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A SCULPTURAL AESTHETIC: REPRODUCTION[S] IN THOMAS HARDY'S *THE PURSUIT OF THE WELL-BELOVED* AND *THE WELL-BELOVED*

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ABSTRACT

A SCULPTURAL AESTHETIC: REPRODUCTION[S] IN THOMAS HARDY'S *THE PURSUIT OF THE WELL-BELOVED* AND *THE WELL-BELOVED*

By

Allison Meryl Harvey

I use Hardy's texts as a paradigm for examining an ambiguous sculptural aesthetic that emerges in the late nineteenth century. The novels are embroiled in a debate over whether popular art can be good art, and specifically, whether popular sculpture can be good sculpture. I link the novels' concern with popularity to the various forms of reproduction that surface in the texts, namely sculptural, biological, and mechanical. The inextricability of these forms of reproduction, coupled with an ambiguous aesthetic terminology, promises a conceptualization of sculptural reproduction that knows no boundaries. Given that sculpture inherently seeks to make ideas tangible, to instill viewers with a sense of possession over the subject, and to fix objects in time and space, it is ironic that Hardy's texts suggest a sculptural aesthetic in the nineteenth century that is, ultimately, anti-sculptural.

To Mom...

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Both *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* and *The Well-Beloved* are continually forgotten texts in Thomas Hardy's oeuvre. According to many critics, the mechanics of the works are weak, the themes are old, and the tone is bitter. However, I consider the texts to be invaluable reflections on turn-of-the-century art and aesthetics. The plots of *The Pursuit of Well-Beloved*[1], which appeared in serialized format in 1892, and the substantially reworked version of the story, *The Well-Beloved*, which Hardy made into a novel in 1897, are centered on a sculptor, Jocelyn[2], who falls in love with three generations of the same woman, Avice Caro. Jocelyn's sculptures are in and of themselves reproductions, and his artistic quest to reproduce ideal love and beauty informs and actually complicates the other types of reproduction that surface in the texts, namely biological and mechanical. Many critics, notably J. Hillis Miller, Tess O'Toole, and Patricia Ingham,[3] discuss several manifestations of the term in connection with the novels, including narrative and genealogic reproduction; however, little attention has been paid to the most obvious form of reproduction in the novel, sculptural. Miller even notes in his essay that two of the texts' central themes are literature and art, but his discussion of sculpture is surprisingly sparse.

Aesthetic judgment comes to the forefront in both novels. The last line of *The Well-Beloved* actually announces that Pierston's artistic talents were "insufficiently recognized in his lifetime" (336)[4]. I believe that the centrality of Jocelyn's art to

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[1] Hereafter referred to as *The Pursuit*.
[2] His full name is Jocelyn Pearston in *The Pursuit* and Jocelyn Pierston in *The Well-Beloved*. So as not to privilege either text, I refer to him by his first name. However, I revert to the specific last names when distinguishing Jocelyn's actions or attitudes in each text.
[3] See Miller's "*The Well-Beloved*: The Compulsion to Stop Repeating," O'Toole's "Genealogy and Narrative Jamming in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*," and Ingham's "Provisional Narratives: Hardy's Final Trilogy."
[4] If I am quoting from or referring to only one of the texts, then only a page number will appear in the citation. However, if I speaking of an event that occurs in both texts, I will use '*P*' to refer to *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* and '*WB*' to refer to *The Well-Beloved*.

understanding the text is similarly "insufficiently recognized" by critics. Jocelyn is afflicted with a need to possess and sculpturally represent ideal beauty, and this pursuit motivates the plot. Likewise, the setting vacillates between an island comprised of huge expanses of rock waiting to be chiseled into life and a London studio full of carved busts and statues. Thus, one cannot grasp the full meaning of the novels without understanding the roles sculpture plays in character delineations, plot, and settings. The goal of this paper is to explore those roles and ultimately to present the novels as reflections upon artistic reproduction in the late nineteenth century. Further, while many critics consider only *The Well-Beloved* in their analyses, I find it imperative to consider both versions since artistic reproduction differs considerably between the two texts. Most notably, in the latter version of the work, Pierston loses his aesthetic discernment, while in the serial, he retains it. Pierston's loss of artistic sensibility leaves open the possibility that he might have once had it, something that I argue he likely never has in *The Pursuit*.

I use Hardy's texts as a paradigm for examining an ambiguous sculptural aesthetic that emerges in the late nineteenth century. The novels are embroiled in a debate over whether popular art can be good art, and specifically, whether popular sculpture can be good sculpture. Jocelyn believes that most popular art is popular because it is mechanically reproduced, meaning that it is produced mechanically by the artist, or without artistic inspiration[5]. Mechanical reproduction also suggests to Jocelyn that an artist makes works to satisfy public tastes, regardless of whether or not the tastes reflect his/her own. Hardy's texts are written in a time when there is great public demand for sculpture. Some scholars, like nineteenth-century writer Edmund Gosse, suggest that the popularity of sculpture in the late nineteenth century indicates that the medium was

[5] Jocelyn deems "the local" to be one possible and worthy source of artistic inspiration.

flourishing. Contemporary scholar, H.W. Janson, conversely argues that the sheer number of sculptors at that time means that there is a greater possibility for merely average talent and works that are overall mediocre. The novels provide a lens for understanding this debate, as opposed to trying to solve it, since certain places in the texts support both Gosse's and Janson's claims. Central to the debate is a question of authenticity. Can popular art be authentic and what does authentic art look like? In the texts, the defining qualities of this term, much like with other aesthetic terms that permeate the text (likeness and copy, respectively), are ambiguous.[6] The complexity of these terms is revealed not only through the way artistic reproduction works in the texts, but through the manifestation of other types of reproduction as well, which suggests that notions of likeness, the copy, and authenticity trouble reproduction in general.

