Lorenz, Kai

A Landscape of Love : Courtly Spatial Structures in Thomas Hardy's Two on a Tower

In:

Susan Brähler; Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Hrsg.), "When men are unprepared and look not for it"•: in Memoriam Christoph Houswitschka, Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, S. 527-542. DOI: 10.20378/irb-96531

Beitrag im Sammelwerk - Verlagsversion

DOI des Beitrags: 10.20378/irb-105224

Datum der Veröffentlichung: 04.12.2024

A Landscape of Love: Courtly Spatial Structures in Thomas Hardy's *Two on a Tower*

Kai Lorenz, University of Halle-Wittenberg 0000-0001-8420-9642

Fortunately, now emerged from the shadows, Thomas Hardy's *Two on a Tower* (*ToT*) has received attention from readers and scholars alike, mostly as a deep and tragic love story, an outstanding example of astronomy in Victorian literature or within its connections to Hardy's oeuvre as a whole (see Henchman, Armstrong). Another approach lies in the discourse of space. Here a number of aspects has been covered, like references to local geography (see also Bullen) or Hardy's "use of geographic descriptions to promote empathic engagement with his characters" (Sorum 180). From an interdisciplinary point of view, there are other striking perspectives just waiting to be recognized: the skilful use of spatial structures and their corresponding to the court epics. Naturally, there are numerous elements contemporary to Hardy's own period, but they too are part of a tradition of building up poetic space that spans from the hero tales of the ancient world to modern science fiction.

The universal structures of poetic space have been described with the example of medieval literature. Focussing on the balance between the actions of the protagonists and the spaces around them, there are three basic kinds of poetic space (Lorenz, *Raumstrukturen* 46-74):

Gesellschaftsräume (fixed spaces of social interaction). Many modern novels contain fictional maps that help the readers to imagine the geography of the poetic world. Apart from distances and boundaries, they show cities and towns or individual bulidings like castles, houses and cottages, all of which are clearly identifable by their name and location. Each of these *Gesellschaftsräume* confronts the protagonist with a unique blend of characters, requirements, chances, comforts and dangers. Depending on their size and the details of description, they can contain sub-divisions with individual features. *Gesellschaftsräume* are animated and shaped by their inhabitants and the social interaction that takes place may alter the protagonist as well as the space itself.

Transiträume (transitional spaces) create a sense of distance. Such spaces separate places on the map from each other and show the protagonist in motion, travelling, making unexpected encounters, which are often dangerous and remain unnoticed. While this can be problematic when the heroic slaying of a dragon remains without witnesses, it also gives the hero a certain kind of freedom. Transitional spaces are usually stretches of land or water such as forests, grassland plains, moors or oceans.

Schwellenräume (threshold spaces). Just as a knight will have to pass through a gatehouse before entering a castle, or a modern traveller goes through a security check before reaching the interior rooms of an airport, protagonists frequently meet with threshold spaces sorting out which character may proceed into the spaces beyond and which will be kept out. Threshold spaces are confined but nevertheless influential types of space. Thresholds are often guarded, can provide information about the adjacent spaces and also mark a divide in protagonists' attitudes: the hero within the castle may behave very differently from the hero in the dark forest – and may also meet with different challenges.

Most works of sophisticated narration show an elaborate use of these three structures as well as a dynamic evolvement of spaces as the *Gesellschaftsräume* change along with the protagonists' actions. At the same time all poetic space can appear in a different light according to the narrator's or recipient's point of view (see also Haug, "Schreckensorte"). This is also true for *ToT*.

The Tower

The most complex spatial structure in *ToT* is undoubtedly the tower itself with its surroundings. It is a structure embedded in a carefully painted landscape, experiencing change throughout the novel and equipped with a history of its very own.

Two on a Tower starts with the picture of a rural landscape, which combines mild beauty with silence, wintry paralysis and a panoramic view. The stretch of land is a prototypical space of transition, defined by its vastness and the road leading through it. The only human and mobile elements are a lady and her coach driver, and it is their point of view that the reader assumes. The readers' eyes are being drawn into a diorama-like scene "through the opening afforded by a field-gate" (*ToT* 3), on "a circular isolated hill, of no great elevation" (3). While at first glance introduced as a purely natural feature, its distinctiveness also lies in a manmade addition: "This pine-clad protuberance was yet further marked out from the general landscape by having on its summit a tower in the form of a classical column, which, though partly immersed in the plantation, rose above the tree-tops to a considerable height" (3). Only now does the aural sphere align with the gaze, as the lady asks her driver "Then there is no road leading near it?" (3). Having been answered in the negative, the drive is resumed and the first picture of the tower concluded.

