

How We Must See:  
Into the Abstract Imaginings of Thomas Hardy's  
*Wessex Poems and Other Verses*

by  
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For my parents—

Who nurtured my love of words and gave me 20/20 vision.



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Finally, I'd like to thank Harper & Brothers for first publishing the drawings in 1898. Thank you for seeing Hardy's vision.



## Abstract

Published in Thomas Hardy's 1898 inaugural volume of poetry *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* are 31 illustrations drawn by the poet himself. These drawings are simultaneously strange, grotesque, and disparate. They do not appear to directly connect to the poems, nor do they form a coherent narrative of their own.

This thesis argues that in order to fully understand Hardy's project in the *Wessex Poems*, these drawings *must* be examined. It is of vital critical importance to consider the drawings and how they make us see *Wessex Poems* differently. How do they make us see differently? They make us aware that we are seeing.

The first chapter briefly looks at previous criticism of the *Wessex Poems* drawings and attempts to understand why it is so difficult to find sustained criticism about the poems and drawings and their intersection. I then catalog the 31 illustrations using criteria important for understanding how the drawings affect the reading experience. After analyzing the catalog, I argue the drawings are structured, and the final three drawings in *Wessex Poems* are the climax of this construction.

The second chapter surveys Hardy's construction training: namely his past as an architect and his experience with Gothic architecture. This chapter argues that the inclusion of the drawings is an intentional Gothic movement by Hardy. A close reading of the poem "The Impercipient" and its accompanying drawing shows that Hardy carefully places poem and image together to complicate his imaginings in the poetry.

The third chapter examines measured sight, a term I coined reminiscent of Hardy's quotation: "Poetry is emotion put into measure." Measured sight implies spatial depth and texture. A close reading of the poem "Heiress and Architect" and its accompanying drawing show Hardy at work creating empty space in the poem and illustration for us to see.

The final chapter concludes with two short readings of images. I examine the strangest *Wessex Poem* drawing, of a pasture landscape with glasses overlaid, and argue this is the culmination of Hardy's controlling our sight. It is impossible not to be aware of your conscious act of seeing when looking at this drawing. I also read the drawing that accompanies "The Sign-Seeker," of a night sky and conclude with the idea that Hardy wants us to see as many ways as possible.



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## Figures

All of the drawings I've included in this thesis have been oriented on the page as they originally appeared in the 1898 Harper & Brothers First Edition of *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. When reading the poems, drawings often interrupt the reader and require a full turning of the book for examination. I aim to create this same experience while reading the thesis.

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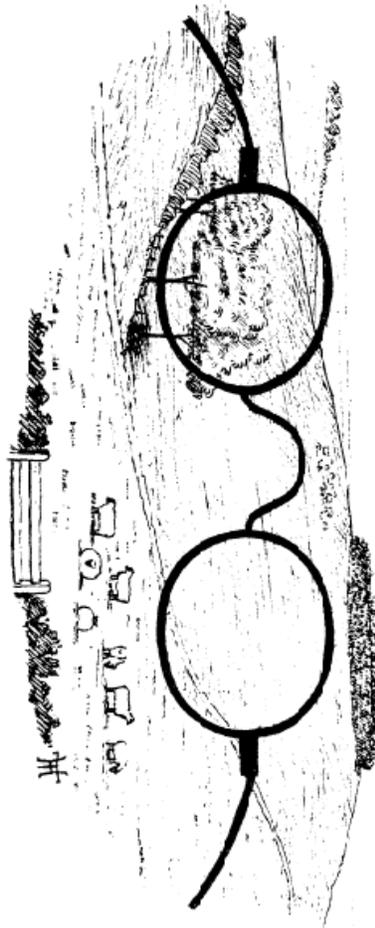


Fig. 1: “In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury” drawing  
Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 197.



## INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of Thomas Hardy's 1898 volume *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*, there is a short poem called "Heiress and Architect." In the poem, a young heiress implores an architect to design her a building. Each of her requests is met with a strong rejection from the architect who ends the poem with a description of her coffin being carried away after her death. In the middle of this poem, following the third stanza, there is a shocking interruption (Fig. 2).

Placed vertically on the page, flanked with poetry on the opposite leaf, and a black page after, this drawing commands attention. The traced outlines of figures and stone are blank and striking. The measured lines and hatched shading of the coffin are schematic. This image stops us in the middle of the poem and demands us to see. The act of seeing is what is highlighted in *Wessex Poems* through the careful construction of image and text that Hardy offers up for examination. This thesis argues that in order to fully understand Hardy's project in the *Wessex Poems*, the drawings *must* be examined. It is of vital critical importance to consider the drawings and how they make us see differently. How do they make us see differently? They make us aware that we are seeing.

Over the course of his life, Hardy's career changed from architect to novelist to poet. Starting in 1898, after the particularly bad reception of *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy published volume after volume of poetry until his death in 1928. It is not true, however, that Hardy began writing poetry in the winter years of his life. In fact, he wrote poems all through the 1860s and 70s while publishing fiction, and considered poetry his "first



Fig. 2: "Heiress and Architect"  
Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 213.

love.” It was an art he cultivated throughout his time as an architect and novelist, and finally let out into the eager world many years later. Another hobby of Hardy’s that appears in *Wessex Poems* is his affinity for drawing. Thirty-one original illustrations appear in the pages of its first edition. These drawings, by Thomas Hardy himself, consumed the months leading up to the publication of *Wessex Poems* and were Hardy’s most recent art at the time of its publication. As strange, textural, and intriguing as these drawings are, they have received little attention from most Hardy critics.<sup>1</sup> This gap in the criticism is largely due to two factors: First, the tumultuous publication history of the drawings, and second, Hardy’s own ambivalent opinion about their importance.

Included in the first publication of *Wessex Poems* by Harper and Brothers,<sup>2</sup> the drawings were generally well received by contemporary reviewers of the volume, many confused by Hardy’s foray into poetry after success as a novelist. An 1899 review by the *Glasgow Herald* asserts they “give force to the poetry” and were “themselves poems.” In 1902 Hardy switched publishers from Harper and Brothers to Macmillan and Company and the plates for *Wessex Poems* were sold, including the blocks for the illustrations. The first Macmillan edition of *Wessex Poems* was released in 1903 with the drawings, with a few minor differences, mostly in the orientation of the artwork. Macmillan continued publication of the poems with the drawings in subsequent editions, including their popular Pocket Editions. However, ten years later in 1912 while working with Macmillan on the *Wessex Editions*, the decision was made, mostly by Hardy’s lack of strong conviction either way towards, to exclude the drawings. The decision, almost regrettably, came to pure economics. Noting in a letter to Frederick Macmillan: “I do not

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<sup>1</sup> There are several critics who have given the drawings due attention, notably C.H. Knopfmacher, Paul Zietlow, and Marjorie Levinson.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898).

myself care much to have them reproduced in the Wessex Edition; but will subscribers grumble if they are not included? I should like the question of sale to decide the matter: if the enhanced sale would make it worth while, we might ask to borrow them;<sup>3</sup> if not trouble would be saved by leaving them out” (*Collected Letters*, iv. 231). The illustrations were consequently excluded from the Wessex Edition, and from every major edition following its publication until *The Complete Poetical Works* published by Samuel Hynes in 1982.

Hardy’s opinion of his drawings for *Wessex Poems* oscillates between an apparent loyalty and indifference and then back again. His tentativeness about the artistic merit of the illustrations seems to serve as a partial explanation for their inclusion and exclusion from different editions of the work during Hardy’s lifetime and in later 20<sup>th</sup> century editions. Canadian scholar Pamela Dalziel presents this complicated publication history in her essay “Drawings and Withdrawings: The Vicissitudes of Thomas Hardy’s *Wessex Poems*.” She argues against Hardy’s apparent apathy towards the inclusion of the drawings pointing towards a piece of evidence in the Dorset County Museum, which serves as a curator for many of Hardy’s personal papers and letters. An envelope labeled “Illustrations to “Wessex Poems” (from proofs)” in blue crayon in Hardy’s handwriting was discovered containing an almost complete set of the illustrations. Dalziel contends these are from a setting copy of the Wessex Edition of *Wessex Poems*. Pointing towards publisher marks on the illustration pages and the lack of any indication of omission of the illustrations, she argues that when submitting his

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<sup>3</sup> The original drawings were, at this point, given to the Birmingham Museum in Birmingham, England, where they are still housed today.

copy to Macmillan it was Hardy's "assumption, even his 'intention'... that his drawings would continue to remain in place" (398).

