philosophical Forum* 35, no. 2 (2004): 118.
[19] Lagueux, "Ethics versus Aesthetics in Architecture," 119.
[20] Lagueux, "Ethics versus Aesthetics in Architecture," 123.

sameness, maintaining that architecture, no less than painting or literature, is subject to ethical considerations. Carroll's main polemical target is therefore the view that art is categorically separate from ethics, a view that he calls "autonomism".[21] Carroll's subsequent lines of argument converge with those of Harries's refutation of the aesthetic approach to architecture. First, concurring with Harries, Carroll points out that, insomuch as the history of art is concerned, "[m]ost art historically was and arguably continues to be made with primary intentions other than affording aesthetic experiences. Commissioned by churches, rulers, guilds, aristocrats and so forth most art has been made with the primary intention to serve religion, politics, cognition, morality and so on".[22] Second, Carroll holds that one reliable symptom of art is pronounced intentional expressivity, a conceptual model that resonates with Harries's conception of viewing architecture as interpretation. Thus, Carroll argues, since "some art, including architectural art, is expressive", and since "[s]ome of that expressive art, including architectural art, is ethically charged", then "some architectural art is ethically charged", and "architecture is potentially ethically assessable".[23]

Although demonstrated from different theoretical strategies, Lagueux's and Carroll's arguments reinforce the ethical function of architecture and provide useful conceptual supplements to Harries's argumentative premises. The differences in their analytical paradigms aside, both Lagueux and Carroll bring to the fore one central belief which remains unaddressed in Harries's work: the interdependence of the ethics and the aesthetics of architecture. For Lagueux as for Carroll, an emphasis on the ethical function of architecture does not preclude consideration of its aesthetic dimension, as Harries tends to see it. Rather, as Lagueux phrases it: "Since most ethical problems raised by architecture are internal to this art, in the sense that they are nothing but problems that architects must solve in practicing their art, it is almost impossible for them to clearly dissociate their aesthetic solutions to artistic challenges from solutions they propose to ethical dilemmas".[24] In tune with Lagueux, Carroll frames the issue of the relationship between the ethics and the aesthetics of architecture in terms of what he calls "moderate architectural moralism", a concept employed to discredit "moderate architectural autonomism", the view that the aesthetic dimension is allegedly distinct from other artistic dimensions of architecture. Therefore, within the conceptual model of moderate architectural autonomism,

[21] Noël Carroll, "Architecture and Ethics: Autonomy, Architecture, Art," *Architecture Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2015): 146.
[22] Carroll, "Architecture and Ethics," 147.
[23] Carroll, "Architecture and Ethics," 150.
[24] Lagueux, "Ethics versus Aesthetics in Architecture," 130.

aesthetics is severed from other artistic purposes, including ethical ones. Thus considered, an ethical flaw in a work of architecture will never be considered an aesthetic defect. However, by resorting to the notion of moderate architectural moralism, Carroll argues that "some works of art, including some works of architectural art, feature moral defects that are also aesthetic defects, specifically formal defects", contending that the aesthetic dimension and the ethical dimension of arts cannot be entirely split, a stance that can be condensed into the famous architectural slogan—form follows function.[25] Furthermore, Carroll observes that architectural form is designed with the purpose of provoking certain emotional responses, and emotional responses are closely related to ethics. Considered this way, any formal, aesthetic flaw must at the same time be an ethical one.

This idea of the interdependence between the ethics and the aesthetics of architecture evokes Plato's oft-quoted remark that "The beautiful is the splendour of the truth" in the *Symposium* as well as Thomas Aquinas's statement that "Nothing exists which does not participate in beauty and goodness". In architectural history, it is traceable to Renaissance thinkers such as Leon Battista Alberti. In his *De re aedificatoria* (1452), Alberti directly aligns the aesthetic dimension of architecture with the issues of "decorum" and "civitas". In this sense, architectural form should be brought into line with the appropriate ethics of a city and expressive of civic values and responsibilities. As Françoise Choay puts it, "For Alberti, the city is the public edifice whose import and dignity is greater than any other".[26] Therefore, all types of buildings within a city should be organised in such a way as to conform to its prevalent social mores.[27] Furthermore, Alberti subscribes to the view of the conflation of form and function, of art and craft, believing that the solution to a problem of design must at the same time fulfil an aesthetic purpose. The belief in the interdependence between the ethics and the aesthetics of architecture reached its culmination in the nineteenth century, epitomised by A. W. N. Pugin and Ruskin. In *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), Pugin argued that "there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety".[28] His advocacy of the Gothic Revival was premised upon the perceived unity of the aesthetic superiority