The next two scenes employ a step-by step approximation towards the tower. The lady's wish to get there by coach despite the lack of a road is rejected because of the tower's inaccessibility after heavy rain. That the driver is now called by his name, Nobbs, also sharpens the difference between these two characters as visitors in a landscape characterized by muddy unnavigable space and the arcane

structure of the tower: "Although the pillar stood upon the hereditary estate of her husband, the lady had never visited it, owing to its insulation by this well-nigh impracticable ground" (4).

At the third visit, conditions allow her advance. Now, the coach physically follows her former gaze: off the road, through the gates and over the fields towards the island-like hill. Having negotiated this transitional space and reaching the new territory, there is a remarkable change on the level of characters as the lady separates herself from her coach and driver, sends them back and submerges herself into the thick trees all by herself. This is a classical construction of a threshold space: the trees are neither part of the surrounding fields, nor part of the tower itself. They shield the base of the column and, like the doorway, are stretches of space that only some characters may pass through.

Now that the protagonist has entered this space, the narrator unfurls a range of information. Some refers to the structure itself, the hilltop being a link to the ancient past with its Roman, old British and old Saxon origins remaining in the mists of time. The tower has its own history as well, and while it can be traced back three generations and appears in a state of neglect, it still remains solid and sound. The levels of space and characters intermingle. The lady's disinterest in the tower as a memorial column stems from the poor relationship between her and her husband, and her motivation to explore the space now is a mixture of boredom, curiosity and the dire need for any mind-lifting experience. "She would have welcomed even a misfortune" (5). Once there, the first impression is less thrilling than tranquil: the forest around the tower, with its brambles and abundance of fauna as well as the lichen and mildew on the masonry, adding a fairy-tale like sense of timelessness and solitude.[1]

> Few unaccustomed to such places can be aware of the insulating effect of ploughed ground, when no necessity compels people to traverse it. This rotund hill of trees and brambles, standing in the centre of a ploughed field of some ninety or a hundred acres, was probably visited less frequently than a rock would have been visited in a lake of equal extend. (6)

It is vital to notice that none of this creates a sinister or forbidding atmosphere, especially the tower itself: "the pillar rose into the sky a bright and cheerful thing, unimpeded, clean, and flushed with the sunligh" (5). However, even though the lady had heard of the magnificent view, "[s]he had no intention of ascending, but finding that the door was not fastened she pushed it open and entered" (6). The

[1] Greenhill remarks that these characteristics could be read as a connection between the space and the protagonists, foreshadowing Lady Constantine's pregnancy: "So integrated is the story of Viviette and Swithin with the natural landscape, that here the product of their natural love match is indistinguishable from the environment. We can see early signs of this symbiotic relationship at work in the first chapter, when the natural vegetation entwines itself around the masonry of the tower" (Greenhill 150).

open door and her unobstructed step into the tower concludes the threshold-process, immediately followed by the discovery of a fresh piece of paper on the floor signalling human presence and an accessible staircase to lead her to it.

When the lady now ascends and finds a young man with a telescope on the rooftop, with regards to the correlation of space and action both the tower and the characters are transformed. The tower is no longer an abandoned structure but from now on the place of social interactions. This is most visible in the lady's reaction, when her desperate wish for emotion is fulfilled and described with a similar cheer of expression as was the tower: "a warmer wave of her warm temperament glowed visibly through her, and a qualified observer might from this hazarded a guess that there was Romance blood in her veins" (8). Aptly, her view from the tower is not drawn to the wintry countryside, but the burning sun. The change of spatial perception also shows in the intermingling of ownership and occupancy: while the tower belongs to her husband's family, the young man is here not illegally as his family has been trusted with the keys for as long as the tower has been standing. When she playfully argues that the tower is actually hers and expresses her wish to return, she is called by her full name, Lady Constantine, for the first time. Notably the young man's name, Swithin, is not mentioned in this first encounter.

The disassembly of this scene is spatially reflected: "He helped her down the stairs and through the briers. He would have gone further, and crossed the open cornland with her, but she preferred to go alone" (11). The two characters separate in the threshold space, while leaving both with a changed perception. Swithin ascends the steps with a different focus: "He then retraced his way to the top of the column, but, instead of looking longer at the sun, watched her diminishing towards the distant fence, behind which waited the carriage" (11). Lady Constantine makes her way across the fields and changes from her new and secret role to her former social position.