The novels call into question the differences between the following set of terms: ideal and copy, copy and likeness, local and modern, sexual possession and aesthetic possession, and sculpture and other artistic mediums.[7] Jocelyn attempts to define these terms for himself, but his definitions are ultimately vague, as he is preoccupied with his quest for ideal beauty. His quest never ends and only becomes more confusing because he is pursuing an ideal that is only a copy. There is no original embodiment of beauty for him to represent. While readers question the motivations of his pursuit and his aesthetic categorizations in both versions of the narrative, readers are more skeptical of his conclusions in *The Pursuit*, because in *The Pursuit*, Jocelyn does not seem quite as unique an artist as he makes himself out to be. In fact, the first image Hardy gives of

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[6] Benjamin's rather straightforward assumption that an original is always easy to identify because it has aura is not so simplistic in these texts. See his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

[7] For a more detailed reading of somewhat "dissonant" elements in Hardy's works, see Rosemary Sumner's article, "Discoveries of Dissonance: Hardy's Late Fiction."

Jocelyn in that version is a rather stereotypical, bohemian one; this opening image is absent from *The Well-Beloved.* Further, Jocelyn wants to die an artistic death at the end of *The Pursuit* so he attempts to drown himself in the sea, whereas at the end of *The Well-Beloved*, he is less concerned about the way he dies, but he wants to lead a traditional life in his old age. Thus, reading Jocelyn somewhat skeptically, I argue that problems with aesthetic categorization become the motivating force of the plots of the novels and differentiate the texts.

The opening chapters of both *The Pursuit* and *The Well-Beloved* introduce the multivalent theme of reproduction and foreshadow the roles that sculpting and aesthetic judgment will play in each text. While the early characterizations of Jocelyn, Jocelyn's father, and the island of his birth are similar in each narrative, the specific language of the characterizations and the order in which readers meet characters are unique to each text. Further, *The Pursuit* opens with a scene which appears nowhere in *The Well-Beloved*, distinguishing the novels from their beginnings.

Readers learn in the first sentence of *The Pursuit* that Jocelyn Pearston is a sculptor of rising fame whose father is conversely "inartistic" and solely interested in "trade and commerce" (9). Hardy immediately juxtaposes the romantic Pearston and his business-minded father, as Pearston burns letters from his past loves. This juxtaposition becomes significant later in the text when we learn that while Pearston's father cannot provide him with the genetic material to sculpt, he can, as a quarryman, provide Pearston with a purchasable sculpting material, stone. This scene also introduces two qualities which will continue to characterize Pearston: a desire for a tangible representation of beauty and nostalgia for the past. As Pearston begins to burn his love letters, he realizes

that their authors have been the models for his statuettes and that the letters represent an affection of his "which had once lived" (10). So, in a moment of guilt and fear, Pearston reconsiders their value and decides to save them. He wants to preserve those artifacts that represent his sculptural models and can also serve as archives of his aesthetic judgment. Similarly, Pearston's nostalgia for the past is reiterated soon thereafter in the second chapter as he returns to visit both his father and the place of his birth, each of which are harvesters of the very stone he carves.

This scene also delineates Jocelyn as embodying the "romantic bohemian" stereotype of an artist. It is easy to envision a melodramatic artist, who cannot possibly destroy something created by another, especially prose that proclaims love. Further, readers immediately question Pearston's narcissism. What is his true emotional impetus for suddenly deciding to save the letters? Does he really have feelings for the letters' authors, or does he selfishly want reminders that he was once loved, relics he can look to in moments of self-doubt? Pearston's intentions will continually be called into question in *The Pursuit*, much more so than in *The Well-Beloved.*

Also more obvious in *The Pursuit* is sexuality and sexual encounters; consequently, Hardy's rhetoric in the opening of *The Pursuit* is much more overt with sexuality than it is in *The Well-Beloved.* The island, which is described in both sexual and masculine terms, represents Pearston's origin. Not only is it the place of his birth, but it births the stone for his sculptures. "The peninsula," Hardy writes, "juts out like the head of a flamingo into the English Channel" (10-11). Miller nicely articulates Hardy's representation of the island when he writes, "It is a single phallus-shaped block of limestone jutting out into the sea, a male member of stone four miles long" (164).

Indeed, Pearston recognizes for the first time the substance and solidness of the island, and reacquaints himself with it as he feels the warmth of the island's "personal temperature" and listens to the "nick-nick" and "saw-saw-saw" of the island's "voice" (11). The island is masculinized and personified because it represents a man; specifically, it represents Pearston's father, the quarryman. His father births Jocelyn, as well as stone. Perhaps Pearston is destined to be a sculptor since he and stone are quarried/born from the person and island. Miller describes the father, son, island triad when he writes, "The monumental stones the father cuts out of this living rock are erected by Jocelyn in his studio and then made into images of his goddess" (164). Further, it will become significant later in the text that both Pearston's masculine father and the masculine island of his birth can reproduce (children and stone, respectively), while Pearston can only reproduce feminine images in stone, and according to Jocelyn, never successfully.

In *The Well-Beloved*, there is no letter-burning scene to open the narrative. This is a noteworthy difference since there is no immediate signifier of a desire to preserve beauty in this narrative. The absence of such a signifier mirrors and foreshadows Pierston's loss of his ability to recognize beauty in *The Well-Beloved*, an ability he conversely preserves in *The Pursuit*. Moreover, the absence of the scene is also indicative of Pierston's less bohemian personality in *The Well-Beloved*. While Pearston dies romantically reflecting on his history at the end of *The Pursuit*, at the end of *The Well-Beloved*, Pierston dies only after marrying for convention and logically trying to make a sound future for the city of his birth.

