"Time Seemed Fiction" – Archaeological Encounters in Victorian Poetry

Virginia Zimmerman

For the Victorians, archaeology integrated a plethora of cultural remains from a range of times into the material landscape of their own culture. Containing objects from assorted pasts alongside objects from the present, that landscape became anachronic. Whether Roman, Middle Eastern or Early British, an artefact is a sign of the past from which it has emerged and the present in which it makes new meaning. Jean Baudrillard argues, "The antique object no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to signify" (74). This article examines three poets who considered the significance of archaeological objects. In particular, Thomas Hardy, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Emmeline Fisher wrote about encounters with artefacts and took those encounters as occasions to re-imagine time. Victorian studies and history of science have paid little attention to archaeology, and poetry that engages with the rich symbolic field of archaeology has received even less notice. The poets considered here reveal that archaeology prompted not only reflection on the accomplishments and longevity of the British Empire but also reflection on the nature of time itself.

An archaeological object is temporally and geographically removed from its original context and meaning. Indeed, this dislocation is part of what it comes to signify. What's more, the artefact represents the very fact of anachronism and prompts those who encounter the object to cast away a linear notion of time. Writing of an object as a repository of cultural memories, Catherine Crawford asserts that while key moments in an object's history can be pinpointed (i.e., when it was created, when it was sold, when it was defaced by an invading army, etc.), the artefact accumulates different meanings over time, and a palimpsest of significances is written (literally or figuratively) on its surface (14). Thus, the archaeological artefact does not represent a specific moment in time but rather a collection of moments and also time itself. The single object conflates an array of times, representing them at once. In this way, time ceases to appear as a line, stretched from them to now: the object reveals an alternate model in which multiple times co-exist. Using the phrase "tempo-object," Paul Ricoeur emphasises this notion of an object that endures and continues to signify over time (26). For Ricoeur, as well as for Hardy, Rossetti and Fisher, an object's origin is far less interesting than its endurance, and its accumulated significance, the palimpsest Crawford describes. Duration and the palimpsest may seem to be at odds, but archaeology and the Victorian poets who encountered archaeology put them together.

Duration describes the experience of the object; it does not capture the experience of the archaeologist (or in the case of this article, the poet) who abruptly encounters the object in his present. He may immediately realise that the object has existed all these many years from the time of its creation to the present of its excavation, but that is the life of the object independent of any interpreter. More interesting is the experience of the person who comes upon the object and is probably not interested in what it has meant or done for all the years between its inception and the now. The poetic speakers who are the subjects here are interested in what the object means in the precise moment of encounter. Writing of an encounter between a fossilised trilobite and an imperilled character in his novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873),

Thomas Hardy describes an alternate model of time: "time closed up like a fan before him" (209). This notion of time closing up can be layered with the notion of duration: the line of time folds back on itself and past and present meet. The archaeological object signifies this meeting, and this is the model of time depicted again and again in poems about archaeology: the object signifies the past, but it also signifies in the present, and the point where those two significances meet is the point of interest for the poet, and for this article.

Thomas Hardy's sonnet "In the Old Theatre, Fiesole" was published as one of the "Poems of Pilgrimage" in *Poems of Past and Present* (1901).[1] The poem describes an actual archaeological encounter that took place when Hardy and his wife visited an amphitheatre in Italy in the spring of 1887 (F. Hardy 251). Hardy uses the short space of fourteen lines to muse on the encounter. The speaker-poet is approached in the theatre by a child who hopes to sell him a coin she has found there. It is a Roman coin, and the speaker marvels at the fact that he has uncovered identical coins in his "loam" at home in England. That the coin connects modern England with Ancient Rome suggests the collapse of time Hardy described in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Yet, when he notes how, "better than all books, [the child] had raised for me / In swift perspective Europe's history" (6-7), Hardy suggests duration.[2]

