

Introduction

“All Men Are Builders”

Victorian Structures

Thomas Hardy’s novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) famously depicts the Everdene barn, where farmers and farm hands gather to shear their flock of sheep. The description’s focus on the details of the barn’s physical space emphasizes that this small community has assembled for a purpose that is common, not just to these particular individuals in this barn, but also to the generations who have come before them:

the old barn embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time. Here at least the spirit of the ancient builders was at one with the spirit of the modern beholder. Standing before this abraded pile, the eye regarded its present usage, the mind dwelt upon its past history, with a satisfied sense of functional continuity throughout—a feeling almost of gratitude, and quite of pride, at the permanence of the idea which had heaped it up. . . . The lanceolate windows, the time-eaten archstones and chamfers, the orientation of the axis, the misty chestnut work of the rafters, referred to no exploded fortifying art or worn-out religious creed. The defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire. (125)

This passage illustrates two important qualities of architecture—temporal presence and communal function. The barn’s “past history” testifies to the

“functional continuity” of its purpose through time, illustrating Walter Benjamin’s assertion that architecture, more than other art forms, can lay “claim to being a living force” (Benjamin 687). The physical structures of the barn—its windows, archstones, chamfers, and rafters—are still meaningful, because within this barn, humans labor, as they have always labored, to meet their basic requirements for warmth, food, and shelter. Unlike the “exploded fortifying art or worn-out religious creed” of a fortress or church, the barn still helps fulfill enduring human needs. In addition, a building such as the Everdene barn both produces space where a community may work toward a shared and defining purpose, and “embodie[s] practices” that represent the community’s shared knowledge and values, demonstrating that architecture “has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art” (Benjamin 687).

Victorian realist novels often feature lengthy descriptions of houses and barns, churches and cathedrals, shops and factories, and courthouses and schools. These descriptions help situate us in a particular time, place, and class, but we may not give them much thought beyond noticing their rather static contribution to a richly detailed setting. But we should pay attention—not only are these descriptions ubiquitous, they are also often quite striking and revealing; we miss vital information when these buildings blend into the background. The four novels I focus on in this study each feature moments of arresting, memorable architectural images that illuminate their thematic and formal patterns. For example, in Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit* (1855), a breathless, climactic scene culminates with the spectacular collapse of the Clennam house, long the site of family and business secrets. In George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), the narrator pointedly introduces us to the Poyser family by leading us around their home, climbing over fences and peeping through windows, emphasizing the different impressions that each angle of the house creates. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), by Thomas Hardy, ancient ruins, including an enormous Roman amphitheater, cast shadows over the otherwise ordinary small town of Casterbridge. In Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the Gothic buildings of Jude’s idealized Christminster turn out to be rotting, crumbling corpses that only survive through perpetual restoration work.

The vividness of the above examples suggests that these descriptions serve important functions beyond just setting the scene; buildings have stories to tell. Because these descriptions emphasize the dynamic social and narrative properties of architecture, they can also be self-reflexive moments that reveal the social and narrative properties of the novels

themselves. We take for granted that we can use physical, architectural language to conceptualize the way different parts of a society fit together into a cohesive whole; substituting spatial for abstract concepts is so ingrained in our thinking as to be practically invisible. We talk of social foundations, systems, and, especially, structures, and use similar language to describe our patterns of storytelling, visualizing our arrangement of plot, characters, and point of view as a coherent narrative structure. Paying attention to descriptions of physical structures makes this conflation of spatial and abstract language visible in these novels and illuminates the way they understand their own social and narrative structures.

Therefore, the word *structure* is the foundation of this study: it is a word with capacious connotations across disciplines, and with changing and sometimes contradictory definitions. First, the starting point for each of the following chapters is an examination of *architectural* structures—the physical buildings and spaces that narrators describe and characters see, touch, and inhabit. The novels describe buildings as having material presence, with physical characteristics that have significance for characters and readers. We can interpret the style of construction, the choice of materials, and the relationship to the surrounding environment, making these buildings themselves readable texts. Second, each of these novels reflects and reenacts *social* structures, including the formal and informal institutions, communities, and families that shape the characters' interactions with each other. With a variety of approaches, these novels all interrogate the processes through which individuals integrate into and disassociate from larger groups. Finally, this book is concerned with *narrative* structures, or the formal devices that novels deploy to effectively tell their stories. Much as an architect builds a physical structure, a novel builds a narrative structure by carefully arranging patterns, sequences, proportions, and perspectives. Putting these three categories of structure in conversation reveals that structuring, in all its applications, is an essential meaning-making process. In his architectural treatise *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), prominent nineteenth-century art and social critic John Ruskin articulates this universality, arguing that *building* describes not only what all architects or artists do, but what all humans do as well. According to Ruskin, “all men are Builders, whom every hour sees laying the stubble or the stone” (213). We build—we impose structure with our ongoing construction of physical buildings, social institutions, and literary narratives.