[25] Carroll, "Architecture and Ethics," 151.
[26] Françoise Choay, *The Rule and the Model: On the Theory of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 80.
[27] See Bernd Evers, *Architectural Theory From the Renaissance to the Present* (Köln: Taschen, 2003), 22-27.
[28] A. W. N. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (London: J. Weale, 1841), 1.

of Gothic architecture and the moral and spiritual integrity of medieval Christian civilization. This view was shared by Ruskin, but on less religious and ideological, and more humane and individual grounds. Ruskin believed that architectural beauty should be a reflection of moral truth, and social ideals, as well as the spiritual and artistic freedom of the people who built and inhabited it, a critical stance deeply tied to the social anxieties and moral decline of industrial England.

The critical reflections of Alberti, Pugin and Ruskin carry within them the implicit awareness of the political dimension of architecture. Thus considered, the interdependence between the ethics and the aesthetics of architecture should be extended to include politics as well, forming a triadic relationship among ethics, politics and aesthetics. The indispensable political function of architecture has been brought into the open by Harries: "Our dwelling is always a dwelling with others. The problem of architecture is therefore inevitably also the problem of community, which is only the other side of the problem of the individual. The ethical function of architecture cannot finally be divorced from the political".[29] For Harries, it is a myth that art can be entirely freed from its former servitude to religion and state. After undertaking a brief survey of the history of Western architecture, Harries concludes that "this history has been pretty much a history of sacred architecture, in which sacred also meant communal".[30] This being the case, the ethical function of architecture must also be a public and political one. For Hegel, architecture should be an expression of the *Zeitgeist*, that is, the "spirit of the age", corresponding to the political and ethical requirements of a certain age, even fulfilling an ideological function. Hegel's view serves as the guiding principle of Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936), in which Pevsner contends that architecture should actively support the forward development of its age, transforming emerging positive tendencies in the present into future realities.[31]

If the relationship among the aesthetics, ethics and politics of architecture has long been a subject of debate in architectural theory, then literary representations of architecture and the built environment are no less informed by these tensions. If, as Carroll sees it, art in general cannot be separated from ethics, then literature equally owes its servitude to the mental and spiritual well-being of its readers. Hence the literary imagination of architecture is doubly charged with an ethical function. Literary constructions of architectural space thus function as a meaningful site through which

[29] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 13.
[30] Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, 286.
[31] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Thetford: Penguin Books, 1977).

writers articulate their ethical—and, in many cases, political—concerns. Furthermore, the conflation of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of architecture offers a useful analogue for the complex relationship between form and content in literature. Taking this line of thought a step further, architecture and literature as two sister arts not only engage with related ethical and political questions, but also reflect shared aesthetic principles. The term *ut architectura poesis*, reformulated from the Horatian doctrine *ut pictura poesis*, which means "as is painting, so is poetry", bespeaks a structural, expressive and conceptual affinity between architecture and poetry, and, by extension, between architecture and literature. Indeed, literature often draws on architecture as a kind of meta-language, while architecture, in turn, is frequently conceived as a text to be read and interpreted. Both produce layered, heterogeneous meanings that reflect and shape understanding of the world. As a chronicle in stone, architecture, like literature, a chronicle in text, records the past and preserves both individual and collective memory. The *ut architectura poesis* tradition thus encourages the dissolution of the boundaries between the two, and invites exploration into how architectural and literary meanings speak to and enrich one another.

The intimate, symbiotic relationship between literature and architecture finds a compelling embodiment in the life and work of Thomas Hardy. Uniquely among English novelists and poets, Hardy began his career as a professional architect before devoting himself fully to literature. Born into a family of stonemasons—his grandfather, father, and brothers all practicing the craft—Hardy naturally inherited the family trade. At sixteen, he was apprenticed to the Dorchester architect John Hicks, responsible for surveying and restoring old churches. In 1862, upon Hicks's recommendation, Hardy moved to London to work as an assistant to A. W. Blomfield, one of the preeminent architects of the time. His architectural career soon showed great promise. He won first prize for a country mansion design and, in 1863, was awarded a silver medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects for his essay "On the Application of Colored [sic] Bricks and Terra Cotta to Modern Architecture". Four years later, Hardy returned to his native Bockhampton, resuming work part-time with Hicks and, after Hicks's death, with George Crickmay. Around 1872, he made the pivotal decision to leave architecture behind and devote himself to his literary career. However, Hardy never completely abandoned architecture during his whole life.