The single, small, even common object reveals in its face and its very presence a broad sweep of history. It signifies the reach and also the ultimate fall of the Roman Empire: "her act flashed home / In that mute moment to my opened mind / The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome" (12-14). With "the image of Constantine" (4) impressed on its face, the coin recalls an imperial past. When Hardy thinks of the presence of like coins in his land in England, he thinks of the reach of that empire, but the coins, the ones in England and in Italy alike, have become debris dredged up by ploughs or the eager scrambling hands of poor children who hope to make a profit. Thus, the coin signifies at once the former greatness of the Roman Empire and the decline of that empire's symbols into rubbish. When Hardy writes of "the reach of perished Rome," he conveys this paradox: Rome reached far, a fact of its greatness, but thus the signs of its fall also reach far. Indeed, the coin as a symbol of perished Rome reaches all the way to England, reminding archaeologists and poets that empires fall and that the British Empire could meet a similar fate. Hardy does not imagine British coins uncovered by children in faraway lands, but such imaginings are the logical extension of the poem's point.

The archaeological encounter that is the subject of Hardy's "In the Old Theatre, Fiesole" involves the interpretation in the present of an object that has lain dormant for thousands of years. It signifies the past from whence it comes (Constantine, Rome, Empire), and it signifies the present in which it has new meaning as a familiar artefact. But most interesting to Hardy, it signifies the meeting of past and present, a temporal conjunction reinforced by the geographical element of the poem. The coin brings together England and Italy just as it brings together the past and the present. The emperor Hardy chose, Constantine, has a name that suggests duration, or constancy. Thus, Hardy subtly invokes the image of the time line, the coin constantly enduring just beneath the surface of the soil these two thousand years, even as he suggests alternate models of time. Yet, in the poem's first line, he writes, "I traced the Circus" (1), choosing a word for the form of the amphitheatre but also a word that immediately brings into the poem images of cycle and return. He leads off with an image that invites the reader to think of the coin as returning, not as having existed all the while. So the coin brings circle and line together: past unquestionably occurred before present, but in a symbolic space, past and present can co-exist.

71

Writing of Hardy's use of archaeology in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Bharat Tandon claims, "If archaeology aspires to reconstruct diachronic explanations from synchronic discoveries, fiction can display both at once" (475). Hardy's poetry, perhaps more than his fiction, displays synchronic and diachronic models of the relationship between past and present. Past, present and sometimes future collapse fan-like onto an archaeological object and, meta-textually, into the poem itself.

In another sonnet inspired by his trip to Italy, "Rome: Building a New Street in the Ancient Quarter," Hardy draws no explicit connection between the Roman and British Empires, but he intertwines imagery of past and present, showing how the workmen (and the visitors) encounter the past even as they build toward the future. Progress and ruin co-exist. Gillian Beer describes how, in general, Hardy conjoins decay and continued life, a paradox central to this poem. Beer writes, "A pervasive theme of Hardy's writing is how things decay, yet how fully and abruptly they are alive" (90). This is another way to imagine the collapse of time: at one site, a visitor can witness decay and life, past and present. Archaeological depths revealed by work to improve an urban landscape would have been familiar to Hardy's readers who witnessed the same in England,[3] so there is an implicit connection here between Rome and London, much like the explicit connection in "In the Old Theatre." In the first stanza of "Rome: Building a New Street in the Ancient Quarter," Hardy offers a confusion of old and new, a mixed metaphor at once architectural and corporal, with Time at the heart of it all:

> These numbered cliffs and gnarls of masonry
> Outskeleton Time's central city, Rome;
> Whereof each arch, entablature, and dome
> Lies bare in all its gaunt anatomy. (1-4)

It is worth lingering over the word "outskeleton." Does Hardy mean that the apparatus of construction brings out the skeleton that lies underneath the city? This is a distinct possibility, and it is reinforced in the last two lines of this stanza. Or does he mean that the construction forms a new, outer skeleton that frames the "gaunt anatomy" within? Both possibilities—surely both in play given Hardy's penchant for meaningful ambiguity – foreground the architectural signs of time, both past and present, and conjoin them within the single body of Rome. When Hardy writes that Rome is "Time's central city," he means, among other things, that Rome is where past, present and also future (implied by the construction work) come together. Returning to his image of the closed fan, the city itself is the point where time closes up.

