# Science Fiction
at the
Boundary of
Genre

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**Ronny Litvack-Katzman**
McGill University

# Hardy's "Science"

"Admitting **the desirability, the impossibility of reproducing in its entirety the phantasmagoria of experience with infinite and atomic truth, without shadow, relevancy, or subordination**, is not the least of them. The fallacy appears to owe its origin to the just perception that with our widened knowledge of the universe and its forces, and man's position therein, **narrative, to be artistically convincing, must adjust itself to the new alignment**..."

— Thomas Hardy, "The Science of Fiction" (1891)

# Two on a Tower
(1882)



Henry Macbeth-Raeburn, *Frontispiece: The "Welland House and Park" of the Story,* etching, 12.4 x 8.5 cm, 1895.
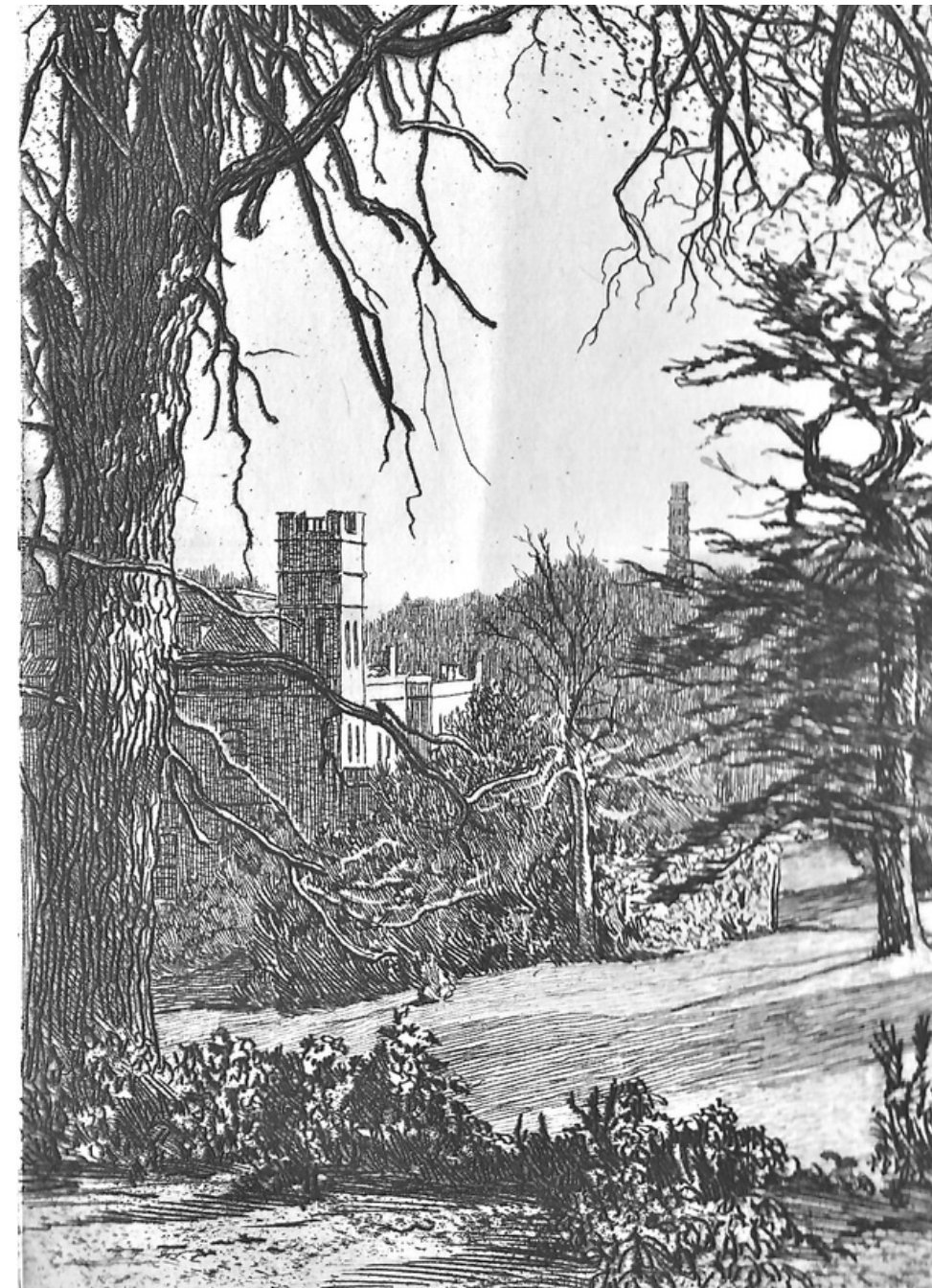
# The high-Victorian 'real'

"...realism – the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and **faithful study of nature**, and **not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling**, i**n place of definite, substantial reality**."

— George Eliot, "Unsigned Review" (1856)

# 19c realism

"We need to shift the balance in our appraisal of realism. It was **not a solidly self-satisfied vision based in a misguided objectivity and faith in representation**, but a highly self-conscious attempt to explore or create a new reality."
— George Levine, The Realistic Imagination

"...a laboring aesthetic"
— Caroline Levine, "Visual Labor: Ruskin's Radical Realism"

"what [does] a novel wants from the idea of the real "
— Audrey Jaffe, The Victorian Novel Dreams of the Real

It had been built in the Tuscan order of classic architecture, and was really a tower, being hollow with steps inside. **The gloom and solitude which prevailed round the base were remarkable**. The **sob of the environing** trees was here expressively manifest; and moved by the light breeze their thin straight stems rocked in seconds, like inverted pendulums; while some boughs and twigs rubbed the pillar's sides, or occasionally clicked in catching each other. Below the level of their summits the masonry was lichen-stained and mildewed, for **the sun never pierced that moaning cloud of blue-black vegetation**. Pads of moss grew in the joints of the stone-work, and here and there shade-loving insects had engraved on the mortar patterns **of no human style or meaning; but curious and suggestive**. Above the trees the case was different: **the pillar rose into the sky a bright and cheerful thing, unimpeded, clean**, and flushed with the sunlight.

# Something more than reality?

"What cannot be discerned by eye and ear, what may be apprehended only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all of it manifestations, this is the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but without that sympathy."

— Thomas Hardy, "The Science of Fiction" (1891)

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# From realism to science fiction

"[sf is] a set of strategies, images, [and] themes that has already emerged into the visibility of a...repeatable gesture,"

— John Rieder, "On Defining SF, or Not"

The young man stood till he was left quite alone in the churchyard, and then went slowly homeward over the hill, **perhaps a trifle depressed at the impossibility of being near Viviette** in this her one day of gaiety...

... His momentary doubt was of his own strength to achieve sufficiently high things to render him, in relation to her, other than a patronized young favourite, whom she had married at an immense sacrifice of position. **Now, at twenty, he was doomed to isolation even from a wife**; could it be that at, say thirty, he would be welcomed everywhere?

But **with motion through the sun and air his mood assumed a lighter complexion**, and on reaching home he remembered with interest that Venus was in a favourable aspect for observation that afternoon.

# From realism to science fiction

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— John Rieder, "On Defining SF, or Not"

"SF is distinguished by its capacity to perform the massively complex representational and epistemological work necessary to render cognitively estranging referents available both for representation and for understanding."

— Seo Young-Chu, Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep

John Everett, *Charborough Tower, Dorset*, oil on paper, 1924. ©Dukes/BNPS

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