There is a relationship between the physical spaces novels describe, the societies they reflect, and the stories they tell. This is not a new idea;

Ian Watt asserts in his seminal 1957 study, *The Rise of the Novel*, that the rise of domestic space and the individual subject found expression through the novel form, and later theorists such as Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey have revised this relationship.¹ However, scholars in this tradition have tended to focus on the creation of the individual as expressed in or produced by private spaces and novelistic structure. By contrast, my project shifts attention from the individual to larger social networks, similar to John Bender's description of both buildings and novels as "cultural systems" (Bender 22).² This is a worthwhile shift, because widening the focus from the interiors of buildings to also include the outside and, especially, the walls in between, creates a critical framework particularly appropriate for analyzing the interconnected social relationships of such concern to the Victorian authors in this study. As the description of the Everdene barn illustrates, architecture both produces communal space and embodies communal values; moreover, the conceptual language of architectural structure resonates with the exploration of social systems that is so important in Dickens's, Eliot's, and Hardy's work. For these authors, the novel is a space for examining the interconnectedness of social relationships; the descriptions of buildings in their work reflect concern with how these relationships are constructed and maintained.

In this project, I think of structure as a historically situated, cross-disciplinary concept, with contradictory material and abstract properties. Unpacking concepts of structure across physical, social, and narrative procedures enters us into recent conversations about form and formalism, begun by Caroline Levine in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, which argues for renewed critical attention to the recursive relationships among various forms. Specifically, she demonstrates that when we broadly define form to mean "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principals, all patterns of repetition and difference" (3), rather than more narrowly focusing on separate kinds of form—literary, social, aesthetic, or political—we can better understand the work that forms do. Moreover, this broader characterization illuminates intersections: the aesthetic work of political forms, the political work of aesthetic forms, and so on. However, while Levine examines forms that have already taken shape, I also want to notice the temporal processes through which we build our structures. When I think about structure, it is not as a fixed form, but rather as the tension that comes from the impulse to fix meanings against constantly shifting perceptions.

The process-oriented approach that I outline here has significant implications for the structures of realism, ultimately challenging what

Frederic Jameson calls the “usual point about the structural and inherent conservatism . . . of the realist novel as such,” namely that “[a]n ontological realism, absolutely committed to the density and solidity of what is—whether in the realm of psychology and feelings, institutions, objects or space—cannot but be threatened in the very nature of the form by any suggestion that these things are changeable and not ontologically immutable” (Jameson 215). Instead, I argue that architectural, social, and narrative structures bear witness to their own existence through time, and the meanings they produce are far more mutable than we tend to assume. Therefore, we should read the Victorian realist novel not, as Jameson seems to suggest, as a static reflection of a stable social system, but as a dynamic reenactment of structuring forces, self-consciously committed to revealing the processes through which those structures are constructed and maintained. Moreover, when we notice these processes, we recognize that these novels use their formal narrative structures to actively intervene in the world around them by critiquing existing structures and imagining new structural possibilities.

To be clear, my focus on architecture’s structural properties, and my shorthand description of buildings in novels as physical structures, is not meant to refer to the actual material world or real buildings.³ Instead, by taking advantage of the flexibility of the concrete and abstract concepts that structure can describe, I can investigate the structuring work that novels do. In her analysis of forms, Levine reminds us that “Literature is not made of the material world it describes or invokes but of language, which lays claims to its own forms—syntactical, narrative, rhythmic, rhetorical—and its own materiality—the spoken word, the printed page” (Levine, *Forms* 10). Whether the buildings they describe are fictional or real, authors build with literature’s “own forms”—I am interested in how they do this, and, most importantly, how they make sense of what they are doing. When a novel describes a building—its insideness and outsideness, its integration into its surroundings, or its existence through time—it offers us insight into the analogous social and narrative formations within its pages. Levine argues that a “reading practice that follows the affordances of both literary forms and material objects imagines these as mutually shaping potentialities” (10). What follows, then, is a reading practice that seeks to make clear the “mutually shaping potentialities” of architectural, social, and narrative structure.

To begin, we can see thematic and formal parallels between architectural and social systems at several levels: first, buildings in these novels function as particular cultural systems where people live, work, and

interact. Besides socially regulated family relationships within domestic spaces, the novels portray the interactions of landlords, tenants, and rent collectors, of prisoners, jailers, and prison visitors, and of all manner of workers and craftsmen responsible for maintaining physical structures, including plasterers, carpenters, and stonemasons. Second, the buildings themselves emphasize their own insideness and outsideness, demonstrating that literal and figurative walls define and sustain a community's identity—those inside the walls of the Poyser home in *Adam Bede*, or the debtor's prison in *Little Dorrit*, or a Christminster college in *Jude the Obscure* are part of a community, while those outside are excluded. Finally, these novels use architectural structures as figurative imagery to evoke the structural organization of institutions and communities. Office buildings or churches can be figures for the institutions they house, and often the physical layout of these buildings is a spatialized representation of the institution's functioning, as with the labyrinthine halls of the inefficient Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit*, or the towering spires of the hierarchical university system in *Jude*. The individual parts of a building can also stand for the members of a family or social group, highlighting the interrelationship of the parts to the whole.