It is widely believed that, had Hardy remained in the architectural profession, he might have become one of the prominent architects of his time. However, he ultimately found architecture inadequate as an outlet for his profound emotional depth, creative imagination, and philosophical inquiry. The "architectural drawing in which the actual designing had no

great part" was described by Hardy as "monotonous and mechanical" (*Life and Work*, 49). Much of his early work involved surveying and drawing for restoration projects, offering little scope for intellectual or imaginative fulfilment. Growing gradually disillusioned at the restoration work, Hardy turned increasingly toward literature as a more meaningful outlet. Throughout his architectural career, Hardy's literary engagement was remarkably intense. He taught himself Latin and Greek, immersed himself in reading, and began writing poetry and fiction, even making early attempts at publication. For a time, he entertained the thought of coalescing his dual interests by becoming an art-architecture critic, a role he hoped might accommodate both architectural skill and literary aspiration. His ambitions as a novelist began to take definite shape with the publication of *Desperate Remedies* (1871) and *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). Following the success of *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874, Hardy committed himself entirely to his literary career.

Hardy characterised the years 1867 to 1870 as a period "Between Architecture and Literature" (*Life and Work*, 57), but much the same can be said of his entire literary career. His literary life was consistently interwoven with a deep and active interest in architecture. He joined the SPAB (the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) in 1881 and, as its member, participated in and superintended several church restoration projects, advocating for a preservationist approach. He also designed his own house Max Gate in 1885. He kept abreast of contemporary architectural debates throughout his life and was conversant with the works of Pugin and Ruskin. In his speech "Memories of Church Restoration" given at the SPAB's annual general meeting in 1906, Hardy gave voice to his grave concern about the destructive consequences of widespread architectural restoration in Victorian England. A similar protest against the demolition of historically significant buildings appeared in his 1910 speech upon receiving the Freedom of the Borough of Dorchester.

In this light, it is tempting to suggest that Hardy's writing is deeply informed by his architectural training and career. At a basic level, architecture, like the landscape, features prominently in Hardy's Wessex novels. The world of Wessex abounds with buildings from a wide array of styles and historical periods, all rendered with meticulous detail and imaginative force. This architectural richness was rarely matched in nineteenth-century fiction. Architectural forms, terms, and concepts are intricately woven into the fabric of his narratives, intensifying the visual and symbolic impact of the text. A wealth of similes, metaphors, and analogies drawn from architecture attests to Hardy's distinctive architectural imagination, one that contributes to what he himself called his "idiosyncratic mode of

regard" (*Life and Work*, 235). However, the influence of Hardy's architectural background runs far deeper than surface detail. Imbued with expressive potential, his textual buildings are closely integrated into the major themes and concerns that the Wessex novels are invested in and are bound up with the author's artistic conception as well as moral, philosophic outlooks. Just as the "typically Hardyesque landscape"[32] gains meaning through its integration into the broader narrative, so Hardy's buildings are almost never mere settings or detachable ornaments, but serve as indispensable semiotic indicators of authorial intention and artistic vision. At a deeper level still, the very form and structure of Hardy's novels are informed by the aesthetics of architecture. Hardy constructs his literary edifices with an architect's hand and eye. The aesthetics and constructional principles of Gothic architecture with which Hardy acquired great expertise on account of his training as a Gothic draughtsman function as templates for his literary aesthetics.