The space of the tower keeps evolving along with the actions and emotions of the two protagonists. For quite a while, Lady Constantine manages to keep her visits secret and the narrator emphasizes the isolation of the hill and the tower:

> A person who had casually observed her gait would have thought it irregular and the lessenings and increasings of speed with which she proceeded in the direction of the pillar could be accounted for only by a motive much more disturbing than an intention to look through a telescope. Thus, she went on, till, leaving the park, she crossed the turnpike-road, and entered the large field, in the middle of which the fir-clad hill stood like Mont St. Michel in its bay. (26)

The tower is not only the space where most of the love story unfolds, which redefines it as a very select social space; it also provides the jumping-off point into the depths of interstellar space. Here, Swithin conducts his observations and also

opens up the view to Lady Constantine. Concerning the perception of space, there are still the basic structures of focal points and transitional spaces, just as on earth, yet the journey cannot be undertaken physically but only through vison enhanced by sophisticated equipment. These astronomical observations are not only Swithin's profession but also an allegorical mirror of the lovers' relationship and this, in return, makes the tower a unique place for it is only here that they can both actively take part in watching cosmic infinity. Other spaces linked with astronomy remain either solely Swithin's territory (Greenwich, his travels to Africa and America), or remain shallow and lifeless (the books at Welland house, or the unused instruments in grandmother's cottage).

The perception of extra-terrestrial space oscillates along with the changes concerning the tower and the lovers: when Lady Constantine first finds Swithin and his telescope, he shows her a cyclone in the sun: "It was a peep into a maelstrom of fire, taking place where nobody had ever been or would ever be" (9). Subsequently he warns her against taking further interest in astronomy: "'Is enlightenment on the subject, then, so terrible?' 'Yes, indeed.'" (11) – a statement that is simply bound to enhance her curiosity and fascination regarding the terrible beauty of the cyclone combined with the young man's intellectual and physical attractiveness. On her second visit to the tower, Swithin's role as an explorer and lone wayfarer in unknown territories is emphasized, creating a heroic touch: "If it annihilates your ladyship to roam over these yawning spaces just once, think how it must annihilate me to be, as it were, in constant suspension amid them night after night" (29). While these images are mostly impressive and poetic, there is also the laborious scientific side of Swithin's observations.[2] As the love story evolves, so does the range of astronomical studies, extended by her investing in enhanced equipment:

> The top of the column was to be roofed in, to form a proper observatory. A wooden cabin was to be erected at the foot of the tower, to provide better accommodation for casual visitors to the observatory than the spiral staircase and the lead-flat afforded. . . . Finally, a path was to be made across the surrounding fallow, by which she might easily approach the scene of her new study. (50)

This brings another tremendous change to the tower as a spatial structure: the path eliminates the insularity and inaccessibility of the hill that had been so characteristic (and her reason for curiosity in the first place) and is now open to anyone. The hut may vary in function, either as a space of its own or as a threshold to the tower, but while it is invisibly hidden among the trees, the alterations to the top of the tower including the distinctive dome are clearly visible to anyone in the open landscape – and so is the change in Lady Constantine's mood despite all her efforts to remain inconspicuous. The lurking pressure of gossip is pressing on

[2] On the scientific side of space in *ToT* see Harumi 145.

her and her strategy of neutralizing it is a two-way approach on both the personal and spatial level. Publicly, she appears to be only casually interested in astronomy while making the amendments a gift to Swithin and financing them in secret so he can appear publicly as the sole principal of the project. Also, Lady Constantine decides to stay away from the tower until Swithin's thesis is published – a severance that she cannot bear for long and the loss of interaction eventually leaves her locked outside alone, and learning from others that Swithin is seriously ill and being tended to in a different space, his grandmother's cottage. After Swithin's recovery, the space of the tower appears changed as well: for the first time, there are other strangers, villagers, who have to be stalled and distracted within the threshold space so Lady Constantine can make her escape unnoticed. The narrator proves his subtle and maybe humorous depiction of space: "The men had stupidly placed the bench close to the door, which, owing to the stairs within, opened outwards; so that at the first push by the pair inside to release themselves, the bench must have gone over, and sent the smokers sprawling on their faces" (79). After this narrow escape, Lady Constantine evades the tower and the company of her beloved for a full three months, leading up to a final moment of the tower in its combination as both an observatory and lovers' space, when Swithin asks Lady Constantine to marry him on the rooftop (95).