Moreover, the homology of architectural and social structures extends beyond static spatial and figurative correspondence, to the important thematic and formal parallels of their temporal processes. Raymond Williams points out in *Keywords* that “in its earliest English uses . . . structure was primarily a noun of process: the action of building” (301); my analysis recovers this temporal usage. At first, this may be counterintuitive, because architecture would seem to be the most inert of art forms. Thematically, as the description of the Everdene barn in *Far from the Madding Crowd* suggests, a building may epitomize permanence and continuity; even more importantly, the structural integrity of a building fundamentally depends on its physical stability. However, recent studies in architectural history have begun to challenge this understanding. For example, Brian Hanson's history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture points out that most historical accounts “tend to be preoccupied with static formal attributes at the expense of dynamic processes” (Hanson 4), which misses “any acknowledgement of the body politic as it is represented in building culture, which in the act of embodying the architect's and planner's vision, does manage to impose something of itself on the city's stones” (5).⁴ Hanson's approach argues that the “formal attributes” of a work of architecture embody a whole apparatus of political, economic, and social

procedures that act together over time to produce a building. Iain Borden further argues that acknowledging the production processes is not sufficient, pointing out that more recently

a new strand of architectural history has been emerging, one that . . . sees architecture as a dynamic entity that continues to have life and importance long after the material object has been constructed . . . sees the building as having a social, political, cultural, and environmental relevance that stretches far beyond the building's original conception and construction, and extends into decades or even centuries of prolonged existence. (Borden x)

The novels' architectural descriptions similarly demonstrate architecture's temporal properties. First, because the scale of a building is larger than that of the human body, a complete view of even the smallest cottage requires a temporal process of moving around and through; characters and readers alike discover that standing in different positions—inside or outside, front or back—changes what we can understand about a building. Furthermore, the buildings in these novels display material changes through time from the natural forces of weather and gravity and the human impact of use and restoration: the stone arch worn away by weather or hands, or the wooden sign obscured by creeping moss or layers of paint.⁵ Finally, temporal processes are at work in all the ways characters from each of these novels actively repurpose and recreate their physical environments in their everyday interactions, by putting old buildings to different uses and even pulling down stones from one structure to build something new; when the physical structures of a medieval cathedral or an ancient fortress are no longer meaningful to their communities, the people pull off pieces to construct pigsties or pave pathways.⁶ As these descriptions reflect, what Borden calls a “new strand of architectural history” in fact revives a dominant theme in nineteenth-century architectural discourse, including fictional representations, as well as art history and social commentary. And, as we will see, this theme is nowhere more evident than in John Ruskin's influential works, which exemplify this social and temporal approach to architecture; just as Borden describes in his “new strand” of history, Ruskin's analyses, spanning from Gothic cathedrals to modern train stations, emphasize the buildings' “prolonged existence” and their “social, political, cultural, and environmental” effects over time.

Nineteenth-century novels use their descriptions of architecture to capture tension between dramatic social restructuring on one hand and a conservative impulse to remember and maintain the world as it has been on the other. As a topic of intellectual and aesthetic conversation, as a focus for religious, historical, and social debate, and as a subject of practical concern for meeting the needs of an urbanizing population, architecture pervaded public discourse and popular imagination alike. The realist novels of the period take up these various architectural conversations directly in, for example, their depictions of daily life in the home and workplace, and indirectly in their examinations of social upheaval. The rapid pace of building, especially in cities, reflects new ways of structuring society, while the debate over preservation or restoration of churches demonstrates anxiety about remaining connected with the past. By the middle of the century, the discussion of architecture had currency across a variety of professional and scholarly disciplines, as well as in the popular culture. As Carol Flores points out, this was a period of “unprecedented public and private demand. The expansion of industry and trade, and dramatic changes in social conditions, required new types of buildings at a larger scale” (Flores 12).⁷ Builders scrambled to meet the needs of industrialization, burgeoning cities, and a rising middle class.⁸ Architecture also fired the public’s imagination for its aesthetic interest: any grand tour of the continent would include stops at every important cathedral and ancient ruin, and modern architectural spectacles such as the Crystal Palace, constructed for the Great Exhibition of 1851, set off enduring debates about architectural style and function.⁹

Beyond architectural discourse, the nineteenth century was also a critical inflection point in developing ideas of structure for describing social and narrative constructions. The descriptions of architecture in these novels manifest a larger nineteenth-century epistemological shift in ways of understanding structure, including radical changes in the organizing principles of the social and natural sciences. To point out two of the most obvious examples, Marx uses structural concepts to reimagine social, economic, and political interactions, while Darwin’s theory of evolution undermines existing taxonomic systems. This period also sees new kinds of structural thinking in social sciences such as statistics and demography. Such developments set the stage for concepts of structure and structuralism to branch out in disciplines ranging from anthropology, linguistics, and literary theory, to physics and computer sciences in the twentieth century. Williams claims that “we need to know this history” of structural

concepts in the nineteenth century “if we are to understand the important and difficult development of *structural* and later *structuralist* as defining terms in the human sciences, notably linguistics and anthropology” (303). In other words, nineteenth-century intellectual and popular discussion of and about structure began to define concepts on which we still rely today. In particular, our thinking about the way a delineated structure produces meaning (both the structuralist assumption that it does, and the post-structuralist rejection of this assumption) begins to take shape.