The sonnet's sestet brings in the image of shadow that not only Hardy but many poets use to symbolise the coming together of past and present:

> And yet within these ruins' very shade
> The singing workmen shape and set and join
> Their frail new mansion's stuccoed cove and quoin
> With no apparent sense that years abrade,
> Though each rent wall their feeble works invade
> Once shamed all such in power of pier and groin. (9-14)

The singing workmen labour in the shade of the ruins, indifferent to the former greatness that looms over them. The shadow is an important image as it implies

measuring time, as in a sun dial in which a shadow marks time. The shade is cast most literally by the ruins that still exist in the present, but Hardy suggests that they have similarly cast their shadow since they were first built in the past. Thus, the workmen, though they do not realise it, "shape and set and join" in a shade cast at once by a ruin in the present and by what that ruin was in the past. Again, past and present co-exist, and the ruin itself is a sort of time-keeping device for non-linear time.

Tandon argues that this poem also performs the temporal layers that are its subject with Hardy's use of archaic language: "As the workmen in the poem expose physical ruins in the strata of past Rome, so Hardy's lines hold buried shards of archaism at different vertical and etymological depths ('rotten metope' 'monitory gnome')" (482). That is, the poem mimics the gaunt anatomy of Rome with linguistic ruins brought to light on the page. It may not be an extrapolation Hardy intended, but if Rome is Time's central city, and the poem takes the shape of Rome, then we might consider that the poem, like Rome, is a place where time closes up. Indeed, the language Hardy uses to describe the workmen's labour could as easily describe a poet's craft: the workmen "sing;" they "shape, set and join." Similarly, a poem can be said to sing, and a poet shapes a stanza, he sets a rhyme, he joins two images. Hardy makes this comparison most explicit in the second stanza: "cracking frieze and rotten metope / Express, as though they were an open tome" (6-7). The simile likens ruins to an open book, and in the book, the reader reads, "'Dunces, Learn here to spell Humanity!'" (9). Just as Hardy reads this line in the crumbling architecture of Rome, so does his reader read the line in his poem. Thus, the poem represents not only Rome, but ancient Rome asserting itself despite its ruin into modern Rome, asserting itself in shadow and poem.

Hardy wrote one other sonnet about his visit to Rome, "Rome: On the Palatine." This poem is most interesting because it so precisely recounts the actual excursion Hardy and his wife took. While Florence Hardy's *Early Life* does not describe the visit to the Palatine in any detail, Hardy's personal Baedeker, in the British Library, includes many annotations and was clearly an important guide to the city for him.[4] The path suggested in the Baedeker is precisely the one traced in the poem. Of course, it is possible that Hardy based the poem on the travel guide rather than on his actual experience, but it seems more likely that he and his wife followed the suggested route, and he subsequently wrote a poem that recalled his excursion. For instance, it is clear from the poem which of the two suggested routes from Livia's house to Caligula's Hardy followed. The Baedeker offers:

> Another way from the house of Livia to this point leads to the right of the door, passing some steps ascending to a large water basin, and traverses a covered passage (Cryptoporticus), with remains of ancient stucco ornamentation. This is supposed to have been the scene of the murder of Caligula. Various architectural and sculptural fragments are exposed to view here. (240-41)

In the poem, Hardy writes, "Whence, thridding cave and Criptoportico, / We gained Caligula's dissolving pile" (3-4). The comparison with Hardy's Baedeker is useful because the guidebook offers a sort of textual archaeology of Hardy's visit. The text suggests a path to take, and Hardy (and probably also his wife) added notes to the book, indicating dates they visited certain sites or making comments. The text thus becomes palimpsestic, and layering the poem atop the guidebook provides multiple layers of text giving insight into Hardy's experience of Rome. Catherine Crawford's

73

comments on artefacts that are altered at a later date come to mind: the Baedeker is itself an artefact, but it was altered by its owner to record that individual's experience. Thus, Hardy's Baedeker becomes a central artefact for those who hope to glean insight into Hardy's experience of Rome. It ceases to serve its original purpose – a guide to Rome – and becomes instead a guide to Hardy's Rome. He perhaps used that guide himself when he wrote his poems, which become the surface layer of this particular archaeological site.