The notion that Hardy idealises and glorifies a vanished, rural England in his Wessex novels was long a *locus classicus* of Hardy criticism. However, such a view oversimplifies the complexity of his social and artistic visions. While Hardy evokes the pastoral beauty and cultural continuity of rural life, he remains acutely aware of its inherent harshness, instability, and potential for social and emotional dislocation, the social realities that lead to the homelessness of his rural characters. This bleak and unpredictable aspect of rural existence is repeatedly foregrounded in his fiction. At the same time, the sweeping social, cultural, religious, and scientific transformations of nineteenth-century England inexorably reshaped traditional ways of life, fostering a deepening sense of alienation and rootlessness. Industrialisation and modernisation brought increased social mobility, but also widespread displacement and the erosion of communal and familial anchors. These social, economic, cultural and scientific forces that contributed to the experience of homelessness were further entangled with issues of gender and sexuality. Within the constraints of Victorian patriarchy and heteronormativity, Hardy's female characters are particularly susceptible to various forms of exclusion and displacement. Homelessness in Hardy, then, is not merely a physical condition but a symbolic and psychological condition, a deprivation of security, identity, and belonging. Architecture, in this context, emerges as a crucial expressive medium: a site through which characters' longing for stability and rootedness is projected. A close examination of Hardy's meticulously constructed textual spaces reveals how this pervasive sense of homelessness and alienation is rendered

[32] Alastair Smart, "Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy," *The Review of English Studies* 12, no. 47 (1961): 262.

architecturally throughout his work.

This pervasive sense of homelessness and displacement in Hardy's novels can be brought into dialogue with Heidegger's notion of dwelling, which signifies not merely inhabiting a physical structure, but a way of being in the world rooted in belonging and integration into one's environment. For Heidegger, dwelling is fundamental to human existence, and homelessness signifies not just the lack of physical shelter but a deeper ontological loss, a failure to exist meaningfully in the world. Hardy's fictional characters seldom experience the feeling of being-at-home. The home, as a metaphorical and physical locus of being, carries particular cultural weight within Victorian domestic ideology. It signifies the private sphere of life, associated with physical comfort, moral refuge, emotional security and spiritual sanctity. Walter E. Houghton characterises the Victorian home as "both a shelter from the anxieties of modern life and a shelter for those moral and spiritual values",[33] underscoring its dual function as physical haven and ethical anchor. Unsurprisingly, the motif of home occupies a central place in Victorian fiction. Yet Hardy resists this fictional convention. Among the many qualities that distinguish him from his Victorian contemporaries is his refusal, or narrative inability, to furnish his characters with stable, enduring homes. As John Barley starkly puts it, "There are no homes in Hardy, as Dickens has them".[34] Hardy's characters, often alienated, self-alienated, or socially displaced, are repeatedly uprooted from their dwellings and cast into a state of homelessness, both literal and existential. They wander through the Wessex landscape in search of a place where they might belong, a place to anchor their identities, to dwell in Heideggerian terms. This longing for rootedness and attachment, for a home in the fullest sense, becomes a defining feature of their emotional and psychological trajectories.

Since, as Harries sees it, the ethos of architecture cannot be separated from its public and political dimensions, the representation of architecture in Hardy's novels is equally deeply rooted in nineteenth-century architectural debates and political, ideological discourses, entangled with questions of power, class and social order. Churches, manor houses, cottages and ruins serve as material signifiers of class status, political authority, social divisions and the tension between the past and the present. If each historical period is defined by its spirit, its *Zeitgeist* in the Hegelian sense, then the spirit of the nineteenth century seems to be a paradoxical blend of progress and crisis, confidence and doubt. This paradox is reflected architecturally

[33] Walter E. Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 343.
[34] John Barley, *An Essay on Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 19.

by a tension between the application of new building materials, such as concrete, steel and glass owing to the development of Industrial Revolution on the one hand, and a nostalgic and reactionary endeavour to revive the architectural and political ideal of the Middle Ages on the other. A defining feature of nineteenth-century architectural practice in England was the vigorous revitalisation of Gothic architecture. The Gothic Revival was underpinned by the influential theoretical writings of Pugin and Ruskin. By the mid-nineteenth century, the restoration of ecclesiastical buildings was at its height. As Tschudi-Madsen notes, between 1840 and 1870, 7,144 churches were restored, amounting to nearly half of England's medieval churches.[35] It was in this architectural milieu that the young Hardy trained as a Gothic draughtsman. His early involvement in church restoration profoundly shaped both his personal life and his literary sensibility. During the restoration of the parish church of St. Juliot in Cornwall, Hardy met his first wife, Emma Gifford. His later reflections on this period carry a sharp poignancy, as his romantic associations with the church were inextricably bound up with his regret over the loss of its historical character: "Hardy much regretted the obliteration in this manner of the church's history, and, too, that he should be instrumental in such obliteration, the building as he had first set eyes on it having been so associated with what was romantic in his life" (*Life and Work*, 82). It is hardly surprising that the issue of architectural restoration permeates Hardy's literary works. Novels such as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and *A Laodicean* (1881) centre their plots around the restoration of specific buildings. Architects and stonemasons populate Hardy's fictional world: Edward Springrove in *Desperate Remedies* (1871), George Somerset in *A Laodicean*, and Jude Fawley in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are among the most notable examples. Yet the influence of architectural restoration on Hardy's writing extends far beyond levels of characterisation and plot-making. His profound regret at having been "passively instrumental in destroying, or in altering beyond identification" (*Life and Work*, 35) so many Gothic buildings, coupled with his increased awareness of the impossibility of restoration and preservation, informs the unique tragic vision that permeates much of his fiction. Restoration, in Hardy's works, becomes a metaphor for the impossibility of recapturing lost origins, whether architectural, emotional, or existential.