For my purposes, one of the most important of these concepts arising in this period comes from theories of culture as structure, most prominently articulated in E.B. Tylor’s foundational text, *Primitive Culture* (1871). Tylor famously defines culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capability and habit acquired by man as a member of society” (1). The related fields of linguistic and anthropological structuralism that followed Tylor’s work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries develop the idea that all behaviors and customs within a discrete group are meaningful manifestations of culture.¹⁰ I examine the novels’ various descriptions of physical buildings as manifestations of the “complex whole” of culture, as well as microcosms of interconnected social systems that produce meaningfulness. My analysis anachronistically applies this understanding of culture to the work of Dickens and Eliot; however, in *Culture and Anomie*, Christopher Herbert argues that Tylor’s famous definition of culture consolidates a set of ideas that had been circulating throughout various social, religious, economic, political, and literary discourses throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century. And while neither Dickens nor Eliot would have used the word “culture” quite as Tylor does to describe a “complex whole” of behaviors and social interactions, their work does reflect an emerging assumption that these various parts exist in an integrated structural relationship to each other. By the latter part of the century, the engagement with the concept was direct; Hardy’s novels are explicitly influenced by his familiarity with Tylor’s theory of culture. Herbert points to the nineteenth-century novel as an important site for tracing the conversation that ultimately defines the “culture concept”; my study focuses more specifically on architecture within these novels, because architectural language provides a conceptual vocabulary for concretizing social relationships in spatial terms.

Most importantly, the spatial and temporal parallels between architectural and social structures in these novels extend to their formal narrative structures as well; examining a description of a physical building reveals a

novel's self-reflexive consideration of its active process of building a narrative. As James Buzard claims, the nineteenth century's new paradigms for understanding cultural structure become templates for developments in novel form in the ways it reproduces, reflects, and reenacts the hierarchies of personal and institutional relationships, the rhythms of daily interactions, and the epistemology of social practices. Levine's attention to forms similarly points us to the affordances of "bounded wholes" across narrative and social forms, emphasizing how the sense of enclosure creates interactions across these forms. Buzard argues that the development of narrative strategies that give the nineteenth-century novel its sense of insideness and outsideness parallels the discussion of insideness and outsideness that culminates in Tylor's definition of culture as a "complex whole"; in fact, the nineteenth-century emergence of a particular novel form and a particular cultural theory are not merely contemporary but develop in conversation with each other, resulting in a narrative form that delineates discrete social systems within which meaning is produced.¹¹ Therefore, a specifically architectural analysis, with its attention to physically enclosed spaces, is uniquely capable of interrogating how the building materials of narrative become meaningful, what the narrative structure can accommodate and what it excludes, and how structuring a narrative situates it in time.

But while the novels in this study clearly reflect an understanding of culture as an integrated social system, and reproduce this space within their narratives, their architectural descriptions also help us recognize that these novels challenge this understanding and expose its limitations. They use their own physical and narrative structures to demonstrate the porousness of social and narrative spaces and the instability of the meanings produced within them; for example, in *Little Dorrit*, the impossibility of enclosing homogeneous groups within clearly defined physical walls parallels its incapacity to coherently contain multiple voices and experiences with its narrative boundaries. Furthermore, by reenacting the processes of constructing social structures through their narratives, these novels reveal the subjectivity and instability of these structures. This is particularly true in *Adam Bede*, which demonstrates that the physical, social, and narrative structures that shape perception and experience—for the characters and the readers—are never fixed. Finally, these novels all remind us that the meanings produced within the "inside" space of a building, a social system, or a narrative will inevitably change with time, as Hardy's *Mayor* and *Jude* are especially concerned to understand.

“The Lamp of Sacrifice”: Ruskin’s Gothic Chronotope

Levine’s description of the affordances of forms enables my own use of concrete architectural structures to illuminate more abstract social and narrative structures. However, it is also important to locate this analysis of structure in its own nineteenth-century moment. If, as I have been arguing, our contemporary ways of reading of these Victorian novels misses the significance of their architectural descriptions, it may be because we don’t immediately perceive their historically situated structural resonances. The choices an architect makes about ornaments and materials, the way a building integrates the surrounding environment, and the way its proportions compare to a human scale, all constitute a kind of language; moreover, the way people continuously interact with, in, and around built spaces suggests it is a dynamic and evolving language. In nineteenth-century Britain, architecture was a potent signifier of progress, identity, social justice, and history.¹² Therefore, to translate the Victorian understanding of this language, I rely on John Ruskin’s architectural writings, especially *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, as my project’s master key.