The poem itself is written in layers. Most of Hardy's sonnets are Spenserian with an octave and a sestet, but this one is Shakespearean with three quatrains and a couplet to conclude. The first stanza describes the path taken through the ruins, echoing the Baedeker. In the second stanza, Hardy describes how the ruins seem to come to life: "each ranked ruin tended to beguile / The outer sense, and shape itself as though / It wore its marble hues" (5-7). In the third stanza, Hardy sets aside the language of simile for metaphor. Ruins that beguile the imagination are transformed by music into the past reborn. The poet-speaker describes how, standing in Caesar's house, he heard a violin playing:

> When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh over-head,
> Began to melodise a waltz by Strauss:
> It stirred me as I stood, in Caesar's house,
> Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led, (9-12)

As he stands amidst ruins, the live music recalls the music that must have played in that place thousands of years before. Hardy's use of the word "raised" (used also in "In the Old Theatre") invokes a notion of raising the dead, raising dead sound from a long gone time. This is a topic that interests Hardy generally, and he wrote similarly about the endurance of sound in his poem "In a Museum." In this poem, Hardy conflates the sound of a fossilised bird with "a contralto voice [he] heard last night" (3). Again, a sound from the present raises a sound from the past. Hardy explains in the poem's second and final stanza:

> Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
> Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
> Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard,
> In the full-fuged song of the universe unending. (5-8)

Writing of this poem, Gillian Beer explains, "The 'full-fuged song' of the final version recognises the play of different voices – different forms of being – driving on, over and under each other, in a flow of energy that keeps alive both the most distant and most immediate past" (26-27). She writes earlier in the same essay, "How to reach into that shared past, as well as those many and separate individual pasts, becomes the most intense question of Hardy's creativity. How to make the past again present, as future, is the matter and the technical enquiry of his fiction and poetry" (18). Collapsing time – bringing together past, present and future – is not only Hardy's preoccupation in the three poems discussed here about his visit to Italy but is a central concern of all his writing.

Indeed, if we return to the final couplet of "Rome: On the Palatine," Hardy makes this interest plain: the sound of the strings, "blended pulsing life with lives long done, / Till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present one" (13-14). The notion of time as a fiction is complex. What Hardy means here is a traditional notion of linear time: the

fiction is that the past has finished. Instead, Hardy breaks down the distinction between past and present. A sound from the past may endure in the present. Yet, it should come as no surprise that there is an ambiguity here. "Past and Present one" means that past and present are blended together, undivided by whatever markers might indicate the past has terminated, but "one" may also refer back to "fiction." In this reading, the line says simply that past and present are a fiction. With this second possibility, it seems that, for Hardy, the fiction lies in the conjunction: past and present, with "and" holding the two times apart, rather than allowing them to merge into some nameless temporal state that is non-linear and undivided. Bert Hornback writes of Hardy's Italy sonnets, that "he engages the past through its mythical immediacy in the present. The doubling – and the conjunction of past and present is both effective and affective – is what gives these poems their theme and their experience" (153). But Hardy eschews doubling and conjunction in favor of blending and merging. Whether past and present are one and the same, or whether the conjunction of past and present is a fiction, Hardy demands some new way of thinking about time, a way that is not linear and that allows for endurance and simultaneity. Past and present co-exist at the site of a coin or a quoin or a couplet. Indeed, these artefacts offer encounters that reveal all time collapsed together.