Instead of opening with Pierston burning letters, *The Well-Beloved* begins with a similarly nostalgic scene. Pierston appears already upon the island, as an urban stranger walking along the rocks. Before readers learn of Pierston's identity, though, the narrator describes the topography of the island and "the stranger" listens to its sounds. The peninsula is still a solid block of stone, but it does not "jut" into the ocean as it does *The Pursuit*. Similarly, Pierston hears the island snore, instead of speak. The fact that the island now snores makes it less of a phallic symbol of regeneration and indicates the lack of sexual encounters in this version of the text. As Pierston listens to the island, his old neighbors, Avice and her mother, Mrs. Caro, recognize him and Mrs. Caro explains Pierston's profession to her daughter. Mrs. Caro describes Pierston: "He's what they call a sculptor, and he means to be a great genius in that line some day, they do say" (181). Her comment implies that sculpting is an unfamiliar activity on that island, but it also adds some credibility to Pierston's artistic ability. Unlike the opening scene of *The Pursuit*, which calls into question Pearston's uniqueness as an artist, Mrs. Caro's comment suggests that others see him as a rising star, someone whose sculpture will rise above the rest. After these events, readers secondarily learn something of Pierston's father, who remains inartistic and business-minded. The fact that Jocelyn's occupation is revealed later in *The Well-Beloved* than in *The Pursuit* is indicative of the role sculpture plays in each novel. Much like Pierston appears as a mysterious stranger in *The Well-Beloved*, so too is sculpting a mysterious occupation for the island's natives. This opening further parallels the fact that Pierston's need to constantly seek and sculpt ideal beauty is a mysterious and unexplainable curse in *The Well-Beloved*, which is lifted only at the end of that novel. Marcia, Pierston's only wife in this version,[8] claims that his

[8] Marcia is Pearston's first wife in *The Pursuit*.

sudden loss of the love of beauty is "strange," but Pierston is not sorry for the loss as it has brought him his "greatest sorrows, if a few little pleasures" (333). Further, the last line of *The Well-Beloved* indicates that the full extent of Pierston's power as an artist will forever remain a mystery to art critics and ultimately, readers.

Both of these openings bind genealogic reproduction to sculptural reproduction through Jocelyn's father and the island fertile with stone. But, on another level, genealogy is always bound to questions of likeness and resemblance. This coupling, though, is problematic for Jocelyn, especially in his conceptualization of the ideal. Jocelyn claims that throughout his life, his well-beloved, the spirit of ideal beauty, has flit from woman to woman. At twenty years old, Jocelyn proposes marriage to his childhood friend, Avice, though the well-beloved is not embodied in her. Just before their marriage, Jocelyn's well-beloved incarnates a woman, Marcia, and he pursues her, leaving Avice in the lurch. Twenty years later, he is still plagued by guilt, but continues pursuing his flitting well-beloved. At a dinner party, and at the very moment he is deciding whether or not his well-beloved has found a new residence, he reads of Avice's death in a letter addressed to him. Immediately disturbed by the news, he returns home to find a photograph of her. Looking at her picture, Jocelyn decides that Avice is now the embodiment of ideal love and ideal beauty. The photograph "completed in his emotions what the letter had begun" (*P* 58; *WB* 231). The fact that it is not Avice herself who embodies the Jocelyn's ideal and the ideal is instead a representation or copy of her is significant, especially given that Jocelyn never loved or idolized the original Avice when he was with her. The narrator explains this irony when he says, "He loved the woman dead and inaccessible as he never loved her in life" (*P* 58; *WB* 231). "Inaccessible" is the

key word here because Jocelyn cannot access Avice, whom he deems is the embodiment of the original ideal. But, he can access her photograph. Thus, the problem of the plot becomes that Jocelyn believes he has access to Avice because he has access to a representation of her, one that is so like her, it even has "much of the softness characteristic of the original" (*P* 58; *WB* 231). Jocelyn's misconception leads him to believe that by sculpting her, he can both represent and access the original, and ultimately satisfy his quest to both possess and represent ideal beauty. But, he does not realize that all he can ever access or represent is a photograph of her; after all, he loves the photograph of her, but not her.[9]

Jocelyn has a brief moment where he is aware of the absurdity of his obsession with someone he can no longer access. The narrator describes Jocelyn's feelings as he looks at Avice's photograph:

> Pearston was almost angry with himself for his feelings of this night, so unreasonably, motivelessly strong were they towards that lost young playmate. "How senseless of me!" he said, as he lay in his lonely bed. She had been another man's wife almost the whole time since he had been estranged from her, and now she was a corpse. Yet the absurdity did not make his grief the less: and the consciousness of the intrinsic, almost radiant, purity of this new sprung affection for a flown spirit forbade him to check it. The flesh was absent altogether; it was love rarified and refined to its highest attar. He had felt nothing like it before. (*P* 58; *WB* 231)

Thus, Jocelyn initially questions his developing obsession, but the magnitude of his feelings for Avice causes him to ignore his own reasoning. This is one of the first instances in the story where readers become aware that Jocelyn can be easily blinded by desire. If he can ignore the reality of his loving a photograph, what other realities can he ignore?

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[9] Loving a photograph of a person instead of the person is a recurring theme in Hardy's works. See his short story, "The Imaginative Woman."

