

The Return of the Native has proven to be a great example of the use of pictorial art in literature. Having been created in the middle of the second half of the 19th century, it became a mirror of the contemporary development of art. Not only does it use some principles from Academism, drawing heavily on the powerful impressions elicited by the sublime and the picturesque, but also it is inspired by Impressionism and a completely new point of view on the subject portrayed. Hardy is also influenced by the baroque play of light and shade, as well as by the symbolism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Reading the novel is like going through a gallery where the subjects of all paintings of different styles are related to one plot. Hardy has shown us several ways of incorporating a clear visual image carrying a meaning into a text. Firstly, it can be a direct reference to a picture or a painter, which helps Hardy to create a more detailed image of a scene in the reader's head, in case he or she knows the picture or the painter. Secondly, he uses methods of artistic styles in portrayal of characters and scenes to enhance particular qualities. Most striking is his obsession with lighting, which binds the structure of the novel together. It allows for a very original style of writing that leaves a long-lasting impression with the reader. Moreover, light and its absence emphasizes the central theme of the novel, the contrast between illusion and reality. The way a scene is lit influences the way characters perceive the world around them as well as the way they behave. Frequent references to light suggest a strong influence of impressionism, but sometimes verge on the point of being melodramatic, which is in accordance with the plot. Thirdly, the novel serves as a vehicle for conveying Hardy's notions on art and aesthetics, especially on the development of the category of the beautiful.

Studying Hardy's background in pictorial arts and aesthetics made me more aware of the development of artistic styles as well as their interconnectedness with literature. The appealing quality of The Return of the Native rests on the fact that the extent to which Hardy employs pictorial arts in his novels is so large that it incites one to delve deeper into this aspect of his writing and find out the reason why art is employed in particular scenes.