Hardy's writings are equally influenced by the aesthetics of architecture, especially the art of the Gothic cathedral. The confluence of the two sister arts—literature and architecture—in terms of their shared architectonics belongs to the long-standing tradition of the architecture-literature analogy

[35] Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration: A Study in English Restoration Philosophy* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), 24.

which dates back to ancient Greek and Roman times. Architecture was often evoked by orators to illustrate the structure and style of oratorical writings. In the nineteenth century, the analogy between architecture and literature was embraced by prominent Anglo-American writers on both sides of the Atlantic, including Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, and Edith Wharton, to name just a few. These authors drew on architectural metaphors to articulate and explore the formal qualities of their literary work. This analogy also figures prominently in the literary culture of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France. Writers such as Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Marcel Proust had recourse to the expressive potential of architectural form to interrogate issues such as the relationship between interiority and exteriority, the complexity of human consciousness, and the workings of memory. For the most part, the analogy between literature and architecture has been invoked for specific, localized purposes rather than developed systematically, but architectural theories and constructional concepts offer valuable insights into literary form and structure. Unlike the aforementioned writers, Hardy was the only one to receive formal training in architecture, which afforded him a unique vantage point from which to incorporate architectural principles of construction and aesthetics into his novelistic practice.

This book, therefore, aims to offer a systematic interdisciplinary study to demonstrate how Hardy's architectural background informs his ethical, political, and aesthetic visions. By examining the intricate relationship between architecture and literature, it uncovers how Hardy's novels embody architectural ethics and politics, negotiate the tensions between ruins and restoration, the past and the present, and how the aesthetic principles of the architectural Gothic inform his literary structures, thematic concerns, narrative patterns and imagery. This book is indebted to the foundational work by Claudius J. P. Beatty on Hardy and architecture. Beatty's monograph *The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (1963) is the first scholarly work that systematically examines the various thematic and symbolic functions that architecture fulfils in Hardy's writings.[36] Particularly, Beatty identifies numerous real-life originals of the fictional buildings that Hardy constructs in his writings, hence highlighting the interplay between Hardy's tangible engagement with architecture and his specific architectural imagination. In a similar vein, J. B. Bullen, in *Thomas Hardy: The World of His Novels* (2013), focuses on the materialist sensibility evident in Hardy's fiction and identifies many real-life originals

[36] Claudius J. P. Beatty, *The Part Played by Architecture in the Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (Dorchester: Plush Publishing, 2004).

of the fictional buildings in his major novels.[37] Concurring with Beatty, Bullen demonstrates that Hardy consciously avails himself of the expressive potency of architecture to explore underlying issues such as the disintegrating forces of industrialisation and modernisation, as well as Victorian constructs of gender and sexuality. Timothy Hands likewise offers valuable insights into the profound influence of Hardy's architectural training as a Gothic draughtsman and his direct involvement in restoration work, both of which significantly shape the content and style of his writing.[38] Notably, Hands argues that the ethical and political dimensions of Gothic architecture form one of the ideological foundations of Hardy's fiction, while the Gothic aesthetic itself serves as a stylistic model for his literary practice. More recently, Kester Rattenbury's *Thomas Hardy, Architect: The Wessex Project* (2018) offers the first comprehensive study of Hardy's works from the perspective of a professional architectural critic.[39] Rattenbury argues that Hardy's architectural mindset allows him to conceive of his writings as a cohesive architectural project—The Wessex project—with its own phases of inception, expansion, modification, and completion. Building on these previous critical works, this book intends to capture intriguing and unifying patterns concerning Hardy's ethical, political and aesthetic concerns with architecture.