Hardy's fondness for the drawings at the end of his life does not necessarily correlate to their importance, but it does require their consideration as something Hardy found highly personal. As such, the drawings are my way into Hardy's aesthetic process, a concentrated dose into the flashes of his poetic mind. In fact, Hardy was so distracted by the deliberate crafting of his drawings in the months leading up to *Wessex Poems* that he remarked later to close friend Edmund Gosse in February of 1899, two months after their release, that he had regrets about the publication of *Wessex Poems*:

The truth is I have been out of conceit with the Poems ever since they were printed – owing to a sense of my inexcusable carelessness in revising them so perfunctorily. My interest lay so entirely in the novel occupation of making the drawings that I did not remove defects of form in the verses which lay quite on the surface, & might have been cured in a couple of hours.<sup>4</sup>

Here, we learn two things. First, the drawings were Hardy's number one priority in the days leading up to the publication. Second, Hardy conceives of his poems spatially, referring to their lines as a "surface." Taking this a step further, I am arguing that all of *Wessex Poems* is physical surface Hardy constructed. The first edition is a heavy olive green covered book with gold leaf on the edges of the pages. The pages are smooth and glossy. Our interaction with *Wessex Poems* is sensory and textural.

The drawings literally interrupt the poetry, coming in the middle of poems, in the middle of stanzas. They appear above the titles or at the end of poems, requiring a full turning of the book to see the illustration horizontally. What they depict is often a single

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<sup>4</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, 214.

snapshot of a single moment, or sometimes an extrapolation of some theme or idea the poem engages. They range from impressionistic landscapes, to strangely modernist drawings of the body. They display mastery of Gothic architectural sketches, or lack accurate spatial representations at all, superimposing eyeglasses over a view of hills and sheep.

Reading his autobiography published by his second wife Florence Dugdale, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, is crucial for gaining insight into Hardy's thoughts on reality:

I don't want to see landscapes, *i.e.*, scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.<sup>5</sup>

Hardy's commitment to "abstract imaginings" versus truthful optical portrayal in the art he enjoys carries over to his drawings of the *Wessex Poems*. An accurate representation of space and perspective is not Hardy's primary interest when sketching landscapes. The "deeper reality" (again, "deeper" indicating depth, size, space...) is of the utmost importance. So, the immediate amateur appearance of the drawings is a conscious choice – a choice to dwell on a "deeper reality" to be seen rather than showing off architectural drafting prowess.<sup>6</sup>

Through close readings of poems and drawings, this thesis will outline how Hardy consciously constructs the ways we see his texts. His constructions are an attempt

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<sup>5</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 182.

<sup>6</sup> This seems to align Hardy with the Modern art movement, concerned with abstraction. With more time and space, this thesis might have researched ways in which Hardy was influenced by and influenced this movement.

to draw attention to controlled sight. **It is an attempt to put sight back into measure.**

The first chapter catalogs the 31 illustrations in *Wessex Poems*. Beginning by examining previous critical work on Hardy's poetry and examining the "problem" the drawings present, I argue that the drawings are not amateur attempts at art, but a purposeful move by a skilled craftsman. By charting the different types of styles, outlines, subjects, sizes, and locations Hardy uses, I argue that while there is no perfect pattern, he exhibits certain tendencies in the arrangement and construction of the drawings. This chapter also notes the importance of the three final drawings in *Wessex Poems* and argues that they serve as the climax of the previous 28 drawings.

My second chapter examines Hardy's construction. I briefly summarize Hardy's architectural past. Trained in his teenage years, Hardy worked in London and in Dorset, restoring Gothic churches and designing buildings for personal and municipal use. I argue Hardy's artistic mindset, tutored to think in terms of physical space, depth, width, and height, allows him to think in terms of measure. Then, I examine the larger context of Gothic art restoration in the late nineteenth century. Hardy was enamored with Gothic art, and this spilled over into his writing and drawing. The inclusion of the drawings is itself Gothic in some sense—an unexpected and imperfect attempt at a new medium that creates a unique text/image reading experience. Additionally, many of the drawings echo a Gothic art principle. In a reading of the poem "The Impercipient" I argue the speaker is struggling to see something but is ultimately incapable of sight. Similarly, the drawing for "The Impercipient" is the interior of a church, yet strangely unfinished, missing a ceiling.

The third chapter will examine measured sight. I will examine Hardy's quotation "Poetry is emotion put into measure,"<sup>7</sup> and his use of the word measure, which I define as a *scaled restraint*. In the poetry and drawings, there are tensions between adhering to strict meters and rhyme, and allowances for grandiose indulgence in language and depth. I mean this literally, in prosody and line length and skewed perspective in the drawings, but also figuratively, in the narrative scope and the gesture inward in many of the poems, as opposed to a traditional exteriority of the Poet. A more thorough reading of "Heiress and Architect" provides an example of this inward movement, and an examination of the accompanying drawing gives insight into Hardy's poem and way he makes us see incrementally more.

The final chapter will bring this architectural construction together and discuss two final drawings: the "In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury" spectacles and "A Sign-Seeker" night sky. It is in these two drawings where Hardy draws most interpretively, offering up alternate ways of seeing then that which our eyes may perceive. These drawings are the "abstract imaginings" that Hardy commits to as truth, and by placing them in the poems, he makes us see them.

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<sup>7</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 322.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Problem of the *Wessex Poem* Drawings

#### I. The Critics

If taking only a cursory glance through *Wessex Poems* one might not even notice the drawings interspersed amongst the 31 poems. They are sporadic in variety and distribution throughout the 200 some pages. The indistinguishable drawings, the sheer number of poems in the volume, and the great number of poems in the total Hardy canon can be an overwhelming experience. As Donald Davie in his major book *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* notes: “One critic after another complains that nearly 1000 poems are too many, and asks for a more or less agreed-upon select few, a canon on which Hardy’s reputation shall rest, about which disagreements shall circle.”<sup>8</sup> While an excess of poems might seem a fortunate problem to have for a poet so influential at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Davie eloquently explains why this is a “problem”:

...if no one can determine what the centre is, no one reading of the corpus can be more eccentric than any other. This points to something that is very important. What defeats the attempt to discriminate the better from the worse among Hardy’s poems is not just the great number of poems, and their variousness. It is not even the impossibility, for the most part, of categorising the poems as ‘early’ or ‘late’; nor the almost equal difficulty of categorizing them according to genre, except in the broadest and most impressionistic way... each reader finds in the poems what he brings to them; what he finds there is his own pattern of

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<sup>8</sup> Davie, *With The Grain*, 42.

preoccupations and preferences, If this is true of every poet to some degree, of Hardy it is exceptionally true.<sup>9</sup>

By saying that Hardy's poetry defies categories, or perhaps definition, he argues that the critic's preconceived notions of Hardy then inherently flaw all Hardy criticism. While certainly all critics bring their personal biases and backgrounds to Hardy studies, it seems that Davie removes much of Hardy's authorial agency. In fact, I am arguing that Hardy's aesthetic theories and opinions of poetry are the true preconceptions that are brought forth. Hardy's opinion of his poetry and drawings and his craftsman's hand should preoccupy the astute Hardy critic.

In C.H. Salter's interesting study *Good Little Thomas Hardy*, he focuses mostly on modernity, Hardy's major novels and *The Dynasts*. Even though poetry is not the main topic, he makes a shrewd (though generalizing) observation about Hardy criticism: that critics have uncritically adopted Hardy's humble opinions of his poetry. Hardy was dismissive about his poems; he often considered them inadequate in many ways. Similarly, the drawings receive this same disparaging attitude. Some critics have also adopted this sheepishness towards his drawings, and Hardy's lack of ability to commit to them has sparked a lack of commitment to the drawings. In fact, it is difficult to find any critic who takes the drawings up with seriousness and considers how they contribute to the *Wessex Poems*. Many critics briefly mention them in their analysis, and many even reprint illustrations as accessory to their work,<sup>10</sup> but finding a scholar

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<sup>9</sup> Davie, *With the Grain*, 42-43.