Much like Jocelyn does not want to see the absurdity of his worshipping a dead woman, he also does not want to be able recognize the Avices' likenesses, or the traits that make them similar to, but not exactly like one another. Instead, he wants the last two to be copies of the first Avice, in whom his well-beloved is supposedly embodied, meaning they should not be similar to her, but should instead replicate her. So, after recognizing the subtle differences among the Avices, Jocelyn forces himself to deny his observations, tricking himself into believing that the second and third Avices are copies of the first. For example, as Jocelyn begins to develop a relationship with the second Avice, he recognizes that while she is similar to her mother, she is not exactly like her in either appearance or demeanor. The narrator describes Jocelyn's early perceptions of the second Avice: "Honest perception had told him that this Avice, fairer than her mother in face and form, was her inferior in soul and understanding" (*P* 70; *WB* 240). These differences, which make Avice the second *like* her mother but *not a copy* of her, become increasingly difficult for Jocelyn to identify. In fact, Jocelyn wants the second Avice to be an exact copy of her mother so badly that he begins to ignore the subtle differences between them, consequently losing his ability to distinguish likenesses from copies. The narrator describes Jocelyn's developing inability when he says,

> All this time Pearston was thinking of the girl – that is to say, Nature was working her plans for producing the next generation under the cloak of a dialogue on linen. He could not read her individual character owing to the confusing effect of her likeness to a woman whom he had valued too late. He could not help seeing in her all that he knew of another, and veiling in her all that did not harmonize with his sense of metempsychosis. (*P* 73; *WB* 244)

Thus, likeness becomes a tool[10] that obscures Jocelyn's vision, which then, in turn, allows Jocelyn to reincarnate the first Avice in her successors' images.[11] This reincarnation is then fully realized when Jocelyn actually sees the second Avice as no longer like her mother, but as a copy of her. Only pages after the narrator describes Jocelyn's affliction, the second Avice becomes "this 'daps' of her mother, [a] perfect copy," and "literally assume[s] the personality" of her mother (74). Though the quotation says that Jocelyn veiled in Avice the characteristics that distinguish her from her mother, Jocelyn was really veiling the truth from himself.[12] Jocelyn's willful ignorance continues to keep readers questioning his claims.

Jocelyn's continual negotiation of the differences between likeness and copy becomes a motivating force of the plot. The concepts problematize Jocelyn's understanding of both genealogic and sculptural reproduction. Jocelyn decides that his well-beloved is embodied in the original Avice, and so she epitomizes ideal beauty. He uses Avice's successors as models for his statues in an attempt to represent this ideal. He sculpts the second and third Avices, but is frustrated with his results. Jocelyn relentlessly pursues ideal beauty, but repeatedly fails, since he has no ability to recognize the Avices' differences, to distinguish likeness from copies and ultimately, the copy from the ideal.[13] He thinks he is reproducing ideal beauty in his sculptures, since the original Avice's

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[10] I use the word "tool" purposefully here because likeness helps Jocelyn pursue his dream. The narrator describes this benefit when he says, "As a physical fact, no doubt, the preservation of the likeness was no uncommon thing here, but it helped the dream" (121). Without the likeness between the first and second Avices, he might not ever see them as a copy. If Jocelyn did not eventually believe the second Avice to be a copy of her mother, then he might not have ever sculpted her, relinquishing his quest to sculpt ideal beauty, the very quest that moves the novel forward.

[11] For a discussion of how genealogy and narratives are "a problematic coupling" in the text, see Tess O'Toole's essay, "Genealogy and Narrative Jamming in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*."

[12] This veiling mechanism is also why in *The Well-Beloved*, Pierston refuses to call the second Avice, Ann Avice, by her full name; he wants her to *be* her mother, simply "Avice" (237).

[13] I refer to Avice's photograph as a copy instead of a likeness because Jocelyn makes all things that are like Avice into copies of her.

"copies" are his models. But, the succeeding Avices are *not* really copies, nor is what he deems the original really the original. Given that the last two Avices are merely like their ancestor, the sculptures Jocelyn produces of them only *resemble* the first Avice. Jocelyn, though, cannot see this mere resemblance; he can only feel dissatisfaction with the results. Blaming Aphrodite (his supposed muse) for his dissatisfaction, instead of his own refusal to see the truth, Jocelyn continues on his quest.[14]

While Jocelyn's difficulty in recognizing likenesses troubles Jocelyn's ability to make sculptural reproductions that satisfy him, it also affects his perception of the third Avice. What happens when a third woman/copy enters the scene who is more like the original woman than the second one, when that second one is already deemed a copy of the first? This is Jocelyn's dilemma. In *The Pursuit*, Pearston returns home to Slopeway Well at fifty-nine years old, after a twenty year sojourn abroad. What he discovers upon his return is that the second Avice's husband has recently died. After visiting her, he decides that he will propose to her, that her companionship will make him content, and that he will finally be able to right the wrong he committed upon her mother.[15] As he is about to propose, however, he catches a glimpse of the third Avice. Suddenly, all bets are off. This is because the third Avice represents her mother better than does the second Avice; in fact, now it is she, and no longer her mother, who is a copy of the original Avice. Or is she? Apparently, when considering the three Avices together, the second is only "much like the first," while the third is "actually a double of the first" (124). At first glance, it appears that Pearston has regained the ability to distinguish likenesses from

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[14] In his book, *Proust and the Victorians*, Robert Fraser draws a parallel between *The Well-Beloved* and Proust's *A la recherche* since both novels contain an ideal beloved and a character that has a skewed sense of perception.

[15] His guilt is also what drives him on his quest to marry the Avices. Barbara Schapiro links this guilt to Jocelyn's narcissism in her essay, "Thomas Hardy and the 'Well-Beloved' Self."

copies. But readers must question this reacquisition. Readers know how easily Pearston was blinded before, how the first Avice became reincarnated in the second one to the point that the second became a copy of her. Predictably then, the three Avices morph into one image for Pearston and he expresses the pain this causes him: "When I went away from the first Avice, [I] had a presentiment that I should ache for it some day. And I am aching – have ached ever since this jade of a Well-Beloved learnt the unconscionable trick of inhabiting one image only" (130).[16] Thus, Hardy could have happily ended the story by having Pearston and the second Avice marry. However, he does not and consequently, readers become aware of how crucial the distinction between likeness and copies is for motivating the plot. Pearston constantly believes that if he possesses the copy then he can possess the ideal; so, he ignores mere likenesses and sees the third Avice as yet another chance for possession. But what Pearston never realizes is that he has possessed the copy (Avice's photograph) the entire time.