Because Ruskin’s writings pervaded mid-century artistic discourse, and because he turned his critical gaze on such a wide range of the most important aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical concerns of his time, his work provides an invaluable bridge between the physical, social, and narrative structures under investigation here. For Ruskin, a work of architecture is a legible text, and each angle or curve is a telling detail—he claims that in Gothic architecture, “not a leaflet in it but speaks, and speaks far off too” (27)—just as each custom or habit is a telling detail in an integrated cultural system, and each particular of character or setting is a telling detail in a realist novel.¹³ Ruskin’s careful eye never misses the pointedness of an arch, the angle of a shadow, or the depth of a carving, and each of these details has significance for whether a building succeeds or fails to embody larger social and aesthetic ideals. Ruskin’s vision of architecture is not wholly representative of his age; however, while his aesthetic opinions are idiosyncratic and often outside of the mainstream of his contemporary architectural community, his profound thinking about the emotional, intellectual, and social consequences of our temporal experience of physical structures maps powerfully onto the novelists’ own exploration of social and narrative structures.¹⁴

Ruskin’s goal in *Seven Lamps* is to guide the architects of his own time toward the best artistic principles; he derives his title from religious

imagery of lighting the way down the proper path.¹⁵ Each of the chapters in *Seven Lamps* is devoted to a specific “lamp” or guiding principle: Ruskin calls these principles the lamps of sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory, and obedience; each of these lamps or chapters uses descriptions and sketches of minute architectural details to outline a different focus for reading the significance of architectural structures in various contexts.¹⁶ Although *Seven Lamps* is an architectural treatise, Ruskin uses it to broadly promote an understanding of artistic principles that is applicable across creative endeavors. He argues for the relevance of his architectural rules to “those which govern every other mode of man’s exertion,” claiming that by precisely identifying and describing these laws,

we shall find them passing the mere connection or analogy, and becoming the actual expression of some ultimate nerve or fibre of the mighty laws which govern the moral world . . . [and] have a representative or derivative influence over the works of the hand, the movements of the frame, and the action of the intellect. (5)

The laws that govern the construction of a building also apply to composing a painting or, indeed, writing a novel. George Eliot claims in her review of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, “it is obvious that [Ruskin] will have a great deal to say which is of interest and importance to others besides painters,” and highlights Ruskin’s ability to communicate the deep level of connection between the “artistic products of a particular age” and the “mental attitude and external life of that age” (247–248).¹⁷ There are echoes across a wide range of thematic concerns in the novels of Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy and in Ruskin’s “lamps,” including the paradoxical relationship of freedom and obedience, the ongoing construction of experience, the possibility of generational continuity and legible history, and the challenges of adapting traditional structures during a moment of transition. The influences and relationships between the aesthetics of Ruskin’s visual realism and nineteenth-century novels’ literary realism are well established, and this project assumes this aesthetic connection as a foundation of its argument. However, it also reframes this connection by highlighting their mutual concern with the interrelated temporal and social consequences of structuring processes.

Noticing the structural implications in Ruskin’s, Dickens’s, Eliot’s, and Hardy’s work accentuates their common concern for the relationship

of art and social justice. Caroline Levine points out that scholars have tended to separate Ruskin's aesthetic preference for realism (as represented by his many volumes of *Modern Painters*) from his more radical social criticism (best represented in *Stones of Venice*). However, Levine argues that such distinctions are artificial, because Ruskin's realist aesthetic and social critique are not contradictory strands of his thinking but rather two aspects of a holistic ideology (Levine, "Visual Labor" 74). Levine identifies the crucial link between his aesthetic and social thought as labor time, suggesting Ruskin's critique of the way a modern factory worker spends his time has parallels with his insistence that "To see and represent the reality of the natural world calls for practice, self-denial, rigorous discipline, 'necessary labour.' Ruskin's realism, in other words, is a *laboring aesthetic*" (75). According to Levine, the consequence of reintegrating these strands is that "Ruskin's visual realism emerges, potentially, as a revolutionary aesthetic" (76).

Ruskin's affinity for Gothic architecture demonstrates this deep connection of the formal and the social in his "laboring aesthetic." He construes the social conditions of production in a work of architecture; nowhere is this more evident than in his interpretation of Gothic cathedrals throughout his work, especially in "The Lamp of Sacrifice" chapter of *Seven Lamps* and "The Nature of Gothic" chapter in *The Stones of Venice*. His attraction to Gothic architecture is largely due to "his idealized vision of generations of men, working in unity, freely sacrificing themselves for an inspired common goal" (Garrigan 175). In each Gothic cathedral, Ruskin infers an entire system of highly trained craftsmen, each working with enough freedom to add individual creative touches—much preferable to the increasingly mechanized, standardized work of his own time. Moreover, he believes these social conditions produced open, irregular work that more accurately reflects his understanding of imperfect humankind's relationship with a perfect God. Thus, for Ruskin, Gothic design encodes the political, religious, and moral values that he subscribes to.