<sup>10</sup> The most commonly reproduced illustrations in criticism I have found are the drawings for "Heiress and Architect" and "In a Eweleaze Near Weatherbury," two drawings I find of particular interest for this thesis and *Wessex Poems* in general. It follows then that there is something pressing about these drawings many critics recognize but choose not meditate on in the argument of their essay or book.

who fully interacts with the intertextuality of the illustrations and poems in *Wessex Poems* proves challenging.

Even though it is difficult to find a sustained exploration of the drawings, several critics manage to take an intelligent glimpse at the drawings. The first chapter of Paul Zietlow's *Moments of Vision*, what he calls a "descriptive rather than evaluative"<sup>11</sup> study of Hardy's poetry, features excellent readings of the "Her Dilemma" and "Heiress and Architect" drawings. His major question about the drawings is "Are they the naïve gropings of an amateur, or does Hardy exploit amateurish primitivism for deliberate effect?"<sup>12</sup> He later argues that the drawings "alert" the reader to "artful intention" in the poems, but does not give the same intention to the drawings.

Marjorie Levinson noted in her excellent 2006 essay on Hardy's poetry that the drawings are reminiscent of pre-Raphaelite art and the Decadent art movement. She too ponders the question of skill:

...[the drawings] whose "disproportionings" (Hardy's coinage), bizarre cropping, and breaks in perspective are unsystematic enough and so strangely disjointed from the texts they illustrate as to suggest incompetence. At the same time, however—and as Hardy's readers were well-aware—Hardy was a consummated craftsman, a skill developed during his years as an architect. In other words, the technical flaws and the overall weirdness of the sketches could not (and still cannot) be assimilated as a genteel amateurism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Zietlow, *Moments of Vision*, ix.

<sup>12</sup> Zietlow, *Moments of Vision*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Levinson, "Object-Loss and Object-Bondage: Economies of Representation in Hardy's Poetry," 555.

Levinson's conclusion that Hardy's skills as an architect prevent making any assumptions about "amateurism" in the drawings is the same as mine. It is impossible to believe that a man with such extensive drafting training and previous drawing experience, as shown in his *Architectural Notebook*, would leave the drawings rough out of clumsiness. How, then, can this apparent haphazardness be accounted for?

## II. The Catalog

Of the 31 drawings in the 51 *Wessex Poems*, there seems to be no apparent pattern. For some poems, there are multiple drawings, and then immediately following around 15 pages with no drawing. In addition to this haphazard distribution, the drawings are disparate. Some feature landscapes, some profiles of human figures, and some intricate churches. Is there any pattern to be found in the arrangement of the drawings? Is there any evidence of careful construction?

To answer these questions, I begin this thesis by carefully cataloging the 31 *Wessex Poems* drawings. This catalog provides a useful starting point for dealing with the amount and variety of drawings and attempts to make sense of Hardy's numerous ideas. This catalog then is evidence of Hardy's architectural construction of the drawings and poems (Fig. 3).

First, I make sense of the various subjects of the drawings: architectural features, landscapes, and items. Architectural features are drawings that emphasize some sort of architectural object or detail, be it a full sketch of a church, or a detailed look at molding or furniture. Landscapes are simply that—landscapes of nature or cities. Everything that is not a landscape or architectural feature categories I denoted an item. The majority of

Subject	Description	Alignment	Shape	Size	Frame	Style	with Poem	pp.
Architectural feature	Gothic church w/ potted plants	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Impressionistic	None	11
Architectural feature	Steeple w/ clock and shadow	Straight	Floating	Half	None	Combination	The Temporary The All	1
Item	Hourglass w/ butterflies	Straight	Square	Half	Grey	Combination	Amabel	6
Architectural feature	Gothic church w/ shadow	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Outline	Impressionistic	She (At His Funeral)	19
Item	Book of poems	Straight	Trapezoid	Half	Grey	Combination	Her Initials	21
Architectural feature	Arches w/ church graveyard	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Architectural	Her Dilemma	25
Landscapes	Hilly path w/ sunrise	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Impressionistic	She, to Him I	30
Item	Profiled Sergeant	Straight	Smudge	Third	Grey	Impressionistic	The Sergeant's Song	43
Item	Trenches	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Grey	Combination	Valencennes	45
Landscapes	Island city at night	Sideways	Smudge	Full	Grey	Impressionistic	San Sebastian	53
Architectural feature	Man walking down city street	Straight	Square	Half	Outline	Impressionistic	The Burgbers	61
Architectural feature	City scene featuring a steeple	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Impressionistic	Leipzig	74
Architectural feature	Bay window w/ violinist	Straight	Square	Half	None	Impressionistic	Leipzig	78
Landscapes	Pastures and grey skies	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Impressionistic	The Peasant's Confession	85
Landscapes	Soldier set against landscape	Straight	Smudge	Third	None	Impressionistic	The Alarm	91
Landscapes	Soldier set against landscape	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Combination	The Alarm	94
Architectural feature	Gravewards with city background	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Combination	Her Death and After	107
Landscapes	Tree arched path	Straight	Square	Third	Outline	Impressionistic	Her Death and After	113
Item	Floating music bars	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Grey	Combination	The Dance at the Phoenix	115
Landscapes	Army riding down tree lined path	Straight	Rectangle	Half	Outline	Impressionistic	The Dance at the Phoenix	123
Architectural feature	Tracery work on wood paneling	Straight	Smudge	Half	None	Combination	The Casterbridge Captains	125
Landscapes	Night sky w/ comet	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Outline	Impressionistic	A Sign-Seeker	129
Landscapes	Pastures	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Outline	Combination	My Cicely	133
Architectural feature	Offset turrets	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Outline	Combination	My Cicely	140
Landscapes	Pastures with small path	Straight	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Combination	Her Immortality	142
Item	Urn with dead foliage	Straight	Square	Half	Grey	Combination	To Outer Nature	159
Architectural feature	Chaise w/ tracery and dead body	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Grey	Architectural	Thoughts of Ph-a	165
Item	Key in two parts	Straight	Rectangle	Third	Grey	Combination	Nature's Questioning	177
Architectural feature	Inner Cathedral	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Grey	Impressionistic	The Imprecipent	183
Landscapes	Pasture with spectacles overlaid	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Grey	Combination	In a Eweleaze.../none?	197
Architectural feature	Figures carry coffin down stairs	Sideways	Rectangle	Full	Outline	Architectural	Hetress and Architect	213

Fig. 3: Wessex Poems Drawings Catalog

drawings are either landscapes or architectural features. Hardy's fondness for architecture and rural landscapes is obvious.

Next, I looked at the literal physical construction of the drawings on the page. The alignment of the drawings on the page is important to determine how much of a disruption they present in the experience of reading. Does the drawing require you to turn the book for examination? I also considered the shape of the drawing. Is it precisely geometric? How large is the drawing? How much of the page does it occupy?

The next two features are in regards to the style of the drawings. First, I looked at how the drawings are framed. This is important because framing signals the edges of the drawing, the edge of the sight that Hardy has constructed. There are two types of frames that Hardy uses throughout *Wessex Poems*: a black outline and grey shading. Several of the drawings lack a frame all together. Outlined drawings feature a prominent, clear line that cut off all sides of the drawings. Grey shaded drawings also have straight edges, but these are instead dictated by a grey gradient that is different from the color of the page. Finally, drawings that feature no outline simply fade into the page with no straight edge. The second feature is the type of drawing. I divided Hardy's drawings into three styles: impressionistic, combination, and architectural. Impressionistic drawings feature significant shading, softer edges, and muted gray tones. Architectural drawings feature little to no shading, and have a two-dimensional "flat" effect. Combination drawings use features of both these styles. These "styles" are also gradients of exactness, the architectural drawing being closest to an actual architectural draftsman's work, an impression sketch being closer to that of a painting. The combination drawings appear most realistic and photographic.