With the third Avice in the picture, readers also learn that for Jocelyn, genealogy always signifies the copy and when likeness does trouble genealogy, it only does so temporarily. Likeness does, however, continue to complicate both his aesthetic pursuit of beauty and the results of his pursuit, his sculptures. Since genealogic reproduction signifies "the copy" for Jocelyn, it becomes inextricable from aesthetic reproduction and the idea that all art is a copy. In fact, Jocelyn sees people as things that can be mechanically reproduced and mechanical reproduction of any sort saddens him, though

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[16] I should note here that in *The Well-Beloved*, the three Avices also become "one image only," however, in that version, there is only a hint that Pierston ever intended to marry Avice (300). Upon Pierston's seeing the third Avice for the first time, while visiting the second Avice, the narrator says, "Warm friendship, indeed, he felt for her; but whatever that might have done towards the instauration of a former dream was now hopelessly barred by the rivalry of the thing itself in the guise of a lineal successor" (290). In fact, the second Avice, instead, asks Pierston to consider marrying her daughter. Thus, Jocelyn's negotiation of likeness and copy is more essential to the plot of *The Pursuit.*

ironically, he does not realize that he, himself, is obsessed with a copy and not an original. Thus, the novels' overarching concerns with mechanical reproduction surface when Jocelyn sadly sees the first Avice becoming a reproduction of thousands of other people and the Slopeway Well community likewise becoming a copy of thousands of other communities:

> He observed that every aim of those who had brought her up had been to get her away mentally as far as possible from her natural and individual life as an inhabitant of a peculiar isle; to make her an exact copy of tens of thousands of other people, in whose circumstances there was nothing special, distinctive, or picturesque; to teach her to forget all of the experiences of her ancestors; to drown the local ballads by songs purchased at the Budmouth fashionable music-sellers', and the local vocabulary by a governess tongue of no country at all. She lived in a house that would have been the fortune of an artist, and learned to draw London suburban villas from printed copies.
>
> Avice had seen all of this before he pointed it out, but, with a girl's tractability, had acquiesced. By constitution she was local to the bone, but she could not escape the tendency of the age. (*P* 18; *WB* 186-87)

In this passage, Jocelyn realizes that the influential power of mechanical reproduction is beyond that of the individual. Rather, collective groups and cultures are abandoning their local customs, those traditions, which with their origin in the past, retain a sort of authenticity that modern inventions and art can only lack. Indeed, for Jocelyn reproduction is positive when it is rooted in the local, or that which he deems authentic. Though Jocelyn's fellow islanders may look, sound, and act alike, they are, as a community, distinct, and they have the ability to perpetuate their distinctiveness. Jocelyn's appreciation for Slopeway Well is also why he continually distinguishes the native islanders from everyone else, the foreigners or "kimberlins." But, is it that these natives are more authentic, or does Jocelyn rationalize their sameness because of his nostalgia for the past and his community? Readers certainly call his notion of

authenticity into question since he is never quite aware that his ideal is embodied in something that is already a copy.

Jocelyn acknowledges that only the island and islanders together could produce ideal beauty and Jocelyn's ideal love, as they did with the first Avice; according to Jocelyn, the Caro family "was yet the only family he had ever met, or was likely to meet, which possessed the material for her making" (*WB* 251). Yet, the Caro's did not make his ideal, a camera did. But unaware of this fact, Jocelyn acknowledges the potentially beneficial results of reproducing islanders, and seeks reproductions or copies of the original Avice when he is on the island. He takes pleasure in the fact that Avice the third reproduces his childhood, and grows up in his own bedroom. And his pleasure is justified since his love is also initially for a copy. The more copies that are produced of the original Avice, the more intense his love becomes, because copies of her, being that they are merely copies, are as vacuous as the original copy, the photograph.[17]

Conversely, when he sees his friend and fellow artist, Somers' daughters as exact copies of their mother, Mrs. Pine-Avon, and Mrs. Pine-Avon as a copy of her ancestors, he degrades all of them, likely because they are not from Slopeway Well and are, consequently, only mere representations of modernity, and namely, London. The narrator describes Jocelyn's perception of the Somers' family:

> Mrs. Somers – once the intellectual, emancipated Mrs. Pine-Avon – had now retrograded to the petty and timid mental position of her mother and grandmother, giving sharp, strict regard to the current literature and art that reached the innocent perspective of her long perspective of girls, with the view of hiding every skull and skeleton of life from their dear eyes. She was another illustration of the rule that succeeding generations of women are seldom marked by cumulative progress, their advance as

[17] J. Hillis Miller also acknowledges that Jocelyn's well-beloved is really an absence, but he argues that this is because she is a "projection" of Jocelyn himself (168). See his essay, "*The Well-Beloved*: The Compulsion to Stop Repeating."

> matrons; so that they move up and down the stream of intellectual development like flotsam in a tidal estuary. And perhaps not by reason of their faults as individuals, but of their misfortune as child-rearers. (*P* 130-31; *WB* 301)

Reproduction that is not grounded in the local strips individuals of taste and affect. Mrs. Pine-Avon, Jocelyn's former love interest, has, he feels, grown emotionally indifferent to "good" art and literature and imposes her indifference on her daughters, who are not allowed to enjoy culture. Further, Mrs. Pine-Avon is bound to the past in a negative way; she does not allow past works of art and literature to shape her discernment of current works, but rather, she simply rereads those works over and over again, closing off her eyes and mind to new material. Jocelyn is, perhaps, critical of Mrs. Pine-Avon's aesthetic judgment because he is frustrated with his own. He too is bound to the past, to his experience, or lack thereof, with the first Avice. His obsession with her renders him unable to see the other Avices as different in appearance from the first Avice and each other. Over and over again, he sees the first Avice's image in the images of her ancestors. His mind, like Mrs. Pine-Avon's is closed off from new material. Thus, Jocelyn inadvertently links himself to her, and ultimately the fruitless reproduction of modern kimberlins.