Rossetti's poem about an archaeological encounter, "The Burden of Nineveh," extends the logic of the encounter into the future more explicitly than Hardy. Like Hardy's sonnets, "The Burden of Nineveh" can be seen as itself an archaeological artefact. While Hardy's use of ancient language and stanzaic structure invite this claim, in Rossetti's case, it is the different versions of the poem that offer strata of meaning. The poem was first composed in 1850, perhaps only in a fragmentary form; it was then revised and published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in 1856; in 1858, it was reprinted in the American magazine *The Crayon* with some small changes; a final version, significantly revised, was published in 1870 in Rossetti's *Poems*.[5] The nature of the revisions are not as important here (and is ground that has been well covered by Andrew Stauffer), but suffice it to say that multiple versions of the poem are extant, and thus even as it is in some ways about excavation, the layers of the poem itself must be excavated. Indeed, the poem is associated with the excavation of Rossetti's notebook, which had been buried in his wife's grave: Stauffer points out that the poem was chosen to appear first in "his own monument, the 1870 *Poems* – a monument that would come to depend on [. . .] the notebook exhumed from Siddal's grave" (55).

The poem describes the arrival of the great winged bull from Austen Henry Layard's excavation in Nineveh, and uses this archaeological artefact as an occasion to reflect on the British Empire alongside a lost empire. Florence Boos asserts, "Rossetti's bull seems a form of compromise between Shelley's 'Ozymandias' image and Keats' urn, simultaneously a sign of the transience of corrupt glory and an artefact inspiring meditation on past life" (213). Boos does not adequately theorise Rossetti's engagement with time, and while her claim seems right, it is important to add that Rossetti also uses the bull to reflect on the future and to call into question a linear notion of time. Stauffer writes, "The winged bull became an imperial *momento mori*, the centrepiece of various fascinating spectacles that fused Eastern otherness and Victorian anxieties about England's future past" (372). This "future past" is what I will primarily focus on here.

Rossetti did not encounter the artefact in its original location, as Hardy encountered the coin in Rome. Instead, he came upon workers unloading the statue as he departed the British Museum (or so the poem reports):

> Sighing I turned at last to win
> Once more the London dirt and din;
> And as I made the swing-door spin
> And issued, they were hoisting in
> A wingèd beast from Nineveh. (6-10)

Rossetti's encounter occurs in London, as he makes plain in the poem's first stanza, and this site, the new home of a relic of another time and place, is central to the poem's engagement with time. The "swing-door" of line eight underscores the image of the poet, the statue, London and Assyria all spinning together in the achronic space of the British Museum. The museum is emphatically of its present moment, celebrating the accomplishments and acquisitions of the nation, but it is the repository of so many objects from the past that it becomes a space confused in time.

In the midst of that space, Rossetti sets, as Hardy did, shadow as a marker of time. He uses the image of shadow to reflect on the artefact's dislocation and its past and present lives. After musing over the statue's creation and its subsequent burial for thousands of years, Rossetti writes:

> On London stones our sun anew
> The beast's recovered shadow threw.
> (No shade that plague of darkness knew,
> No light, no shade, while older grew
> By ages the old earth and sea.) (41-45)

The shadow was lost when the statue was buried, described in the parenthetical. These three lines acknowledge the period during which the artefact endured but was not subject to any interpretation: while Rossetti describes this period, his real interest lies in the rediscovery of the bull and its shadow. The recovered shadow recalls Hardy's coin, which rises from the soil after years buried and forgotten. Having no shadow suggests having no significance and also no location in time. When the statue is buried it ceases to exist for any interpreter: it has no past or present. Yet it was dormant. Layard woke the artefact up and brought it from oblivion into the light of the present where it casts a shadow, first in Assyria where it was excavated and then in London where it will be displayed. With the shadow shining anew on this object, it regains a relationship to time.

The statue survives from the past – "from their dead past thou liv'st alone" (48), but it means differently than it did – "and still thy shadow is thine own" (49). The shadow is made from the sun shining on the artefact in the present; however, Rossetti imagines that the shadow is identical to what it was long ago: "this shadow has been shed the same" (56). Thus there is an achronic quality to the interplay between sun and artefact: the shadow is constant even as it is produced only in the moment and determined by the precise position of the sun in the here and now. Rossetti imagines Sennacherib kneeling to pray in the shadow of the bull, and he observes that only last year, Christians knelt to pray in the same shadow. That shadow will now fall on "school-foundations in the act / of holiday" (76-77) as they visit the statue in the museum. The shadow is for Rossetti what music was for Hardy in "Rome: On the Palatine." It collapses time.