From now on, there is a steady deconstruction of the tower and an altered usage of the whole structure of the tower. At first, a storm destroys the dome, leaving the precious instruments unprotected. In the subsequent confusions of trying to get married, being confronted by Lady Constantine's brother and the Bishop's proposal to Lady Constantine, the hut serves as a hideaway and shelter for the lovers, a home for Swithin, a place of near discovery and the space for contemplating their parting without the tower playing any vital part in it. After Swithin sets off on his journeys, Lady Constantine orders the whole alterations to the tower that physically accounted for this particular space of their relationship to be undone:

> she experienced the unutterable melancholy of seeing two carpenters dismantle the dome of its felt covering, detach its ribs, and clear away the enclosure at the top till everything stood as it had stood before Swithin had been known to the place. The equatorial had already been packed in a box, to be in readiness if he should send for it from abroad. The cabin, too, was in course of demolition, such having been his directions acquiesced in by her, before he started. Yet she could not bear the idea that these structures, so germane to the events of their romance, should be removed as if removed for ever. Going to the men, she bade them store up the materials intact, that they might be re-erected if desired. (226)

Though this space will never be called to life again, the tower has one more part to play – the very final one. It is here on the rooftop that the lovers meet again: Swithin returns from his travels and Lady Constantine, now the widow of the

Bishop and in company of her child, dies in his arms when their mutual love and prospect of unhindered marriage are expressed freely.

It is hardly surprising that the tower, also titling the novel, receives the most detailed and most dynamic spatial composition. Nonetheless, it is closely linked to the other structures of space in the text, especially the two other major *Gesellschaftsräume*, Welland House and the grandmother's cottage. Being less complex than the tower but still equipped with a sophisticated internal order and encircled by thresholds and adjacent transitional spaces, the protagonists enjoy or suffer the interplay between them.

Welland House

The existence of a grand place like Welland House can be guessed when the lady admires the view over the lands that belong to her husband's family. It is not, however, until twenty pages later that the house is actually mentioned, and even then, combined with a very different perspective than the elegant aristocratic one. Mr Torkingham, the local parson, makes his way there through transitional and threshold spaces, "he performed the remainder of the journey on foot, crossing the park toward Welland House by a stile and path, till he struck into the drive near the north door of the mansion" (21). The transition that the character undergoes in this passage is clearly visible when compared to his previous stop: "His boots, which had seemed elegant in the farm-house, appeared rather clumsy here" (22). At the same time, this reflects upon Welland House and its characteristics as a *Gesellschaftsraum*. Apart from the parson, few others are permitted to make their entry, and each of these constellations of characters is unique.

Welland House is the stately home of the family that Lady Constantine has married into. While her husband is away, she is more or less confined[3] to this space, creating a wanting and imbalanced atmosphere, always waiting to be either refreshed by his return or redefined by his death and her taking over. Welland House is also the space of Lady Constantine's life without Swithin – here, she secretly misses him and the sphere of the tower while playing her part as a well-known member of nobility and with a status of distinction that sets her apart from the villagers. Consequently, Swithin is kept away from, or at least outside of, Welland House for most of the time: the few times that he does enter the house, the clash between the spatial structure as it is and his presence is only too visible.

The need to keep up Lady Constantine's dual life brings the difficulty of keeping Swithin and Welland House apart. Spatially, this causes problems whenever the

[3] Fjagesund goes as far as comparing her to a bird in a cage, see Fjagesund 89.

desire to make contact becomes overwhelming. When Swithin returns from London with information about Lady Constantine's missing husband, she diverts the encounter into the threshold space as deeply as possible:

> His way homeward would lie within a stone's throw of the manor house, and though for certain reasons she had forbidden him to call at the late hour of his arrival, she could easily intercept him in the avenue. At twenty minutes past ten she went out into the drive, and stood in the dark. (35)

The same technique is employed when Swithin feels the desire to thank her for a precious lens; only he covers a much wider range, oscillating between threshold and transitional space:

> he started off for the Great House. On gaining its precincts he felt so shy of calling, never having received any hint or permission to do so . . . All afternoon he lingered about uncertainly, in the hope of intercepting her on the return from a drive, occasionally walking with an indifferent lounge across glades commanded by the windows, that if she were in-doors she might know he was near. But she did not show herself during the daylight. Still impressed by her playful secrecy, he carried on the same idea after dark, by returning to the house, and passing through the garden door on to the lawn front, where he sat on the parapet that breasted the terrace. (41)

How much this is part of an elaborate spatial concept becomes clear when the two protagonists do meet – by chance, in the nowhere of transitional space between Welland House and the village: "The distance was short; and she returned along a narrow lane, divided from the river by a hedge, through whose leafless twigs the ripples flashed silver lights into her eyes. Here she discovered Swithin, leaning over a gate, his eyes bent upon the stream" (44). As the love between the protagonists unfolds, the need for secrecy and keeping the worlds of Welland House and the Tower apart from each other grow stronger. Lady Constantine hands Swithin the money for the construction works through the window at night without asking him in (53). And meeting on a path in transitional space, their words paint a clear picture:

> "I have just sent my page across to the column with your book on Cometary Nuclei", she said softly; "that you might not have to come to the house for it. I did not know I should meet you here." "Didn't you wish me to come to the house for it?" "I did not, frankly. You know why, do you not?" (86)

Even though she leaves it open as to whether she means the fear of gossip or her feeling uncomfortable at the thought of him seeing the state of her impoverished life, the gap between the two spheres is obvious. Setting her apart from Swithin, Welland House functions as a place of Lady Constantine's very own decisions: planning the alterations to the Tower (50), thinking how to avoid servants' and villagers' gossip (51), or trying to decide whether to postpone the marriage (222) – all this takes place at the house.