Architecture is a physical art that takes up space, so the spatial arrangements both of buildings in a community and of individual features in a building obviously inform Ruskin's interpretations. For example, the centralized location of a cathedral in a medieval town, with its spires looming above the rest of the roofs and dominating the landscape from every angle, emphasizes religion's primacy over every aspect of medieval life. More specifically, the physical design of individual cathedrals informs the viewer about the character of its builders: the "rigid lines, vigorous and

various masses, and daringly projecting structure of the Northern Gothic ornament” demonstrate the North’s “strength of will, independence of character, resoluteness of purpose and that general tendency to set the individual reason against authority”; by contrast, the Southern Gothic’s “safely guided waves and wreathed bands” show its “languid submission . . . and purpose to fatality” (Ruskin, “Nature of Gothic” 33). Similarly, the arrangement of Gothic lines and spaces reveal a particular attitude toward God; Ruskin somewhat counterintuitively argues that the asymmetrical, ornamented style of Gothic architecture shows more humility than the symmetrical, simple lines of classical design, because “[n]o architecture is so haughty as that which is simple . . . which implies . . . that all it has offered is perfect” (34). As only God is perfect, Gothic architecture’s openness and imperfection better reflects Ruskin’s understanding of the natural order.

Clearly, spatial interpretation is important to Ruskin’s understanding; less obviously, Ruskin also relies on temporal interpretation of his subject. A foundational premise of Ruskin’s working definition of architecture in *Seven Lamps* is that architecture encodes time. Of course, all architecture requires building, but Ruskin argues that most building is not architecture. Instead, he claims “building does not become architecture merely by the stability of what it erects” (*Seven Lamps* 8). A building aims to be *useful*: it serves the physical needs of its occupants by fulfilling a particular set of functions. By contrast, Ruskin describes architecture as *useless*, because it “concerns itself only with those characters of an edifice which are above and beyond its common use” (9). That which goes beyond what is strictly necessary is “useless”; for Ruskin this can mean using the highest quality materials, but even more importantly, it means recognizing “the value of the appearance of labour upon architecture” (21). In other words, architecture broadcasts its own temporal processes, and architecture that is worthy of the name exhibits that a great amount of time was spent laboring on ornaments and intricate details.

Ruskin reads architecture as text and treats the productions of different eras as contrasting genres, using the intersection of his spatial and temporal interpretations to define and value these various architectural genres.¹⁸ Bakhtin’s literary concept, the chronotope, where “[s]patial and temporal indicators are artistically fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (Bakhtin 84), can help describe Ruskin’s architectural readings that fuse labor time and arranged space. Ruskin’s Gothic chronotope is exemplified by sacrifice: the beauty of a Gothic cathedral is only possible when an entire community prioritizes the time and treasure

necessary to create architecture that glorifies God. He emphasizes that the effect of this sacrifice is most pronounced on the builders—not only the actual physical laborers and designers, but the entire community that comes together to enable the production of the new building. For them, “[i]t is not the church we want, but the sacrifice; not the emotion of admiration, but the act of adoration, not the gift, but the giving” (19). In these oppositions, Ruskin emphasizes dynamic action over feelings or material presence and process over finished product.

Ruskin’s Gothic chronotope stands in stark contrast to his chronotope of modern Victorian architecture. The spirit of sacrifice is “the opposite of the prevalent feeling of modern times, which desires to produce the largest results at the least cost” (11). Whereas “old work,” even if rude and barbaric, is “always their utmost,” contemporary work “has as constantly the look of money’s worth, of stopping short wherever and whenever we can, of a lazy compliance with low conditions; never of a fair putting forth of our strength” (21). Ruskin disparages Victorian architecture because its arrangement of spaces expresses a less attractive attitude toward time—time is hoarded instead of freely sacrificed toward a common purpose. This contrast indicates to Ruskin that Victorian society is more individualistic, because its people are less willing to share their time with each other for a larger good. When we look at Ruskin’s interpretation through this intertwined spatial and temporal lens, it becomes evident that his aesthetic and social thought, far from being separate strands, are impossible to untangle. A building’s physical structure cannot be understood outside of its social processes; therefore, its aesthetic value inherently depends upon those processes.

Levine suggests that a laboring aesthetic was not unique to Ruskin, but part of the larger project of Victorian realism, arguing that realism’s practitioners “claimed social and ethical value for the work of creating the representation—valuing not so much mimetic immediacy as the activity of mediation” (Levine, “Visual Labor” 75). Just as Ruskin finds social meaningfulness in the chronotopes of the architecture he studies, socially concerned realist novels of the period used the temporal arrangements of their narratives for social critique. I propose that by first understanding Ruskin’s deeply inextricable connection of art’s formal, temporal properties with its social implications, and then reading descriptions of architecture in Victorian realist novels through the lens of this Ruskinian understanding, we begin to more clearly perceive the “revolutionary aesthetic” of these novels’ narrative structures. Of course, Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy use their

novels to forcefully and explicitly address contemporary social ills; less obviously, their novels also deploy narrative strategies, especially temporal processes, that undermine existing social structures.