Rossetti highlights the collapse of temporal order and linear time when he writes of "all relics here together" in the museum, a jumble of archaeological debris, all taken out of time:

> Why, of those mummies in the room
> Above, there might indeed have come
> One out of Egypt to thy home,
> An alien. Nay, but were not some
> Of these thine own 'antiquity?'
> And now, – they and their gods and thou
> All relics here together (101-107)

The museum brings together archaeological remains from assorted times and places, and the museum itself becomes a place of anachronic encounters. The artefacts bump into one another across the boundaries of period and place, and visitors experience time jumbled together, displayed by artefacts who resist linearity.

Rossetti extends this temporal jumble into the future when he asks the central question of the poem: "some may question which was first, / Of London or of Nineveh" (169-70). That is, just as present visitors to the museum confuse the timeline, not knowing whether Egypt or Assyria came first, future visitors to the British Museum may not know whether the British Empire predated the Assyrian Empire; they may not know of which culture the bull god is a relic. Indeed, Rossetti imagines that it could even be taken at some future time by the imperial forces of a latter day empire to another place altogether:

> So may he stand again; till now,
> In ships of unknown sail and prow,
> Some tribe of the Australian plough
> Bear him afar, – a relic now
> Of London, not of Nineveh! (176-80)

Of course, Rossetti is not indulging in some futuristic aimless musing. The statue is now a thing of London; it casts its shadow there. When archaeologists come from the future, they will have to contend with the hodgepodge of artefacts in museums. Like Catherine Crawford, they will interpret objects as palimpsests with several cultures carving (literally or figuratively) significance into their surfaces. The bull god, then, is not an object from the past, signifying the past, and standing apart from the present or the future. It is a thing onto which time collapses: it is from the past but it is also of the present and will be of the future. It lives in all time as its unchanging shadow shows, whether it is cast in Assyria or London or Australia.

The final poet to be considered here is Emmeline Fisher. Fisher wrote a handful of poems under her maiden name and then published a volume, *Poems*, in 1856 under her married name of Hinxman. She was not well known during her lifetime nor afterwards. Her greatest poetic claim was that her mother was Wordsworth's cousin, and he wrote several letters attesting to her poetic abilities.[6] On the strength of that connection, she was invited to write a new version of the national anthem for Queen Victoria's coronation. Her anthem was not chosen or published at that time, but the twelve-year-old Fisher did receive a gift of a writing set from the young queen, and the story of the girl who wrote a new national anthem appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1910. In short, Fisher has achieved little fame or notice.

However, she played an interesting part in the excavation of Silbury Hill, a prehistoric mound in Wiltshire, not far from Stonehenge and Avebury.

Archaeologists and local dignitaries believed that treasure would be found within Silbury Hill, and so John Merewhether, the Dean of Hereford, organised an excavation to tunnel into the hill in 1849. This effort achieved a fair amount of recognition in the press, and a crowd was assembled for the opening of the hill on August 3. It is presumed that Emmeline Fisher was in the group. In any event, she wrote a poem commemorating the occasion. The opening of the hill was most notable for the disappointing fact that it revealed absolutely nothing within. The hill was devoid of any archaeological artefacts whatsoever. Thus, the opening of Silbury Hill was a planned encounter – the excavation was elaborate, lengthy in duration, and much publicised – that failed. No artefact rose from the past to challenge assumptions about time.

Fisher's poem, "Lines, Suggested by the Opening Made in Silbury Hill, August 3rd, 1849," was published in 1854 in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*. Fisher's "Lines" acknowledge the absence of an archaeological encounter and then imagine what might have been. Fisher begins by asking that their forefathers forgive them for intruding in the site, and then she describes a vision of one of these men leading them into the tunnel: "Hark, as we move, / Runs no stern whisper through the narrow vault? / Flickers no shape across our torch-light pale, / With backward beckoning arm?" (4-7).[7] Fisher's use of rhetorical questions raises the possibility of a "shape" flickering across their path but at once negates the possibility. She asserts absolutely that there is no one there: "No, all is still" (7). In the next line, she laments, "O that it were not!" (9), and later she wishes that, "science, could call back thy history lost, / Green Pyramid of the plains, from far-ebbed Time!" (10-11). She goes on to imagine an encounter, so while the archaeological excavation of Silbury Hill revealed nothing, within the fictive space of the poem, Fisher uses the site to stage an encounter with a yellow-haired "zealous" Savage engaged in funereal rites (14-22). Because there are no artefacts, the poet has license to invent a character and to craft an encounter not with an object but with a man from another time. For Fisher, the absence of archaeological remains creates an opportunity to set aside the mundane reality of potsherds in favour of fantastical visions of noble forefathers.