There are two passages where Swithin enters Welland House and both show the transition of a character insecure in dealing with unfamiliar spaces. The first one is when Lady Constantine decides to be his patron. Swithin, unaware of this, arrives at Welland House in a state of anxiousness, reflected on the spatial level by dense fog, clinging to his appearance (46). Contrary to his apprehensions, Lady Constantine is most benevolent, making him her "Astronomer Royal" (47), which leaves her to "be his Queen" (47). Notably, their conversation lacks any romance as it is focussed on finance and in this corresponds to the setting. Swithin is then allowed deeper into the space of Welland House to explore the library. Here, the rift between the static atmosphere and the social conventions that characterize the *Gesellschaftsraum* of Welland House and Swithin's youthful and inexperienced character fully shows. The books on astronomy hold no interest for him as they have long been out of date. All the same Swithin fails to take the opportunity to have lunch with Lady Constantine and has his meal all by himself in the reading room. Moreover, he keeps wondering how much of an appetite is appropriate.

While this scene has a ring of innocence and playfulness to it, Welland House takes on a very different appearance when Lady Constantine's brother Louis arrives. Now the family's position in society is emphasized, as well as Lady Constantine's position as wife (or widow) of Sir Blount. This conflict instantly shows on the spatial level – Swithin must hide or leave (133). That he borrows the late Sir Blount's clothing to make his escape may serve the purpose, but seeing the lover in the attire of the dead husband leaves a feeling of uneasiness and emphasizes the might of the clash (134). This becomes even more evident in the talk at the festive luncheon Louis holds for the Bishop: Swithin is regarded as a gifted young man but hardly an equal in social standing (149). Louis even claims to have noticed Swithin holding an affection for a village girl named Tabitha Lark. The last stage is reached, when Swithin is asked to dinner a few days later. Again, he is shown the outdated books in the library, only this time not left to himself but with Louis who is pressing a protracted conversation with him and tricks him into staying over. While Louis' intention to catch Swithin and Lady Constantine redhanded fails, he still succeeds in extracting a confirmation of being in love on her part and causes Swithin to oversleep and miss an important appointment in Greenwich (187).

As static as the social space of Welland House may seem at first, change seems to be imminent when Lady Constantine's fortune declines. Threatened with poverty, she sells her horses and carriages, lives in the smallest rooms, lays off the servants and contemplates going to live abroad (73-74). This directly leads to two lines of thought. First: the social structures of Welland House as it was are gone for good: "I wish I could never see my great gloomy house again, since I am not

rich enough to throw it open, and live there as I ought to do" (125). Second: unlikely as it may be, there is the idea of completely redefining Welland House as a place of love and companionship between her and Swithin: "'Will the house ever be thrown open to gaiety, as it was in old times?' said he. 'Not unless you make a fortune,' she replied laughingly" (129). That she would consider reviving Welland House as a restructured *Gesellschaftsraum* is an immensely powerful statement, even though it would require Swithin to gain a large amount of money in time.

The Grandmother's Cottage

Grandmother's cottage represents Swithin's family background and therein forms a contrast to Welland House. It too is visited by mobile characters from the village, like the parson or Tabitha, but lacks any grandeur and is characterized as rustic and cosy. It too is equipped with an incomplete family structure and shows internal spatial sub-divisions not accessible to everyone. When a group of villagers gathers downstairs the bourgeois pleasures of chatting, laughing, and singing, Swithin retreats to his private chamber on the first floor, where a hole in the ceiling still permits him to listen in on their conversation (15-20).

This chamber is also the place where Swithin remains when in imminent danger of dying. Only under such unusual circumstances can Lady Constantine be allowed into the depths of the private rooms: "Her presence having been made known to the sufferer, she was conducted upstairs to Swithin's room. ... Old Mrs. Martin sat down by the window, and Lady Constantine bent over Swithin" (64). In an unobserved moment, the privacy of the chamber becomes the space for total secret honesty: "Scarcely knowing what she did, Lady Constantine ran back to Swithin's side, flung herself upon the bed, and in a paroxysm of sorrow kissed him" (65).