Fruitless or futile is in fact how Jocelyn perceives the act of reproducing and rearing offspring, a chore that Jocelyn claims specifically belongs to women. Women, except for those who pass down local charms and traditions, are merely reproducing copies of themselves and are thus machines of mechanical reproduction.[18] Because they lack the ability to give birth, men are not destined for any particular reproductive role. Jocelyn compares women to flotsam in an estuary because he thinks women are, as

[18] In her essay, "Genealogy and Narrative Jamming in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*," Tess O'Toole notes Hardy's use of "machinery" rhetoric in the text.

merely copies of their mother, excesses or remains. Further, this analogy is significant since at another point in the novel, the narrator designates Jocelyn's own role in the hypothetical river. At Lady Channelcliff's house, Jocelyn "was like a stone in a brook, waiting for some particular floating object to be brought towards him and to stick upon his surface" (*P* 47; *WB* 219). He and women are passive objects. They float instead of swim and he, as a stone, sits and waits. Metaphorically, these analogies suggest that both Jocelyn and women have limited voice in their marrying and reproducing. And Jocelyn would like to believe that his ability to produce was limited by another, like Aphrodite, because his art, in reality, is not that unique and his quest is propagated by a copy.

Jocelyn, of course, either does not realize or denies the fact that his own art is not solely grounded in the local. While his sculptures are made from the stone of his homeland, they are produced in London, in a modern "flat" that could be the studio of any artist (*P* 94; *WB* 264). This conflict between the local and the mainstream, or the good and bad types of reproduction, may also contribute to a paradox in Jocelyn's sculpting. He is on an unending quest to sculpt ideal beauty, yet can only sculpt the same figure over and over again.[19] Jocelyn realizes that his repetitive subject matter and his repeated use of (what he believes to be) the same image, typecasts him as a sculptor of beautiful goddesses.

His recognizable subject matter consequently has him concerned about the popularity of his own art and his role in an art world dictated by mechanical reproduction: "For all these dreams he translated into marble, and found that by them he was hitting a public taste he had never deliberately aimed at, and mostly despised. He

[19] For a detailed discussion of Jocelyn's repetitive loving and sculpting, see Miller's "*The Well-Beloved*: The Compulsion to Stop Repeating."

was, in short, in danger of drifting away from a solid artistic reputation to a popularity which might possibly be as brief as it would be brilliant and exciting" (*P* 44; *WB* 212). Jocelyn's concern is one that would have likely been the concern of a sculptor working in nineteenth-century Britain.[20] All over Europe, there was such a public demand for monuments and portrait busts during this time that the sheer proliferation of works often resulted in mediocrity. H.W. Janson, in his book, *Nineteenth-Century Sculpture*, explains that artists were tired from all of their commissions, and their sculptures began to reflect their fatigue (177). This mediocrity ultimately contributed to a vast decrease in the popularity of sculpture moving into the early twentieth century (Janson 177). Janson also claims that sculptors contributed to their own demise because there was a loss of "common understanding" between sculptors and the public; they instead "conceived public monuments on their own initiative which society did not want" (177). Jocelyn claims that his initiative is all his own, and that his popularity was just chance:

> He would have gone on working with his chisel with just as much zest if his creations had been deemed to be seen by no mortal eye but his own. By reason of this indifference to the popular reception of his dream-figures he acquired a curious artistic *aplomb* that carried him through the gusts of opinion without suffering them to disturb his inherent bias (*P* 42; *WB* 211).

Jocelyn seems to suggest that his "personal motivations" for sculpting are what distinguish him from other sculptors, but with Janson's sentiment, we have reason to suspect that Jocelyn might, in fact, be like every other sculptor in the nineteenth century, popular but mediocre. Moreover, because he can only see to sculpt one image, readers question his ingenuity.

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[20] Hardy's presentation of the sculptural world does, in fact, reflect the artistic climate of the late nineteenth-century. Moreover, Michael Millgate's biography of Hardy, coupled with Hardy's own letters, reveals that Hardy associated with several sculptors, art critics, and was a frequent visitor of the Royal Academy, which exhibited sculpture.

Jocelyn's popularity coupled with his failure to recognize how grounded in the "modern" his sculptures are, similarly causes readers to query Jocelyn's professed uniqueness. Jocelyn's friend and fellow artist, Somers, seems to think that Jocelyn is unique, but this sentiment is coming from an artist who is just as (if not more) mainstream than Jocelyn, and who is shown to not be able to recognize genius.[21] Somers attempts to alleviate Jocelyn's fear by applauding his ingenuity when he says,

> Pearston, you are our only inspired sculptor. You are our Praxiteles. You are almost the only man of this generation who has been able to mold and chisel forms living enough to draw the idle public away from the popular genre paintings into the usually deserted lecture-room, and people who have seen your last piece of stuff say there has been nothing like it since sixteen hundred and – since the sculptors 'of the great race' lived and died (59).[22]

The 'great race' of sculptors which Somers mentions likely refers to sculptors like Bernini, Canova, and Roubillac, who flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Gosse 163). Edmund Gosse, one of Hardy's frequent dinner companions,[23] says in his 1883 essay "Living English Sculptors" that the early to mid nineteenth century was a dark age for sculpture in England and the medium only began to regain popularity and talent in the late nineteenth century (164). Thus, he argues, contrary to Janson, that the late nineteenth century, when the story is purportedly set, would be the ideal age for a thriving, ambitious sculpture. The popularity of sculpture at this time also led a renewal