So, in this mass of data, is there any pattern to be found? Unfortunately, There is no single pattern that emerges from the catalog and makes the construction of *Wessex Poems* a neat feat of poetic engineering. However, it is clear that Hardy has *inclinations*. First, the drawings seem to be divided into rough thirds. Of the three subjects featured in the drawings, there are 13 architectural features, seven items, and 11 landscapes. Certainly not perfect thirds by any means, but there is not an overwhelming majority of any type. Similarly, there are 13 full-page drawings, eight half-page drawings, and 10 one-third-page drawings.

All of the full-page drawings, the “major” drawings, are either architectural features or landscapes. All of these full-page drawings are arranged on the page sideways, requiring the flip of the book, except for one, featured with the poem “Her Immortality.” It is not unusual for “Her” poems to feature drawings—of Hardy’s poems about women, or those that feature a female speaker, almost all have drawings.

The progression of drawings is also of importance. It is not by chance that the final three drawings in the volume—the vault-less cathedral of “The Impercipient,” the bespectacled pasture of “In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury,” and the hollow coffin-carrying figures of “Heiress and Architect”—are a few of the most thought-provoking and different images in the text. The three drawings are spaced within sections of fourteen and sixteen pages, two of the largest vacancies in the volume. The three drawings also span all three of styles: the impressionistic style of the cathedral, the combination of impression/drafting in the pasture, and the architectural angularity of the “Heiress and Architect” drawing.

All three break rules in some way. Each drawing is a more extreme and experimental representation of earlier drawings. It is almost like these drawings are the

final drafts of rougher sketches from earlier in the volume. Hardy is finally getting at something in this coda of drawings; they are what has been finally deduced from his earlier sketches.

In these coda drawings we literally *see* the project of *Wessex Poems*, and again are reminded of his thoughts on landscapes from *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*:

I don't want to see landscapes, *i.e.*, scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.<sup>14</sup>

Hardy desires a second kind of sight: that which exposes “deeper reality.” In these final drawings, by drawing our attention consciously to how our ways of seeing are constructed, he is getting at the *imaginings* in our sight.

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<sup>14</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 182.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Construction

#### I. Hardy the Architect

Hardy came from a family of masons, however Hardy was not destined to be only a craftsman.<sup>15</sup> Instead, he was to be also an architect. In 1856, Hardy began his architectural training at the age of sixteen as an apprentice to an architect and church-restorer from Dorchester, John Hicks.<sup>16</sup> During his pupilage, Hardy was trained in practical architecture, but also kept up a robust reading agenda, especially in Greek.<sup>17</sup> At the time of Hardy's training, church restoration was employing much attention in Dorsetshire and its surrounding counties. Hardy survey, measured, and sketched old churches in order to make "restorative" changes to their structure. The "restoration" in this period often destroyed the integrity of the ancient Gothic work, and Hardy unwillingly instrumented many of these changes. Hardy regretted his part in these "restorations" in his later years.<sup>18</sup> Reading his essay "Memories of Church Restoration" written in 1906 for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings conveys this regret succinctly.<sup>19</sup>

In 1862, after moving to London, Hardy served as an assistant under Arthur Blomfield, who he remained with until 1867. It is by Blomfield's recommendation that he joined the avant-garde society the Architectural Association in November 1862.<sup>20</sup> The Association was co-founded by Robert Kerr and Charles Gray, both influential Victorian

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<sup>15</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 35.

<sup>19</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 2.

architects.<sup>21</sup> It is Robert Kerr that is credited with saying “A good house is like a good square of infantry: it looks you full in the face all round.”<sup>22</sup> In addition to this kind of rousing architectural discussion, Hardy also published while a member of the Architectural Association. With a nod to his masonry roots, his essay “On the Application of Coloured Bricks and Terra Cotta to Modern Architecture” was awarded numerous prizes.<sup>23</sup> In the summer of 1867, Hardy found himself in less than ideal health, and decided to return to the country at which point he resumed work with his first employer Hicks, intermittently until 1869.<sup>24</sup> In February 1869, Hicks died, leaving his practice to G.R. Crickmay, an architect from Weymouth. That April, Crickmay wrote to Hardy asking for his assistance, once again, with several church restorations Hicks had begun. It was at this point that Hardy began a more intense study of the Gothic. In particular, Brandon Raphael’s *An Analysis of Gothic Architecture*, published in 1847, served as a basis for his investigations.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most interesting insights into Hardy’s time as an architect comes in the form of his only (known) surviving architectural notebook. Published in 1966 by the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society in conjunction with the Dorset County Museum, where the main share of Hardy’s personal papers are housed,<sup>26</sup> it gives an unfiltered look into Hardy’s sketches, drafting, and writings from his decade (1862-1872) as a working architect. In this notebook, there is a large amount of sketching and

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<sup>21</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kerr, qtd. in *Architectural Notebook*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> The Dorset County Museum still is home to many of Hardy’s personal papers, and in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and much more in recent years, these papers have received more attention as a valuable resource for Hardy studies and many have been published.

drafting devoted to the restoration of Gothic churches, such as Alkham Church in Kent, Findon Church in Sussex, St. Juliot Church in Cornwall, and Hardy's home parish, Stinsford Church in Dorset. I am indebted to Dr. C.J.P. Beatty's wonderful introduction to the notebook that gives an excellent brief summary of Hardy's architectural background and comments on areas of interest among Hardy's notes and sketches. It is Beatty that calls the notebook a "microcosm of the Victorian age" in both the way it deals with "almost every aspect of Gothic church architecture" but practically deals with the commercial aspects of architecture and the particulars of Victorian house design, including lavatories.<sup>27</sup> Hardy's sketches and notes are fastidious, as Beatty mentions:

No feature is too insignificant for Hardy's whole-hearted attention, and one feels too that he could have made many of these features himself...For Hardy, then, an architect should be conversant with such subsidiary crafts as carpentry and joinery, even if he cannot be a practicing craftsman himself.<sup>28</sup>

It is with this attention to craftsmanship that Hardy approaches both his architectural career and his poetry. Hardy is as much of a craftsman of the *Wessex Poems* as he is architect. This attention to "subsidiary crafts" continued through Hardy's whole career. He was fiercely attentive to publication details of his novels and poems, especially interested in illustrations. He even conversed directly with illustrators for some of his novels, giving the artists sketches to reference when making their own artwork.<sup>29</sup> However, as Beatty notes, although Hardy was a contemporary of the Arts and Crafts Movement, any connection is "purely fortuitous."<sup>30</sup> The attention to craft is something

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<sup>27</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, *Illustration and the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, 31-61.

<sup>30</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 17.

Hardy did not consciously strive to emphasize; rather it was inherited from his familial history of masonry. Beatty claims the importance of the Architectural Notebook in this context. He argues it “shows us an energetic young man who, for all he could tell at the time, was about to make architecture his lifelong career.”<sup>31</sup> However, I am arguing that the craftsmanship and architectural skill Hardy learned in his training and displays in the pages of his notebook is that of a young man who indeed made architecture a lifelong career. Architecture not only permeates the Hardy canon, it is employed over 30 years later as the major creative force behind *Wessex Poems*.

## II. The Gothic

As Hardy was trained primarily in the school of Gothic revival and restoration, it will be helpful to offer a brief survey into Gothic art, and more specifically Gothic architecture. One of the most important contributors to theories of the Gothic is John Ruskin. His 1849 “The Nature of Gothic” from the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, is a text that both traces the history of Gothic, and analyzes the division of labor and capitalism in Victorian England. It is from this text I take my understanding of the Gothic and also Hardy’s particular school of Gothic thought. Hardy was familiar with at least some of Ruskin’s writings. If nothing else, his ideas about art and architecture were influential during Hardy’s time.<sup>32</sup>

When reading his essay, it is clear (and Ruskin admits this openly) that the Gothic seems to defy definition. He is right in assuming that many of his readers will have an idea of the Gothic but be unable to precisely say what it is that endows

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<sup>31</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 15.

something with the title. It seems, to speak crudely, to be the sort of the thing you know when you know. Ruskin outlines six key features of the Gothic.<sup>33</sup> They are as follows

- 1 Savageness
- 2 Changefulness
- 3 Naturalism
- 4 Grotesqueness
- 5 Rigidity
- 6 Redundance

Despite these “characteristic” and “moral elements,”<sup>34</sup> the Gothic still remains a loose term and he is only able to “... [trace] out this grey, shadowy, many pinnacled image of the Gothic spirit within us...”<sup>35</sup> instead of providing a crystal cut meaning. He describes the Gothic as a spirit, and much like a ghost, it is hard to contain. The idea that the Gothic defies categories is reminiscent of Davies’ arguments about Hardy’s poetry defying categorization. Although the Gothic has six tenants, it is still vague. I categorized Hardy’s drawings, but they still escaped my grasp in some ways. At the start of the essay, the similarities between Gothic and the *Wessex Poems* drawings are already apparent.