The first chapter of this book explores Hardy's architectural ideology, which is condensed into the formulation of "The Analogy between a Man and His Mansion", first introduced in his novel *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876). The belief that the stylistic and formal features of a building are reliable semiotic indicators of the personal, social and moral conditions of its dweller lies at the heart of Hardy's central ethical concern with architecture. This chapter traces a line of descent of Hardy's architectural ethics from Vitruvius and Renaissance humanists to some nineteenth-century architectural theorists, with a particular focus on Hardy's engagement with Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*. It then examines how Hardy's architectural ethics not only shape the style and characterisation of his fictional writing, but also serve as a significant structural device that underpins the major thematic concerns of his Wessex novels.

---

[37] J. B. Bullen, *Thomas Hardy: The World of His Novels* (London: F. Lincoln, 2013).
[38] Timothy Hands, "Hardy's Architecture: A General Perspective and a Personal View". In *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Phillip Mallett (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 95-104.
[39] Kester Rattenbury, *Thomas Hardy, Architect: The Wessex Project* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018).

A romanticized nostalgia for the medieval past as a reaction against industrialization and modernity finds its expression in Hardy's novels. The second chapter explores how the tension between modernity and medievalism in Hardy's novels is dramatized by the Battle of the Styles within the larger discourses of the Medieval Revival and the Gothic Revival. Hardy's polemic against Church restoration in which he was deeply involved as a Gothic draughtsman is transmuted into a committed demonstration of the impossibility and infeasibility of Gothic restoration. The impossibility of restoring Gothic architecture to its original state, an ethical and aesthetic stance firmly held by Hardy and Ruskin, reflects the political disillusionment of the revival of medievalism and provides an apt allegorical framework for the bleak and tragic fate of Hardy's fictional characters, who seem to reach an impasse in the deadly struggle between the present and the past.

The fictional world that Hardy creates is littered with ruins dating from prehistoric times to the recent past. The third chapter examines the multiple symbolic and structural roles that ruins play in Hardy's novels. It argues that physical ruins serve as fitting analogues to human ruination and are used as emblems of vanitas, signifying the futility and transitoriness of human effort. The antithesis of physical ruins is architectural restoration, which, like ruins, acquires metaphorical, moral and biblical dimensions. The rival claims of ruins and restoration provide an aesthetic template for the dramatic tension in Hardy's novels. Particularly, this chapter brings the aesthetic category of the picturesque to bear on the tension between ruins and restoration. The merging of the aesthetics and ethics of ruins in Hardy's novels promises a new order of wholeness, unity and immortality for the otherwise fragmented, fractured and shattered human lives.

Hardy's first career as a Gothic draughtsman shapes his distinct Gothic art-principle. The fourth chapter offers a comparative reading of Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", demonstrating how both writers have recourse to the aesthetic principles inherent in Gothic architecture, especially the principle of geometry, to construct their literary Gothic. Next it examines Hardy's borrowing of the aesthetic category of the grotesque to construct his literary gargoyle, which exemplifies the spirit of vitality, irregularity and spontaneity of his Gothic art-principle. Just as a Gothic cathedral is the nest of grotesque gargoyles, so Hardy's literary cathedral is replete with grotesque elements. By exploring the shared aesthetic principles of the architectural Gothic and the literary Gothic, this chapter strengthens the affinity between architecture and literature as sister arts.

This book concludes by moving beyond the ethical, political and aesthetic dimensions of architecture, and focusing on the memorial function

of architecture, as well as the intricate relationship between the built spaces and the human mind. In Hardy's novels, characters harbour sundry desires, which are often architecturally reified. This chapter deals with the architectural reification of desire by bringing into dialogue the dialectic of distance and desire in Hardy's novels with anthropologist Edward T. Hall's theory of proxemics. The architectural reification of desire bespeaks the great extent to which architecture is bound up with the formation of the human mind. Architectural space serves as a useful metaphor for the depth of human consciousness and memory. This chapter thus further interrogates the memorial function of architecture established by the classical *ars memoriae* tradition. Particularly, it offers a comparative reading of *Jude the Obscure* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) to illustrate the intimate relationship between architecture, desire and human memory.