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[21] The narrator describes Somers' lack of uniqueness and loss of aesthetic taste: "The landscape-painter, now an Academician like Pierston himself – rather popular than distinguished – had given up that peculiar and personal taste in subjects which had marked him in times past, executing instead many pleasing aspects of nature addressed to the furnishing householder through the middling critic, and really very good of their kind" (*P* 131; *WB* 301). Though on one level, this passage seems to distinguish Jocelyn and Somers, it actually compares the two artists. And since it implies that Somers might have once had more taste, he and the Pierston of *The Well-Beloved* are really similar, since Pierston also loses aesthetic discernment at the end of the text. For a reading that argues the opposite idea, that Somers and Jocelyn are quite different artists, see Helmut Gerber's essay, "The Well-Beloved as a Comment on the Well-Despised."

[22] This quotation also appears in *The Well-Beloved*, though with the alternative spelling of Jocelyn's name, Pierston, and with the addition of "or rather our Lysippus" after the mention of Praxiteles. Lysippus was another famous sculptor.

[23] In his biography of Hardy, Millgate mentions several times that Gosse and Hardy dined together.

of interest in great sculptors, like Praxiteles; thus Somers' mention of him is not chance.[24] Perhaps Jocelyn's own carved Aphrodites are as magnificent as Praxiteles' statues; after all, both of these sculptors pursue ideal beauty (Barrow 60).[25] But more than likely, Somers compares Jocelyn to Praxiteles because both of them are popular sculptors at that time.

John Ruskin, a nineteenth-century critic and lecturer on the arts, was the era's primary commentator on artistic popularity and the sculptural aesthetic. Ruskin's opinions of sculpture, in fact, provide a lens through which to examine Jocelyn's sculpting. Ruskin explains how sculptural imperfections separate "common" sculptors from "fine" sculptors:

> There must be, therefore, two degrees of truth to be looked for in the good graphic arts; one, the commonest, which by any partial or imperfect sign conveys to you an idea which you must complete for yourself; and the other, the finest, a representation so perfect as to leave you nothing to be farther accomplished by this independent exertion; but to give you the same feeling of possession and presence which you would experience from the natural object itself (105-106).

Ruskin's sentiment is quite suggestive of the novels' overarching problems: Jocelyn's ambiguous place in mechanical reproduction and the conflict between the ideal and the copy. Given Ruskin's categorization, Jocelyn could be classified as a fine sculptor, hence the comparison of him to Praxiteles (if readers accepted the comparison as genuinely suggestive of Jocelyn's talent). The problem with this classification though, is that Jocelyn's sculptures of Avice would have to serve as a substitute for her, to make the

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[24] Throughout the mid to late nineteenth century, The British Museum continued to acquire works from the fourth century, the age of Praxiteles (Barrow 50). Two of the most popular statues at the time were, consequently, Praxiteles' *Leconfield Aphrodite* and his *Aphrodite of Cnidus* (Barrow 58) (Ingham 345).
[25] Notably, Gosse also praises sculpture from the era of Praxiteles when he says, "If we want to see what is truly beautiful in sculpture, let us look at such fragments of genuine old Greek work, down to the age of Praxiteles, as the piety of the modern world has collected out of chaos" (166).

spectator feel just as if they were in the presence of the first Avice. It is questionable, though, whether this feeling is even possible since Jocelyn never possesses Avice or perceives the ideal in her while she is alive. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to classify Jocelyn as a common sculptor, especially since he finds his sculptures wanting. Because he sculpts from models who are only like the original Avice, he never produces statues that make him feel as if he was in the presence of her, or more importantly, that he possesses her in all of her ideal beauty.

Ruskin also conceptualizes sculpture as "the art of fiction in solid substance" (27). His idea can quite literally be applied to Jocelyn's finished sculptures and his motivation for sculpting. The ideal never becomes a reality for Jocelyn except when it is no longer important to him, which happens only in *The Well-Beloved.* As such, the ideal is always fiction that he continues to represent sculpturally. The ideal is also fictional because it masks as an ideal; in reality, the ideal is only a copy. Still, he tries to make it tangible. Jocelyn believes that his well-beloved is forever elusive and he wishes he could quit chasing her. Therefore, he wants to turn her, the one who continually appears in "mutable flesh," into "durable shape" (*P* 43; *WB* 211). Ruskin claims that sculpting feeds an "irresistible human instinct" to capture "living creatures in such permanent form that one may play with the images at leisure" (28). Jocelyn wants the opportunity to play with his well-beloved, as he is convinced she so often plays with him. He ultimately sculpts for the same reason he decides to save the love letters in the opening of *The Pursuit*: he wants to preserve something that is never quite there.

Readers are much more skeptical of Jocelyn's artistic genius in *The Pursuit*, and this skepticism is reinforced by the ending of this version. In *The Pursuit*, Pearston

actually marries the third Avice. After he learns of her current love for and prior commitment to her old teacher, Henri Leverre, he decides that they need to be together. His solution is to make it appear as though he heard that his first wife, Marcia, is still alive and he has subsequently gone to America to be with her. However, his real plan is to sail out to sea and drown himself in a dangerous part of the ocean, known as the race. But, his suicide attempt is unsuccessful and he awakes from a coma, only to discover Marcia actually by his bed side. This ending, much like the opening, is highly romanticized. In the last moments of his life, Pearston begins to acknowledge his gross misperceptions of things and his revelation reinforces the skepticism readers have had of him all along. As he lies in bed staring at Avice's photograph, "the single object he cared to bring" from his old house to the house where he dies, he realizes the ironic pay off of his quest for beauty: "The contrast of the ancient Marcia's aspect, both with this portrait and with her own fine former self, brought into his brain a sudden sense of the grotesqueness of things. His wife was – not Avice, but that parchment-covered skull moving about him" (168).[26] The irony of his final marriage partner ultimately sends Pearston to his death. He dies laughing and exclaiming to himself "Oh – no, no! I – I – it is too, too droll – this ending to my would-be romantic history! Ho-ho-ho!" (168).