A Ruskinian Methodology

Ruskin's architectural readings can therefore provide a model for using architecture in social and literary interpretation. For Ruskin, time is a building block of architecture, as surely as stone or brick; architecture even has its own kind of literary rhythm. Ruskin makes this association explicitly in "The Nature of Gothic," when he imagines the "idea of reading a building as we would read Milton or Dante," noticing "[t]here is indeed rhythm in the verses [of poetry], quite as strict as the symmetries or rhythm of the architecture" (15). Similarly, novels build narratives by arranging temporal patterns and sequences; therefore, I draw parallels between the active movements of architectural, social, and narrative structures. In what follows, I outline what I call a "Ruskinian" approach to interpreting structure in the descriptions of architecture that permeate *Little Dorrit*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Jude the Obscure*. My strategy in each chapter is to align one of Ruskin's individual lamps with an individual novel; Ruskin's exploration of the principles of obedience, beauty and power, memory, and life resonate with crucial themes in each of these novels.¹⁹ Moreover, while using a different lamp to explore the thematic significance of architecture in each novel has great interpretative advantage, this framework is even more valuable as a way to illuminate the formal structural tensions that each of these novels enacts. All these novels use their own narrative structures to demonstrate the porousness of social and narrative spaces and the instability of the meanings produced within them.²⁰ These novels deploy their unique narrative capabilities to demonstrate an ongoing process of construction—a constant tension produced by fixing meanings against a shifting, moving field. This central tension mirrors the structural tensions of Ruskin's *Seven Lamps*.

Ruskin writes *Seven Lamps* because he has grave concern for the impact of modern social and technological change on architecture, fearing that as it relies more on technology and modern materials, it leaves no place for continuity of practice or authority. His proposed solution shifts focus from the particular artistic "abuses" that are merely symptomatic of the problem, to instead delineate the absolute, unchangeable principles

(the lamps) that enable architectural artistry to flourish. This not only describes his rationale for writing *Seven Lamps*, but also its structural tensions: by identifying and stabilizing the aesthetic laws that are based on the “unchangeableness” of “man’s nature” (3), Ruskin believes he can define a field of knowledge that is impervious to changing materials, techniques, and social values, and fix architectural and social meaningfulness against the momentum of traditional and communal structures in flux. This structural tension is the crux of my Ruskinian methodology; it allows us to see the structures or forms at work in each of these novels as active forces. Ruskin articulates this sense of form as force in an 1849 diary entry:

Now I think that Form, properly so called, may be considered as a function or exponent either of Growth or Force, inherent or impressed; and that one of the steps to admiring it or understanding it must be a comprehension of the laws of formation and of the forces to be resisted; that all forms are thus indicative of lines of energy, or pressure, or motion, variously impressed or resisted. . . . (quoted in Spuybroek 14)

Ruskin understood that form is a “function or exponent” of force. We can further clarify this insight by noticing and naming the variety of forces at work in *Seven Lamps*; each chapter, or “lamp,” describes a particular structural momentum. For example, “The Lamp of Obedience” envisions aesthetic and social freedoms as a centrifugal force of chaos and confusion and associates obedience with the physical, imaginative, and linguistic walls and boundaries that provide safety and common understanding. The related chapters “The Lamp of Beauty” and “The Lamp of Power” describe artistic creation as a centripetal process of gathering in the temporal and spatial features of real experience. “The Lamp of Memory” passionately argues that architecture is a repository of legible cultural memory because it bears witness to the accretive force of time—the tangible, material processes that mark the lifespan of a building. By contrast, “The Lamp of Life” is about the dissolutive momentum of structure in periods of change.

The first half of this book looks at novels by Dickens and Eliot that are roughly contemporaneous with *Seven Lamps*. While neither author is necessarily known for being “architectural”—critics have not thoroughly attended to the roles of buildings in their work—my readings of their novels’ various buildings will demonstrate the thematic and formal significance of these descriptions. First, Dickens’s fiction and nonfiction

displays his deep knowledge of the built environment, especially the urban landscape of London, and uses carefully realized domestic, work, and social spaces to contextualize his interconnected characters. Architectural imagery is also an important part of the fanciful figurative language that is so important to Dickens's unique narrative voice. For my first chapter, Dickens's *Little Dorrit* is paired with Ruskin's "The Lamp of Obedience," because both works are concerned with the physical, institutional, and fictional walls that may produce or conceal meaning and knowledge. *Little Dorrit's* structure, with its profusion of characters and narrative strands pushing against the physical walls and textual boundaries that enclose and define them, is centrifugal. "The Lamp of Obedience" uses the imagery of enclosing walls to argue for the necessity of clearly delineated aesthetic laws—expression can only be meaningful within established boundaries. The narrative structure of *Little Dorrit* pushes against those boundaries and reveals their gaps. The novel sets out not to resolve this tension, but rather to expose and enact strategies of containment. *Little Dorrit* uses plot as limiting device to contain the ever-expanding centrifugal push of incongruous perspectives and stories, but the narrative structure cannot ultimately accommodate the multiplicity of experience. By emphasizing discordant narrative strands, and the impossibility of containing them coherently within the boundaries of the text, the structure of *Little Dorrit* critiques existing social structures, reminding us that the only way the social structure it reflects makes sense is if its individuals deliberately choose not to see its moral incongruities.