The Gothic spirit is that of freedom and imperfection. In contrast to Grecian or Egyptian architecture, where the craftsman is the slave, the Gothic craftsman is allowed by the architect the creativity of thought, the freedom of artisanship. The Gothic principle allows for human imperfection to become part of the physicality of design. The idea that imperfection is not only good, but in fact *imperative* to the Gothic is quite revolutionary. Since Gothic architecture allows for interruption and dissymmetry, it can

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<sup>33</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol II, 169.

harness the pure beauty of perfection in its nature of imperfection. As he eloquently argues, and I less eloquently paraphrase here: we see the true beauty of perfection because an object has flaws.

There is something indulgent about Gothic-ness that Ruskin glosses in his essay that seems to echo Hardy's indulgence that we discussed in the previous chapter.

And it is, perhaps, the principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture, that they thus receive the results of the labor of inferior minds; and out of fragments full of imperfection and betraying that imperfection in every touch, indulgently raise up a stately and unaccusable whole<sup>36</sup>. (177)

To unpack this quote, I first point to the concept that imperfection can be discovered by touch. Ruskin, much like Hardy, seeks to tangibly conceive of aesthetic concepts.

Ruskin's idea that imperfect fragments create "unaccusable whole" also seems like a contradiction. I want to suggest that Ruskin is arguing to redefine what the "whole" is.

Ruskin's whole no longer requires completeness. Instead, the "whole" he is referring to is the fulfilled "labor of inferior minds." It is the fulfilled vision of the craftsman.

Although I hesitate to call Hardy an "inferior [mind]," and his education and commitment to arts and ideas speaks to the contrary, there is something fragmented about much of Hardy's poetry. The stilted choppiness so many critics focus on as a flaw is instead I want to suggest an *indulgence* in imperfection for a greater whole. Moreover, Moreover, I also want to suggest that Hardy chooses his indulgences wisely. He chooses to forgo close editing of the poems to complete the drawings in the months leading up to the publication of *Wessex Poems*. He chooses to leave some of the drawings unfinished and choose which poems get drawings.

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<sup>36</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice, vol. II*, 177.

Another criticism of Hardy is his melancholy monotony, but again, this can be seen in a Gothic light. Ruskin argues:

...we may gather generally that monotony is, and ought to be, in itself painful to us, just as darkness is; that an architecture which is altogether monotonous is a dark or dead architecture; and, of those who love it, it may be truly said, “they love darkness rather than light.” But monotony in certain **measure**, used in order to give value to change, and above all, that *transparent* monotony which, like the shadows of a great painter, suffers all manner of dimly suggested form to be seen through the body of it, is an essential in architectural as in all other composition...<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, Ruskin uses the word *measure* in this passage. This is also Hardy’s term, and one I have chosen to focus on in this thesis. Much as *measure* conveys scale, here *measure* can mean control, or decorum. My definition of the term is that *measure* is a *scaled restraint*. The tension here between scale—communicating size and weighty balance—and restraint—a holding state—can be seen again as a shadow of the Gothic style. For every moment of melancholy stiffness, there is a moment in Hardy that bursts brightly. For example, in Hardy’s “Hap,” the language is ornate and depressed. Words like “powerfuller,” “unblooms,” “purblind,” and “Doomsters,” are rather off-putting and stiff in their convoluted construction.<sup>38</sup> But the line “Then would I bear, and clench myself, and die,” in the second stanza, is so simple in its fatalism; it leaps from the stilted diction. Moments like these would not burst so if it were not for the darker moments.

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<sup>37</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II, 196 (my emphasis).

<sup>38</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 7-8.

In one particularly poetic passage, Ruskin notes rigidity as one of the essential elements of Gothic and highlights another tension crucial to the form.

Rigidity...not merely stable, but *active* rigidity; the peculiar energy which gives tension to movement, and stiffness to resistance, which makes the fiercest lightning forked rather than curved, and the stoutest oak-branch angular rather than bending, and is as much seen in the quivering of the lance as in the glittering of the icicle.<sup>39</sup>

Again, the words used to describe Gothic are those that crop up in Hardy criticism often- stiffness, rigidity- yet here they are equipped with agency and taut traction. These natural objects are elevated from passive states, letting the air around them control their force, to vibrant existence. I can see the quivering lance, shaking in its stiffness, nearly bursting with energy.

At this point, the connections between the Gothic and Hardy's work have been only theoretical. But Hardy *himself* drew these connections. Again, it is helpful to look to Hardy's autobiography *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* to find Hardy's voice on architecture and his poetry. What exactly does Hardy find about Gothic architecture that is so compelling? As his wife elaborates:

... the analogy of architecture, between which art and that of poetry he had discovered, to use his own words, that there existed a close and curious parallel, each art, unlike some others, having to carry a rational content inside its artistic form. He knew that in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous worth, and it is obvious that he carried on into his verse, perhaps unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained – the principle of spontaneity,

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<sup>39</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II, 224.

found in mouldings, tracery, and such-like – resulting in the “unforeseen” (as it has been called) character of his metres and stanzas – that of stress rather than of syllable, poetic texture rather than poetic veneer; the later kind of thing, under the name of “constructed ornament”, being what he, in common with every Gothic student, had been taught to avoid as the plague. He shaped his poetry accordingly, introducing metrical pauses, and reversed beats...<sup>40</sup>

Here, there is a connection between poetry and architecture, but mostly at a surface level, in his meter and stanzas. The idea of “poetic texture” hints at the actual feeling of the material of his poems, alluding to a deeper principle at play in his work. The idea that architecture and poetry both must carry “rational content inside [their] artistic form” proves a useful analogy for transferring Gothic ideas onto Hardy’s architectural and poetic work. Architecture and poetry both require rational content. Architecture requires living and practical space within its walls, and poetry requires some greater narrative or meaning within its stanzas. It might be said that Hardy’s poems- their narratives and meanings- are best served with the “cunning irregularities” of the Gothic, the freedom and imperfection the style allows.

### **III. The Impercipient**

“The Impercipient” cathedral, (Fig. 4), is one of Hardy’s most skillfully impressive drawings in *Wessex Poems*. Earlier in the volume, Hardy featured at least three drawings of the exterior of Gothic churches. In this poem we are finally cut to the interior of the architecture. We are finally given that important look *into* the rational, practical space of the architecture. Instead of looking *at* the church again, or instead of

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<sup>40</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 323.