Conversely, the ending of *The Well-Beloved* imbues Pierston with artistic credibility. Instead of attempting to give his life a romantic end, he instead intends to marry the third Avice, but it she who dramatically flees her home in the middle of the night to meet and marry Henri. They leave a note for Avice's mother and sail off to the mainland, braving and surviving the same "Race" that almost takes Pearston's life in *The*

[26] Michael Ryan, in his essay, "One Name of Many Shapes: The Well-Beloved," similarly proposes that *The Well-Beloved* should be read through an ironic lens since it is a mockery of aestheticism.

Pursuit. Pierston, instead of responding dramatically in turn, merely resigns and reflects rather mournfully on his life. As Pierston reminiscences, the narrator describes Pierston's reflections on his pursuit of beauty, and the description presents a more self-aware and a potentially more truthful person. Pierston might have actually been plagued by the curse of Aphrodite. The narrator says,

> Nobody would ever know the truth about him; what it was he had sought that had so eluded, tantalized, and escaped him; what it was that led him such a dance, and had at last, as he believed just now in the freshness of his loss, been discovered in the girl who had left him. It was not in the flesh; he had never knelt low to that. Not a woman in the world had been wrecked by him, though he had been impassioned by so many. Nobody would guess the cordial loving-kindness – which had lain behind what had seemed to him the enraptured fulfillment of a pleasing destiny postponed for forty years. His attraction to the third Avice would be regarded by the world as the selfish designs of an elderly man on a maid. (325)

In this passage, Pierston seems aware that others may misperceive his desire for the Avices as something selfish and controllable. Much like sexuality is removed from this version of the text, Pierston removes sex as a possible motivation for his quest. No matter what readers believe about his attachment to Avice, he knows that his love for her has been genuine. Though it is possible to still question Pierston's claims in this passage, he seems truly saddened by his pursuit, and hints that he would have changed it if he could.

Pierston is also made out to be less of a hypocrite in this version, since he does embrace the local in his old age. The narrator describes the change in his appearance: "He had now changed his style of dress entirely, appearing always in a homely suit of local make, and of the fashion of thirty years before, the achievement of a tailoress at East Quarriers. He also let his iron-grey beard grow as it would..." (334). Further, there

is little suggestion of stereotypical artistic behavior in this version; rather, Pierston makes the logical decision to "give a geometrical shape" to his story and marry Marcia for companionship (335). As a married couple, he reasons that he and Marcia will no longer have to strain their aged bodies by walking to each other's houses.[27] And, with his decision to marry Marcia, Pierston actually realizes that is giving his life a mechanically reproduced end, in "the best machine-made conventional manner" (334).

Finally, the fact that in this version Pierston loses his artistic sensibility implies that he once had it. There is a significant scene where Pierston goes to a museum to "test" the survival of his artistic tastes, which the narrator claims were formerly good (333). Readers are inclined to believe that his tastes were sound, since he heads straight to works by those artists that readers would also deem as fine, Perugino, Titian, and Sebastiano. However, Jocelyn suddenly cannot see any more aesthetic worth in their works than in those works of "the pavement artist [he] passed on the way" (333). And at the very end of the novel, Pierston becomes a father-figure for Avice and Henri, further rejecting the bohemian artist stereotype. The narrator informs us in the last line of the novel that after his death, his artworks were held in high regard, but that his potential as an artist was "insufficiently recognized in his lifetime" (336). Readers can choose to take the narrator seriously, or they can assume that the narrator is communicating what Pierston would have said about himself, but this version of the novel pointedly leaves open the possibility of that choice.

The fact that it is ambiguous whether or not Jocelyn possessed artistic ingenuity reflects the overall difficulty one has in defining the terms of artistic reproduction. Miller perhaps best articulates this difficulty in the novels as an "aporia of interminability," or

[27] He also accepts his old age in this version, which is something he denies his whole life in *The Pursuit*.

the impossibility of "ever reach[ing] a definitive explanatory end" (173). He claims that this aporia is perpetuated by the novels' "interlocking repetition," but more importantly for this paper, it is also caused by the fact that Hardy provides us with a "potentially interminable set of other possible endings" and "possible interpretations" (173). The inextricability of the various forms of reproduction in these texts likewise promises a conceptualization of sculptural reproduction that knows no boundaries or definition. Given that sculpture inherently seeks to make ideas tangible, to instill viewers with a sense of possession over the subject, and to fix objects in time and space, it is ironic that Hardy's texts suggest a sculptural aesthetic in the nineteenth century that is, ultimately, anti-sculptural. There is little that is tangible in the definitions of terms like authenticity, likeness, copy, and ideal, the very words which become central to discussions of sculpture in the texts. Because of this intangibility, readers gain little mastery of and feel no sense of possession over those terms, nor can readers definitively claim whether popularity indicated a certain quality of work in the nineteenth century. Gosse's description of a flourishing sculptural climate might best be coupled with *The Well-Beloved*, since such a climate would be ideal for producing extraordinary sculptors. Janson's nineteenth century, full of popular, mediocre artists, might better describe the environment of *The Pursuit*. Our conceptualization of the sculptural milieu in the late nineteenth century is obviously not one that is either fixed or permanent and Hardy's texts insure that it never will be.

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