But Fisher's imaginary savage is not the only archaeological encounter in relation to Silbury Hill. When the excavation failed to uncover any evidence to warrant further activity, the hill was closed up, but before the tunnels were sealed, Richard Falkner, a historian and archaeology enthusiast who had been involved with the excavation, arranged to bury within the hill a stoneware pot filled with clippings about the site, including some that recounted debates about the hill's purpose and others that documented the excavation of the site. This time capsule also contained *The Devises and Wiltshire Gazette* for September 20, 1849, three coins, a Bible Society poster, and Emmeline Fisher's poem. The jar was buried in the hill on September 25th, 1849, and it remained there until it was uncovered by archaeologists again attempting an excavation of the site in 1969.[8] Thus, the most compelling archaeological encounter associated with Silbury Hill is the encounter with Fisher's poem, which could not describe an artefact as there was none, but which itself became an archaeological artefact.

Much more literally than Hardy's poems which use diction and structure to echo strata or "The Burden of Nineveh" which arguably has a literary kinship with Rossetti's exhumed notebook, Fisher's poem is emphatically an archaeological object. The encounter with this poem brings to life the hopes of a young woman who might

78

have found her forefathers in Silbury Hill and the disappointment that nothing remained to raise the past in that place. Yet, it acts as a reminder that even without material objects, archaeology inspired poets like Fisher to construct a vision of the past based on fragments of imagination. Fisher hoped to meet her zealous savage in the tunnels of Silbury Hill, and she did, because she wrote the poem and set down on paper the possibility of that meeting. The savage's beckoning arm, even if it is only a figment of her imagination, is another image for the coming together of past and present. And, in effect, Fisher joins him in the past because her poem becomes the artefact that was not found and is sealed within the hill like the funereal remains she imagines. She responds to his beck and lies down in the hill to await archaeologists of the future. She breaks down any division between poetry and archaeology as her "Lines" are an archaeological artefact. Fisher offers a final model of time collapsing: instead of bringing the past into the present, the present goes quietly into the past to become the archaeological remains of the future.

When Hardy offers the bold claim that "Time seemed fiction," he articulates a changed philosophy of time. Past, present and future might co-exist, and archaeology, more than any other discipline, offers evidence of this anachronism. When Hardy encounters a coin, Rossetti faces a bull, and Fisher crafts an encounter for the archaeologist or poet of the future, they all interpret the artefact less as a signifier of a particular time and more as a signifier of the collapse of time. The archaeological object endures from its origin in the past into a life of new meaning in the present, and, as a palimpsest, the object folds time back on itself. Poets who depict archaeological encounters seize those moments to craft monuments to a vision of time that celebrates the power of the poet to see all time at once.

Notes

1. Several scholars have done interesting work on Hardy's use of archaeology in England (See Andrew Radford and Bharat Tandon), but very little attention has been directed at the poems that rose out of his brief experience in Italy. Indeed, archaeology in Hardy's poetry has been virtually ignored by Hardy scholars. Exceptions include Ian Ousby and Bert Hornback.

2. Even though the coin reveals Europe's history, the coin's history is not of particular interest to Hardy. It is worth noting that some writers were interested in narratives of objects' lives. In *Portable Property*, John Plotz mentions one such narrative that offers the autobiography of a coin, *Aureus: Or, the Life and Opinions of a Sovereign* (1824).

3. For more on how digging for the future led to the past in Victorian London, see Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians*.