Swithin's chamber is also a space of study, equipped with books and a small telescope, setting this bit of space apart from the usual equipment of a country cottage and linking it to the tower and Welland House. When things become more complicated on the character level, the spatial structures change accordingly: while Welland House is threatened by poverty, the storm that damages the tower's dome also hits the cottage: "The wind have blowed down the chimley that don't smoke, and the pinning-end with it; and the old ancient house, that have been in your family so long as the memory of man, is naked to the wide world!" (101). The decisions being made in other social spaces also affect the cabin. When Swithin sets off on his travels, his chamber is tidied and kept waiting for him, the old housekeeper remarking, "'now that he is, as a woman may say, dead and buried to us'" (231). Again, Lady Constantine is permitted into his room and gives vent to her feelings crying for the loss of Swithin. The three women arrange his

books and astronomical instruments in a museum-like style, even preserving his scribbles on the wall.

A lot more could be said about these and the other places and spaces and their intermingling with the characters. Some are English towns like London, Pupminster, and Warborne, some gain meaning as landscapes defying exact positioning like Sir Blount's travels in Africa or as faraway spots on the globe connected with Swithin and his studies. Also, a meticulous analysis of the village with its subspaces would be well worth conducting and sure to lead to fascinating findings. On the other hand, the basic spatial structures have become quite clear by taking a closer look at the three main *Gesellschaftsräume* as outlined above. Therefore, instead of going into a lengthy further discussion, this paper will conclude on a little comparative experiment and highlight some striking narrative similarities between *ToT* and the medieval court epics.[4]

Two on a Tower and the Tradition of Medieval Court Epics

Together with the spatial structures, especially the concept of *minne* (love) is distinctive: just as in *ToT*, the lady is of higher social standing than her knight (see Tanoori 64-80). She may also act as a patron, rewarding his deeds with financial or symbolic gratuity, here in the form of the costly astronomical instruments, the building work, and the permission to make use of "her tower" (*ToT* 9). This role of the lady is widely used in *Minnesang* (minnesong) where love in most cases has to remain an unfulfilled desire because the lady is already married (see Schweikle 169-95). In the epic tales, it is not uncommon for the hero to marry the widow of a former opponent, sometimes even killed by the knight himself (see for example von Aue ll. 2434-41). While there is no direct conflict between Swithin and Sir Blount, there is also little sympathy (*ToT* 73), and they compete indirectly in their roles as voyagers and explorers, successfully in the case of Swithin, who achieves fame through his studies and returns, while Sir Blount is proclaimed dead after years of dubious reports about his whereabouts. An incomplete or dysfunctional family background is visible in Swithin and Lady Constantine, which is also common in court epics: Parzival, Lanzelet, and Tristan grow up without a father and do not even know their family names and even the great King Arthur's procreation is aided by black magic (Mertens 291).

Lady Constantine is a typical courtly lady with regards to her conduct in dealing with the incompatibility of her feelings for Swithin and her role in society. Towards others, she tries to keep up a perfect façade; towards Swithin, she expresses her feelings very subtly while having a quicker and deeper understanding of the

[4] This especially applies to the first part of the story, from the very beginning till Swithin leaves on his journeys.

evolving love between them than he has. The male part being slower to understand love can be found in a number of medieval texts, including *Parzival*, *Lanzelet*, *Tristan* (see for example von Straßburg ll. 11710-12043). Lady Constantine is also the first to include a physical component when she secretly clips a curl off the sleeping Swithin's head (*ToT* 40). While this remains completely unnoticed, her kiss in the cottage is misinterpreted as an act of kindness (66)

There is also the interlacing between themselves and astronomy that becomes part of their bond but remains Swithin's own exploit when it comes to the professional and academic part of it. Thus, science here is not altogether different from the deeds of the knights that are regarded with interest, praised by and sometimes even achieved in the honour of the lady. Furthermore, the coquettish sulking or even real sorrow when the knight sets off alone on his adventures is also visible in Lady Constantine when Swithin pays more attention to his observations than to her: "'I feel that I have been so foolish as to put in your hands an instrument to effect my own annihilation'" (58).

Swithin also shows a close and merry likeness to the young and inexperienced knights when first confronted with an unacquainted castle, or in his case, Welland House, as has been shown above. The library is a distinctive space within the house, and with all the books on astronomy around him he appears curious and confident, but the very moment that other rules are to be adhered to, he becomes unsure how to behave. It is not without a touch of humour that this shows in the connection with food. A hero who does not know how to behave at the table displays a lack of education and experience and may even appear as a subject of ridicule like the jung Parzival, who gorges like a pig in the castle of a kind-hearted elderly king on his first adventures. Swithin at least poses the question to himself as to how much is appropriate to eat but fails to be polite enough to join Lady Constantine, who reprehends him laughingly for tucking in all by himself in the library and makes him join her for dessert in the dining room (47). This also shows that there is still a long way ahead of them before Swithin could become master of Welland House.