Eliot's novels are interested in construction: how we construct our perceptions, memories, and experience, and how a novel constructs the ordinary time of lived experience in tension with the contrivances of extraordinary, plotted time. *Adam Bede*, like "The Lamp of Power" and "The Lamp of Beauty," reveals the processes through which the perceptions of ordinary and extraordinary time are constructed and maintained. In contrast to *Little Dorrit's* centrifugal push, *Adam Bede's* structure is centripetal; it draws from the outside by counteracting the force of the extraordinary moments that pull characters and readers outside of their routines with a centripetal pattern of return to the interior spaces of ordinary time. Through this centripetal narrative force, *Adam Bede* represents the emergence of a genre capable not only of reproducing existing structures, but also of exposing the processes through which those structures are constructed and maintained. Just as we cannot fully know a house until we have moved around and through it, we cannot fully know the

present moment without its past or future implications. As new information becomes available, characters and readers alike must constantly rewrite the past and adjust expectations for the future. This destabilizing effect is at the heart of Eliot's uncompromising realism: it acknowledges the conflict between the need to act in the present on the one hand, and the inability to know the present on the other.

The second half of the book shifts from the mid-century novels of Dickens and Eliot to two of Hardy's works from the latter part of the nineteenth century. The mid-century structures that enable the realism of Dickens and Eliot produce the narrative strategies they employ: Dickens erecting fictional boundaries to contain his unruly sprawl; Eliot drawing in the rhythms of ordinary life and building a fictional shell in response. By the latter part of the period, the foundations of these social and narrative structures had begun to shift. Hardy responds to this shift, first with the accretive layering of architectural ruins, cultural survivals, and myth in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and later with the disintegration of buildings, social institutions, and narrative conventions in *Jude the Obscure*. At the distance of a generation removed from the publication of *Seven Lambs* and from the height of Victorian realism, Hardy's novels reflect an ongoing and widespread reconsideration of Ruskin's assumptions about architecture and the ideals of realism and a search for new narrative structures to express a changing world.²¹

Descriptions of architecture throughout the novels of the nineteenth century are ubiquitous and significant, but due to his early work as an architect, Hardy's novels are worthy of special consideration. His fiction displays a particularly materialist sensibility that has much in common with Ruskin's writings; specifically, they share an acute awareness of the tangible, material processes that mark out the lifespan of a building and guide our understanding of the significance of these changes to memory, history, and renewal. Buildings show the passage of time by accumulating dust in *Mayor* or by crumbling away and dissolving into nothingness in *Jude*; moreover, accretion and dissolution, as the opposing forces structuring each narrative, map out the limits of what novelistic realism can do.

Like the "The Lamp of Memory," *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is accretive, with layers of incoherent memory building up in its architectural landscape, its social traditions, and its narrative structures. Both "The Lamp of Memory" and *Mayor* emphasize the layers of mediation that accumulate in the process of remembering individual and collective pasts. Ruskin's assumption that buildings preserve cultural memory is challenged

by the actual interaction of the community with its built environment in this novel; ancient buildings in the novel are fragments that still exert an often-unexamined influence, more akin to Tylor's cultural survivals than Ruskin's coherent memories. There is accretion in the narrative structure as well, in the overlapping layers of pagan, classical, Norse, and Old Testament myth that permeate the story. These myths provide a structure through which to read the events, but mythologizing creates a totalizing effect that disguises the incoherence and gaps of memory and the historical record. *Mayor's* fragmented, disjointed version of memory and history suggests a mistrust of a mediated narration of the past that conceals its erasures and concealments.

Jude the Obscure enacts the opposite structural force of *Mayor*; in *Jude*, the disintegration of its physical structures, including the disappearing cottages and churches in rural Marygreen and the crumbling medieval stone colleges in Christminster, interrogates both the way of life of the inhabitants and the viability of the ideas and beliefs these cities represent. *Jude* pairs with "The Lamp of Life" because it is dissolutive—its architectural, social, and narrative structures bearing witness to a modern moment when old forms begin to crumble and disintegrate. Even the structures that appear to be more permanent, such as the physical and institutional structures of the university city of Christminster, are less stable than they initially appear, calling into question the relevance of the educational ideals the university is supposed to represent. Moreover, both Ruskin and Hardy suggest that the loss of physical structures is a loss of association and connection with previous generations. "The Lamp of Life" and *Jude* emphasize the sense of physical connection that comes from touching the same stones that other hands have touched; Ruskin argues that this allows inorganic stone to communicate life. However, *Jude* ultimately challenges the legibility of this subjective reception. Finally, *Jude* questions the viability of traditional novel structures in a modern age. The disintegration of buildings and the ideas they represent, as well as the larger disappearance of Wessex, makes certain kinds of narrative structures irrelevant.

Each of these four novels enacts a particular structural force, but also self-consciously reflects on the process of containing those forces by fixing meaning through a variety of strategies including naming, fictionalizing, mythologizing, preserving, and restoring. Thematically, the social work of collectively constructing traditions and stories emphasizes that communication is only possible when meaning is stable. However, my architectural readings of these novels also demonstrate their thematic