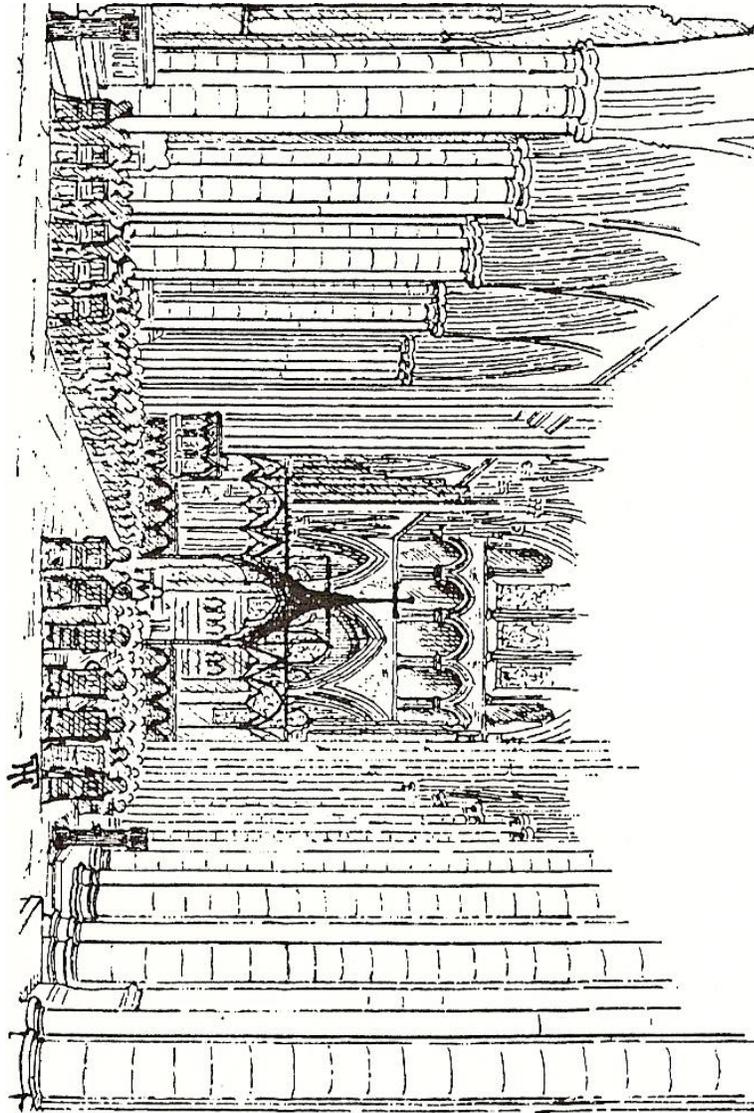


Fig. 4: “The Impercipient”  
Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 183.

our view coming framed with a surrounding landscape, we are thrust into the functionality of architecture, given a glimpse an interiority.

This drawing, first and foremost, highlights Hardy's still adept skills at sketching architectural structures- even after thirty plus years of retirement from the practice. But the drawing opens up on itself upon closer examination and provides interesting moments for meditation. I call the drawing Gothic first recognizing the pointed arches (which are, as Ruskin almost sheepishly admits after his discourse on the social ethos of the style, the most obviously visual cue for Gothic). But more interesting are the moments of dissymmetry and surprise that allow me to call the cathedral Gothic in a more innate sense. First, in the altar, the arches on the right side are unfinished, halfway drawn until stopped by the wall, in contrast to their mirror arches completion. Although this could be attributed to perspective, the choice in drawing from this angle highlights irregularities that could easily otherwise have been avoided and would have made for easier and more straightforward (literally) drafting. Secondly, the details of the columns and bases on the left and right sides of the sanctuary are fascinating. On the left, the columns are intricately fluted, ending in square bases with vertical texture. The columns have an alternating pattern between visible masonry and carved cylindrical cutouts. However, on the right side of the drawing the columns are simpler cylinders, ending in less detailed round bases, with their masonry obvious and large. There is also a small trio of arches on the left side of the altar, a surprise that gives an artisanal detail to the sketch.

However, most strangely, the drawing is unfinished. The top of the cathedral fades away, unevenly, across the top. In this faded motion, Hardy omits what might be the most iconic and impressive Gothic feature, the vaulted roof, although the rest of the

cathedral is awash with arches. The small heads of the congregation are almost scribbled and they lack crisp detail. In fact, the drawing lacks the crispness one might expect of a drawing of a cathedral altogether. But this fading also seems to echo back to the spirit of the Gothic, some sort of freedom and imperfection obvious in the sketch, the unfinished frame, left to the freedom now of the viewer. In this drawing Hardy commits fully to a Gothic mode in both the style of the actual building he sketches, and in the spirit of his illustration.

The poem “The Impercipient” is itself strangely unfinished. The poem’s speaker is at cathedral service struggling with their faith in God. The metaphor Hardy chooses to express this internal conflict is sight. The speaker is struggling to see. “Why always must I feel as blind / To sights my brethren see,”<sup>41</sup> the speaker complains in the second stanza. The speaker, however, is not actually blind, he just feels blind. This implies that sight is something that can be felt. Following the cathedral drawing, there is a full blank page of white space before the final four lines of the poem. In the middle of the four lines, where a fifth line should be, the poem is unfinished. Instead of a line of verse, Hardy places 5 small ellipsis in the center of the stanza. This missing line is as jarring as the missing cathedral vault. The poem ends, however, with finitude: “Enough. As yet disquiet clings / About us. Rest shall we.”<sup>42</sup> Although it is obviously missing something, Hardy has no qualms about the completeness of the poem. He ends with the speaker at “rest.” This echoes Ruskin and the imperfections that make up his redefined completeness. Just as fragments make up the whole of the craftsman’s vision in Gothic architecture, Hardy’s fragments of verse and drawing in “The Impercipient” make up

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<sup>41</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 182.

<sup>42</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 185.

the whole of his poetic vision. Hardy's craft is at work here forcing us to reevaluate what can be seen as complete.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Measured Sight

#### I. “Poetry is emotion put into measure.”

Hardy famously stated, “Poetry is emotion put into measure.”<sup>43</sup> Critics often focus on the “emotion” in this explanation. Hardy is condemned for his overly pessimistic tone, his focus on impressions, the certainty of the passage of time. In short, Hardy is a poet that seems to wallow in his internalized thought. But the altogether more interesting and provocative part of his definition is “measure.” Of course, this can be taken to mean meter, but if Hardy was only conveying metrical units, why use the word measure? Measure implies size. It assumes space. It implies varying degrees of scope. This can be taken both literally and figuratively. First, in the sense of the physical space the poems occupy in their various verse forms and the experience of reading a text under image or examining image across a plane of text. Second, in the actual movement his speakers and imaginative travels take in his poetry. Hardy is accused of being too self-contained by Davie, with little gesture to an audience, instead remaining inside his poems, restricted by his forms and diction. But his containment seems instead to speak more to how he inhabits space. In closer readings of many of the *Wessex Poems* texts and illustrations, Hardy occupies in counterintuitive ways – creating feelings of enclosure in seemingly boundless imagination, and immense depth into small detail and personal interaction. Dealing with space, how it is occupied, and how it is enclosed, is the project of an architect.

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<sup>43</sup> Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, 322.

## II. “Heiress and Architect”

In Hardy’s “Heiress and Architect” an heiress asks an architect to build her a structure, however as the poem progresses, her spatial desires grow smaller and smaller until she is eventually in her coffin, facing her death. Hardy (almost coyly) refuses to call the architect an architect explicitly at the start of the poem, instead calling him “an arch-designer.” This unnatural denotation identifies the architect by his product, namely, his arches. This explicitly draws a connection to the stereotypical Gothic form that Hardy found so pressing. Her reason for “beckoning” the architect is interesting because her reason is simply “to build.” There is no object the heiress intends to build; rather it is the process of building itself that is her main goal. Not surprisingly, then, no completed structure comes of the transaction between the heiress and architect, simply plans for potential buildings. Similarly counterintuitive are his credentials. He is not praised for gorgeous structures, sturdy foundations, or excellent construction, rather it is his skills and in the “high and wide”—denotations of space—that set him apart. In another round-about title, the architect is deemed “her guide” again calling into notions the physical space the two inhabit, a guide associated with moving around in multiple directions.

Then, the architect speaks. The first (and only) physical characteristic we receive of the architect is a description of his voice. As such, his dialogue becomes essential in how we specify this architect amongst the larger, general representations of architects. The architect then responds to the heiress:

“Whatever it be,”

Responded he,

With cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view,

“In true accord with prudent fashionings

For such vicissitudes as living brings,  
 And thwarting not the law of stable things,  
     That will I do.”<sup>44</sup>

The second stanza is aggressively stilted; it is difficult to naturally read the middle three lines of the architect’s speech without stumbling over choppy diction: “prudent fashionings,” “vicissitudes as living beings,” “thwarting not the law of stable things.” However, the firm speech and complicated syntax bring the crisp lines brightly to the surface. The “Whatever it be, / Responded he,” and “That will I do” assign the architect simple verbs “to be” and “to do,” in contrast with the heiress’ “beckoning,” and “seeking.” These effortless actions align with his “cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view.” The alliterative unvoiced hard [k] sound in “cold” and “clear” repeated twice is cut both times by the voiced fricative [v] in “voice” and “view.” These echoes give the line a systematic feel, an adept subject rhyme.