Mobility is a most important category to understand the protagonists' ways of action. In *ToT*, Lady Constantine is the first character to move freely in the spheres of her house, the countryside around it, and the neighbouring village. While in the medieval epics it is definitely the knight who is the most mobile character, and by definition riding around for adventure, the ladies in these tales are often much more mobile and ready to pursue their will than the modern recipient might assume. Still bound to secrecy or their courtly ways of conduct, they can pretty much be seen as predecessors of the Victorian Lady Constantine. The male characters are still more mobile in their actions; the longest journeys are

undertaken by Swithin, Sir Blount, and Lady Constantine's brother Louis. A typical mobile character is the messenger- or informer-type, appearing somewhere in transitional space and providing the protagonist with valuable information for the scenes to come (Lorenz, *Raumstrukturen* 87). In *ToT* there is a perfect example in Haymoss, whom Lady Constantine meets in the middle of the fields and who tells her the story of Swithin's family and living (*ToT* 11). Greenhill notes that he even blends in physically with the landscape and "appears as a speck or dark spot, indistinguishable from the lumpen earth" (Greenhill 143).

Last but not least, there is the tower itself. Already by its shape linked to the architecture of fortresses and castles, it proves to have all the admired characteristics: a stately appearance, a very select personnel, and a view over its surroundings. While these are common in the description of castles in the court epics, the tower can also be seen as a place of safe and secluded love, especially as long as there is no path over the fields and the whole hill appears like an island within the fields. This triggers a wealth of literary associations: castles on lone islands often hold secrets, are inhabited by magical folk, and can only be reached by the chosen (see Brunner). In its existence as an entity combining its physical form with the story of Swithin and Lady Constantine, the tower has a particular shape and function for a limited period of time. This also stands in the tradition of similar places of intimacy: Lanzelet receives a tent that reflects the glory of love (von Zatzikhoven ll. 4749-4931). Set up in nature, it provides comfort and courtly artworks for the inhabitants, and in *Tristan* there is a grotto hidden in the forest that mirrors the beauty and infinity of love, just as the interstellar space does in *ToT* (von Straßburg ll. 16705-17245).

Literary Reflections

Thinking through this wealth of findings, the question is how to deal with them in a wider perspective. It has been well recognized that Hardy took a lively interest in medieval literature (see for example Farrell; Rogers). However, it would be misleading and grossly oversimplifying to assume that Hardy was simply adopting an eclectic variety of elements of the court epics into *ToT*. The key rather lies in the literary process itself, in dealing with the same discourses as well as in reflecting on literature on a bigger scale. Harumi points out:

> Just as John Tyndall remarks that the world embraces a Newton, a Shakespeare, a Boyle, a Raphael, a Kant, a Beethoven, a Darwin, a Carlyle and so on, Hardy himself, as a humanist, embraces the great Victorians as well as the classical authors. We witness Hardy filtering the great minds and creating his own philosophy, a large part of which is to observe human pain and to hope, even if "forlornly", to meliorate it. (Harumi 155)

The emerging courtly literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries constitutes an important step towards the modern novel (see Haug, *Brechungen* 233-48). For

the first time, secular literature is put into writing in popular speech instead of Latin. Apart from antique sources, a major part of these narrations is derived from tales and legends of the British Isles, refined and adapted to courtly society by the French aristocracy and then renarrated at the German courts (see Mertens 295-317). The urge to experiment on the basic discourses like love, faith, gender, or individuality throughout these texts reflects the fundamental changes in human thought and society, a topic also very much present in the poetic space of *ToT*: "They live in a Christian world built on the ideological remnants of past cultures, much as the tower is built on a hill rich in ancient customs, the meanings of which no one is certain, though the effects are 'curious and suggestive'" (Sylvia 50). This also goes for the discourse of space and, when regarded as part of a timeline rather than by itself, interlinks medieval, Victorian, and modern thinking. At the same time as illuminations in medieval manuscripts acquire signs of central perspective, some texts begin to introduce individual perspective into the poetic landscape, like in Ulrich's *Lanzelet* (von Zatzikhoven ll. 8108-25). Perspective is also a major issue in *ToT*, not only in landscaping that always requires a point of view,[5] but also in the lovers' perception as Sorum points out: "Indeed, as Lady Constantine prepares to ask Swithin to leave her, despite their love for each other, the narrator describes her act as one that takes her outside of her own limited perspective to an unprecedented point" (Sorum 181).