4. I am grateful to the staff at the British Library for making Hardy's copy of this book available to me.

5. Unless otherwise indicated, I will refer here to the 1870 version of the poem.

6. Jeffrey Cane Robinson has argued that Wordsworth's poem "Lyre! Though Such Power do in thy Magic Live" (1842) was likely written about Emmeline Fisher, not his sister Dorothy as generally presumed (141). Fisher was visiting Rydall Mount at the time of the poem's composition, and Wordsworth's letters show that he attended with some care to Fisher's poetic abilities, though he eventually suggested she should not write as doing so would distract her from proper female concerns (Masson 882).

7. I am quoting from the manuscript of the poem held at the Alexander Keiller Museum rather than from the published version which has some slight variations.

8. The extant contents of the jar are held in the archives of the Alexander Keiller Museum at Avebury. I am grateful to the museum staff for providing access to these materials, especially Fisher's manuscript. I would also like to thank Bucknell University for the funding to visit this archive. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Brian Edwards whose kindness and thorough research made Fisher and all those associated with the Silbury excavation come alive for me.

Works Cited

Baedeker, K. *Italy. Handbook for Travellers. Second Part: Central Italy and Rome*. 9th ed. London: Dulau and Co., 1886.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The System of Collecting." Trans. Roger Cardinal. *The Cultures of Collecting*. Ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal. London: Reaktion Books, 1994. 97-115.

Beer, Gillian. "Hardy: the After-Life and the Life Before." *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*. Ed. Phillip Mallett. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 18-30.

---. "Hardy and Decadence." *Celebrating Thomas Hardy: Insights and Appreciations*. Ed. Charles Pettit. London: Macmillan, 1996. 90-102.

Boos, Florence Saunders. *The Poetry of Dante G. Rossetti: A Critical Reading and Source Study*. Paris: Mouton, 1976.

Crawford, Catherine Lyon. "Collecting, Defacing, Reinscribing (and Otherwise Performing) Memory in the Ancient World." *Negotiating the Past in the Past: Identity, Memory, and Landscape in Archaeological Research*. Ed. Norman Yoffee. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2007. 11-42.

Fisher, Emmeline. "Lines, Suggested by the Opening Made in Silbury Hill, August 3rd, 1849." MS. Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury, UK.

Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891*. New York: Macmillan, 1928.

Hardy, Thomas. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Ed. Alan Manford. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.

---. *Poems of the Past and the Present*. London: Harper and Brothers, 1902.

---. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. James Gibson. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976. 430.

Hinxman, Neville. "Emmeline Fisher, a Forgotten Wiltshire Poet." *The Hatcher Review* 37 (1994): 16-30.

Hornback, Bert C. *The Metaphor of Chance: Vision and Technique in the Works of Thomas Hardy*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1971.

Masson, Rosaline. "An 'Inspired Little Creature' and the Poet Wordsworth." *Fortnightly Review* 1 November 1910: 874-89.

Ousby, Ian. "Past and Present in Hardy's 'Poems of Pilgrimage.'" *Victorian Poetry* 17 (1979): 51-64.

Pitts, Mike. "A Victorian Time Capsule and Emmeline Fisher's Poem on Silbury Hill." *British Archaeology* 98 (2008). Web. 17 July 2012.

Plotz, John. *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008.

Radford, Andrew. *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

Rees, Joan. *The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Modes of Self-Expression*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Trans. Kathleen Blarney and David Pellauer. Vol. 3. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.

Robinson, Jeffrey C. *The Current of Romantic Passion*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. "The Burden of Nineveh." *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. *The Rossetti Archive: Distributed by IATH and NINES*, n.d. Web. 31 December 2010.

Stauffer, Andrew M. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Burdens of Nineveh." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.2 (2005): 369-94.

---. "Dante Rossetti's 'The Burden of Nineveh': Further Excavations" *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 16 (2007): 45-58.

Tandon, Bharat. "'Among the Ruins': Narrative Archaeology in *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*" *Studies in the Novel* 35 (2003): 471-89.

Zimmerman, Virginia. *Excavating Victorians*. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2008.