In contrast, the heiress’ language is smooth, and quite rich. Although both stanzas adhere to a rhyme scheme, the alliterative language and simpler, natural diction gives her speech softness that opposes the “cold, clear voice” of the architect.

“Shape me,” she said, “high halls with tracery  
 And open ogive-work, that scent and hue  
 Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through  
 The note of birds, and singings of the sea,  
     For these are much to me.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 211.

<sup>45</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 212.

The “shape me” is at first passionately sexual; a young woman imploring a man to use his hands to form her into something greater. By breaking the line into two parts with “she said” it is difficult to avoid this interpretation. She also desires building a natural organic structure.<sup>46</sup> This passionate tone continues with the request the heiress makes of the architect. Again, Hardy avoids explicitly saying “Gothic” but the reference to “ogive” is a word used to describe traditionally Gothic arches. However, the structure the heiress requests is decidedly unstructured. Instead of a stone building, a sturdy fortress, she asks for “tracery”—just the outline of an edifice. She desires an open construction with no formal boundary between indoors and outdoors so that sensations that belong in nature will be brought into the building. By eliminating a clear partition, she effectively challenges the primary purpose of architecture: to provide an effective shelter. The architect chides her for this lack of purpose in her desires and deems them “idle.” There is something violent in his disapproval. It literally “[breaks] forth from him.” Again, his dialogue is characterized by a lofty vocabulary: “cede,” “zephyr,” “falter,” “surly.” He specifically states the needs for walls against “winter’s freeze.”

In the heiress’ next dialogue where she begs (she literally “cries” to the architect) to build her windows:

“Then frame,” she cried, “wide fronts of crystal glass,  
 That I may show my laughter and my light—  
 Light like the sun’s by day, the stars’ by night—  
 Till rival heart—queens, envying, wail, ‘Alas,

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<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that the arch of Gothic cathedrals is meant to imitate the arching of tree branches, a lush and natural canopy.

Her glory!' as they pass."<sup>47</sup>

Intuitively, the purpose of windows is for the resident of a building or home to look outwards into the outside world, however in this moment, the heiress desires windows so she can “show” the world herself. She is inviting outsiders into her shelter, again twisting the traditional utilitarian purpose of architecture as a shelter not just from the natural world, but also from the human world. The heiress likens herself to the natural world, equating herself to light from the sun and stars, so bright that even queens will envy her naturally endowed glory. However, it is of note, that she requires a structure built by the architect to radiate this light. Without the architect including windows in the structure, her light will be contained. She is contingent on the architect’s design. Of course, the architect finds this desire frivolous, and makes his disapproval clear with his contrived syntax and diction. Her soul will require a place to hide, and that is the aim of architecture.

The heiress then lowers her desire to be seen to a desire for only one human to witness her, her “Love.” Her description of the “little chamber” echoes the intricate carvings of gothic sconces and finials—swans and doves “engrailed” in semi-circle (arched?) patterns. It is easy to imagine these adornments much like Hardy’s sketches in his architectural notebook. He includes pages and pages of floral and geometric ornamental decorations for his buildings.<sup>48</sup> These ornaments are to be “ranged thickly.” Again, Hardy chooses words with connotations of physical space. Range calls to mind an upper or lower limit, the distance to an object, or archaically, the direction in which something lies. Thick implies depth. It is inside this space that the heiress will be fully

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<sup>47</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Hardy, *Architectural Notebook*, 64-67, 173-178.

enclosed, finally embracing the crucial sheltering aspects of buildings. Yet, ever cynical, the architect refuses her request, and attributes her love with a shallow, wandering eye.

Finally, beaten down by the architect's continual fatalism, she "faintly" speaks her last request. She asks for a contrived "narrow winding turret" that she might inhabit alone. She orients her plea spatially, deeming it "slight." Yet, the conclusive stanza leaves her unsatisfied:

"Such winding ways  
Fit not your days,"  
Said he, the man of measuring eye;  
"I must even fashion as my rule declares,  
To wit: Give space (since life ends unawares)  
To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs;  
For you will die."<sup>49,50</sup>

The poem concludes with two key terms we've focused on so far: measure and space. These two concepts are heralded by the architect as the architect (and Poet speaker) as wise. It is an advantage to have the "measuring" ability to note the briefness of life and suddenness of death, and it is wise to allow for the "space" (literally and figuratively) for carrying a "coffined corpse" down stairs. The formation of "coffined corpse" is unusual. Why not just say "a corpse in a coffin" or a "coffin containing a corpse?" The convoluted formation of the phrase builds on the architect's previous tonal voice, but also makes the corpse, a former human, very passive. It is the coffin

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<sup>49</sup> Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 211-216.

<sup>50</sup> The final line of the poem is in stark contrast to the next poem in the volume that begins "There were two youths of equal age, / Wit, station, strength, and parentage;" (Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, 217).

performing the verb “containing” upon the corpse, instead of the corpse being “inside” the coffin. The wooden structure that was crafted by some craftsman (i.e. an architect) has agency in the corpse’s death to enclose its humanity.

The illustration for “Heiress and Architect,” (Fig. 5), calls into question our perceptions of depth, flatness, and gender. The tracery and emptiness of the bodies invoke questions regarding the construction of humans in art. We are asked to look at a strangely framed scene, heads cut-off, and a partial view of a staircase. Again, Hardy is drawing extreme attention to *how* we see. Following the word “freeze,” the poem halts and Hardy includes the strange, creepy illustration for the poem. The poem literally freezes for a moment on the page and the reader turns to see.<sup>51</sup>

As C.H. Knoepfmacher notes in his essay on Hardy, the drawing is printed in the book vertically instead of correctly oriented horizontally. In order to see the drawing properly, one must flip the book on its side:

Only then can the viewer see that the arighted rectangle frames still another rectangle and recognize that the attempt to reinstate a stable horizontal axis has in effect been anticipated by four figures steadying a box that would otherwise have to be inclined or even held perpendicularly.<sup>52</sup>

These unstable horizontal and vertical axes disorient the reader to a proper spatial awareness of the physical poem. Although the drawing is “arighted” when turned sideways, it is literally printed on its side, when it could have easily been printed correctly horizontal in line with text. This conscious choice to turn the drawing on its end mirrors the turning of the architectural metaphor to something less firmly grounded

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<sup>51</sup> Here, as Professor Gillian White noted, it would be interesting to think about “Friezes” in architecture, the Elgin marbles, Keats, and Hardy’s “Rome” poems.

<sup>52</sup> Knoepfmacher, *Hardy Ruins: Female Spaces and Male Designs*, 150.



Fig. 5: “Heiress and Architect” drawing

Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems*, (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 213.

in the easily observable world. The drawing is framed in an optically complicated and unexpected reality.

The drawing itself, however, is rather flat. The heiress describes potentially beautiful feats of architecture, but in this drawing, a building is reduced to the stairs—arguably one of the most utilitarian aspects of construction. This functional aspect of the drawing is echoed in the background. The strict outline of the bricks is reminiscent of the graphic quadrants of architectural drafting paper.

Again, as in the drawing of the cathedral we examined earlier, the drawing is far from perfect. The stairs are slightly slanted upwards, as if Hardy's ruler had been placed on an angle. The bodies obscure a clear view of the brickwork in the background of the poem creating an uneven pattern. However, in contrast with the sketch of the cathedral, this drawing features a crisp black outline that fully frames the illustration. There is no illusion of continuance outside the visible artwork. Rather, this is the only window of the view that exists. In many ways, this strict frame is much like a photograph. Zietlow too finds the drawing photographic, but he points to the 'zoom': "It is as if Hardy had taken a photograph askew from too close up, missing most of the coffin, and getting only the trunks and limbs of its bearers."<sup>53</sup> This haphazard framing is Hardy aggressively forcing his craftsman hand into our observation of the drawing. It is impossible to view the drawing for "Heiress and Architect" without wondering about what Hardy chose to allow us to see. Much like the coffined corpse, the reader is enclosed in the small frame of sight Hardy offers up.

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<sup>53</sup> Zietlow, *Moments of Vision*, 5.