Whilst the discourse of space is intermingled with individuality and consequently emotionality[6] in this approach, similar observations can be made concerning gender. A most enigmatic character in this aspect is Tabitha Lark. She first catches the eye because of her mobility in poetic space – not only between the *Gesellschaftsräume* of Welland House, grandmother's cottage and the church, but also, and on her very own behalf, between the village and London. She is not only a potential spouse for Swithin throughout the novel but also part of Swithin's and the recipients' last images in *ToT*: "In the concluding scene of *Two on a Tower,* a single speck of colour on a horizon of monochromatic browns and greys denotes Tabitha Lark – her very name suggesting blithe, airborne animation" (Greenhill 149). This again stands in the medieval tradition of identifying love or lovers with singing birds including the lark or birds of prey: *der minnen verderspil Isôt*, Isolde, the falcon of love (von Straßburg l. 11989). Just like in the beginning, the image is deciphered by linking the conception of space to the characters' and recipient's

[5] "Landschaftsdarstellungen im genauen Sinn des Wortes implizieren Raumerfahrungen, die einen bestimmten Blickpunkt voraussetzen. Der Ort, von dem aus eine Landschaft im Bild wiedergegeben wird, muß auch vom Betrachter eingenommen werden" (Haug, "Schreckensorte" 57).

[6] "My choice of the term 'empathy' points to Hardy's position as a bridge between Victorian and modernist social and aesthetic norms, for the possibility of imagining others was increasingly up for debate during the period when Hardy was writing and revising his novels" (Sorum 130).

point of view: a female figure in a vast rural landscape – only this time one that can fly and is not trapped in a cage.

It is by shedding such an interdiscursive and interdisciplinary light that *ToT* starts to shine like a prism and becomes alive with a wealth of colours reflecting both, its literary quality and its timeless beauty.

Works Cited

Armstrong, Patrick. "Instrumental Optics: Microscopic and Telescopic Lenses in Thomas Hardy's *Two on a Tower*." *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 33, winter 2017, pp. 85-99.

Bullen, J.B. *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy*. Clarendon, 1986.

Brunner, Horst. *Die poetische Insel: Inseln und Inselvorstellungen in der deutschen Literatur*. Metzler, 1967.

Farrell, John P. "Hardy and the Tristan-Isolde Romance." *The Hardy Journal*, vol. 28, autumn 2011, pp. 81-99.

Fjagesund, Peter. "Thomas Hardy's 'Two on a Tower': The Failure of a Symbol." *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1998, pp. 85-93.

Straßburg, Gottfried von. *Tristan*, edited by Karl Marold, DeGruyter, 4th ed., 1977.

Greenhill, Vivian Barbara. *Impressions of Wessex: Light, Perspectives and Landscape in Six Hardy Novels*. Ann Arbor, 2017.

Hardy, Thomas. *Two on a Tower: A Romance*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Sally Shuttleworth, Penguin, 3rd ed., 1999.

Aue, Hartmann von. *Iwein*, edited and translated by Thomas Cramer, DeGruyter, 1981.

Harumi, James. "*Two on a Tower*: Science and Religion, Space and Time." *The Hardy Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1999, pp. 141-56.

Haug, Walter. *Brechungen auf dem Weg zur Individualität: Kleine Schriften zur Literatur des Mittelalters*. Niemeyer, 1995.

---. "Schreckensorte und künstliche Paradiese: Zur mittelalterlichen Vorgeschichte der Landschaftsdarstellung." *Positivierung von Negativität, letzte kleine Schriften*, edited by Ulrich Barton, Niemeyer, 2008, pp. 56-73.

Henchman, Anna. "Hardy's Stargazers and the Astronomy of other Minds." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2008, pp. 37-64.

Lorenz, Kai Tino. *Raumstrukturen einer epischen Welt: Zur Konstruktion des poetischen Raumes in Ulrichs von Zatzikhoven Lanzelet*. Kümmerle, 2009.

Mertens, Volker. "Artus." *Epische Stoffe des Mittelalters*, edited by Volker Mertens and Ulrich Müller, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 290-364.

Rogers, Shannon L. "Medievalism in the Last Novels of Thomas Hardy: New Wine in Old Bottles." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1999, pp. 298-316.

Schweikle, Günther. *Minnesang*. Metzler, 2nd ed., 1995.

Sorum, Eve. "Hardy's Geography of Narrative Empathy." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2011, pp. 179-99.

Sylvia, Richard D. "Hardy's Feminism: Apollonian Myth and Two on a Tower." *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1996, pp. 48-59.

Tanoori, Khatereh. *Men and "Prescence": Constructions of Masculinity in Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy*. Newcastle UP, 2012.

Zatzikhoven, Ulrich von. *Lanzelet*, edited and translated by Florian Kragl, De Gruyter, 2nd ed., 2013.