## CHAPTER FOUR “Abstract Imaginings “

### I. “In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury”

In the strangest *Wessex Poem* drawing, a pair of spectacles overlays a rural pasture landscape. Fully unrealistic, the drawing is striking in its unique imagining of perspective. Hardy literally places you in the pupils of an observer (Fig. 6). The “deeper reality” of the drawing (again, “deeper” indicating depth, size, space...) is of the utmost importance. So, the immediate amateur appearance of the cartoonish sheep and trees, and awkwardly angled spectacles, seems a conscious choice—a choice to dwell on a “deeper reality” to be seen rather than showing off drawing prowess.

Before the “In a Eweleaze in Weatherbury” drawing, there were ten previous *Wessex Poems* landscapes. In all of these drawings there is little question about perspective. Landscapes are perhaps the most passive type of art. They do not necessarily have a significant focal point. They are more interested in the panorama of the whole than a central point of interest. This drawing turns all that on its head. By placing a pair of spectacles onto the landscape the drawing itself becomes a kind of spectacle.

There is a focal point: that which is located inside the frames of the spectacles. These two windows are where the eye is immediately drawn. Interestingly, though, these two points could not be more different. The left spectacle is focused on a trio of trees, the right on a purely empty slice of pasture. In addition to this, instead of receiving a fully rectangular landscape, the edges of the drawing are rounded, fading to the grey shading.

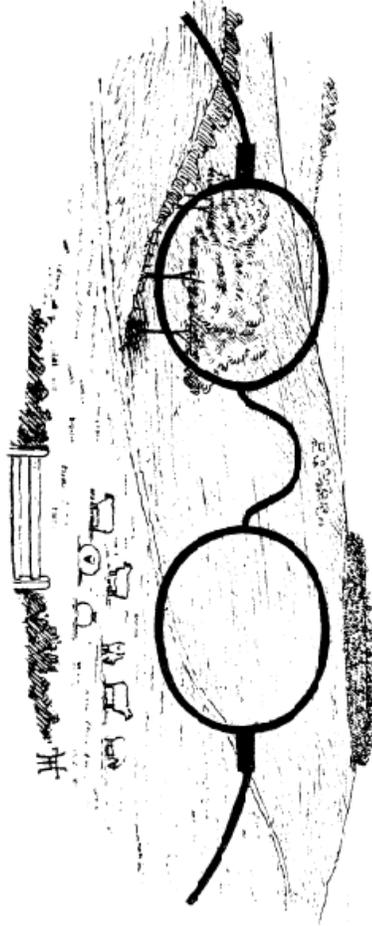


Fig. 6: “In A Eweleaze Near Weatherbury” drawing

Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 197.

It is unclear, however, just who is being viewed in this drawing. The angle of the eyeglasses is vague. They could be bent towards the viewer of the drawing, or away from the viewer, alluding to some unseen observer looking back at the reader. It is also unclear what kind of filter the spectacles are providing. Normal optometric corrective lenses alter a viewer's sight when looking through the glass within their frames. However, in this drawing, the view through the spectacles is just as clear as the view outside the spectacles. There is no discernible difference. With these simple choice details, Hardy is craftily calling into question the framing and perception of this seemingly simple landscape. What *exactly* are we seeing and what are we supposed to make of these different potential ways of seeing.

## II. "A Sign- Seeker"

Hardy critic Anna Henschman wrote a fascinating article discussing Hardy's astronomical work, specifically in the context of astronomical advances made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. She examines several stargazing figures in Hardy's novels and examines "In Vision I Roamed" from the first pages of *Wessex Poems*. Her article on (literal) space has many similar themes as my argument about the way Hardy makes us see. In this quotation, her argument is succinctly put:

Hardy repeatedly makes us see analogies between the perceptual conditions that govern astronomical observation and those governing the everyday act of one person observing another from the distance of a separate consciousness. At what scale, he wonders, can we best understand the world around us? And from what

perspective? The answer itself is relatively straightforward: we must see the world in as many scales as possible.<sup>54</sup>

Scale and measure are similar meaning words. Henchman and I are arguing essentially the same thing in different aspects of Hardy's work. She argues that we must see in the novels and the figures of space exploration, and I am arguing that we must see the drawings in as many ways as possible.

In *Wessex Poems*, there is an illustration of a night sky accompanying the poem "The Sign-Seeker." It is a visual depiction of how Hardy sees space (Fig. 7). Hardy's conception of the night sky is largely dark; there are few stars, and no visible moon. He frames the sketch as a rectangle, conceiving of the sky in a contained space. The rectangle also seems to adhere to an understanding of one's frame of vision as rectangular, at eye level. The panoramic view is akin to what one might observe optically in one frame of vision. There is an eerie, unnatural glow from the city below. This seems counterintuitive given the bright "leaping star," a comet, at the forefront of the drawing. The city, human life, has more of an aura than an astronomical anomaly. The "leaping star" is the forefront, but largely uninteresting. It is simply white, with a simply curved round edge. The lack of stars is disconcerting. One might imagine the brightness of the comet washing out all but the brightest luminous objects, or one might consider the early effects of sky glow from the radiating city. Although Hardy knows there are innumerable stars in the sky, he chooses to represent what he perceives, truthfully observing.

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<sup>54</sup> Henchman, Anna, "Hardy's Stargazers and the Astronomy of Other Minds," *Victorian Studies* 51 (2008): 61.

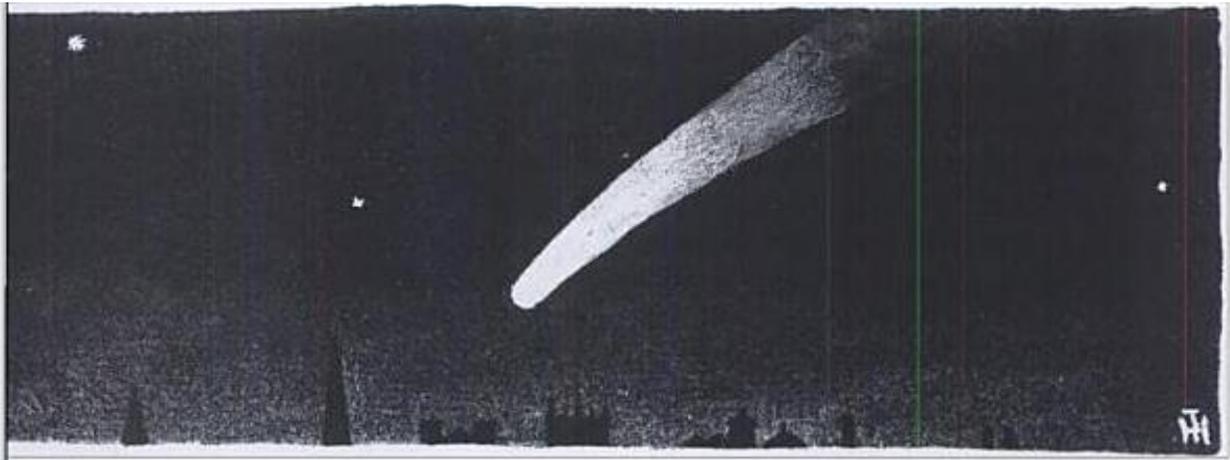


Fig. 7: “The Sign-Seeker”

Thomas Hardy, *Wessex Poems* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1898) ,129 .

## AFTERWORD

I have argued in this thesis that it is essential to read *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* with a careful eye to Hardy's illustrations. It is through his careful crating of the drawings and poems and their relationships that Hardy forces his readers to be aware of the fact that they are seeing and to observe as many different perspectives as possible.

The first chapter noted critics who asked the important questions about the drawings and provided a catalog with which Hardy's careful arrangement of the drawings became apparent. This careful arrangement became even more apparent when examining Hardy's craftsman and architectural past, especially his interaction with the Gothic. These connections were outlined in the second chapter, along with a close reading of "The Impercipient." The third chapter explained ideas of measure and scale and examined these in the context of the poem and drawing "Heiress and Architect," which drew attention to the extreme framing Hardy utilized. The final chapter provided two more alternate ways of seeing with spectacles and stars, and provided the conclusion that Hardy desires us to be aware of sight and see in as many ways as possible.

If it is the job of the poet to force readers to reexamine their everyday lives then Hardy has forced us to reexamine the most basic sense of all: that of sight.

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