

The Early Life and Later Years of Thomas Hardy: An Argument for a New Edition

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Abstract

This article calls for a new edition of the discredited *Early Life* and *Later Years of Thomas Hardy (Life)*, written substantially by Hardy but with significant additions and deletions by Florence Hardy and J.M. Barrie, and published in 1928 and 1930 under Florence Hardy's name; and makes an argument for the precedence of this edition over Michael Millgate's influential 1984 Hardy-only edition of the *Life and Work of Thomas Hardy (Life and Work)*. The article argues that the Millgate edition mobilizes two mutually validating conceptions of autonomous authorship: an editorial conception of the primacy of authorial intention; and a cultural conception of the primacy of the autobiographical subject. In response, the article retraces the history of the composition of the *Life*, finding that Hardy's secret effort to control the execution of his posthumous biography was not consistent with a disguised autobiographical intention. The *Life* declares the relational nature of the self, and represents that self formally and stylistically, as well as in its assumption of shared authorship.

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In 1984 Macmillan published *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (hereafter *Life and Work*), described by its editor, Michael Millgate, as '[a]n edition on new principles of the materials previously drawn upon for *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892-1928* and published over the name of Florence Emily Hardy'.¹ Those materials were the surviving typescripts and associated documents of a work written in the main by Hardy and also originally entitled *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*; but edited and completed after his death in accordance with his written instructions by Florence and the playwright J.M. Barrie, who prepared it for publication in two volumes (as Hardy had anticipated) as the *Early Life* and *Later Years* (hereafter *Life*).² The Hardy bibliographer

Richard Purdy reported as far back as 1940 that even a cursory examination of the typescripts revealed the secret of the real authorship of Florence's *Life*.³ Purdy deduced that Hardy handwrote first drafts, casting himself into the third person, and passed them on to his wife to type before destroying them and most of the notebooks and other documents on which they were based. When corrections and additions were called for, Hardy made them on the second of two carbon copies of the typescript, which Florence then transcribed onto the first carbon for her husband to check and perhaps change again; the final stage was to have Florence transcribe *those* corrections to the top copy. Thereafter, any further changes were added either in her hand or in a disguised calligraphic hand of Hardy's. This elaborate and finally unsuccessful deception left Millgate with 'an extremely complex editorial problem' (*LW*, p.xxx): how to produce a definitive scholarly edition of such an unusual work? His solution was to extricate 'that *layer* of the heavily-corrected typescript which appears to embody Hardy's final decisions and intentions' (*LW*, p.xxxi); his aim, to identify where possible 'Mrs Hardy's independent additions and deletions' (*LW*, p.xxx), remove or restore them, and thus supersede what was 'a work of shared or at any rate successive authorship'—the Hardy-Florence-Barrie *Life*—with 'an essentially Hardyian work'—the *Life and Work* (*LW*, p.xxxi).

The publication of Millgate's edition has had three important effects on Hardy studies. First, although there were some initial reservations about it, it has become the standard edition. The work published under Florence Hardy's name—whether in the once-familiar green volumes or consolidated into the single-volume *Life of Thomas Hardy*⁴—is now close to obsolete as a source for critics and biographers.⁵ Second, by a process of scholarly editing, the claim in Purdy's *Bibliographical Study* (1954) that the *Life* was 'in reality an autobiography', a claim complicated by the fact that Florence and Barrie had together contributed somewhat more than 'a few editorial touches', was made good at last by a complete editorial overhaul of the text.⁶ The 'largely documentary character of the work',

Millgate cautioned, ‘constitutes a challenge to any assumption that [Florence’s] “Life” can or should be read, directly and without qualification, as an autobiography’. Only a reconstructed *Life and Work*, ‘an entirely Hardyian text’, could, he concluded, confidently lay claim to being ‘an autobiography’ (*LW*, p.xxvii). With very few exceptions, the *Life and Work* is now routinely described and used as the authoritative text of Hardy’s autobiography; the *Life* discredited and abandoned as the unreliable text of a fraudulent biography.⁷

As a consequence of the Millgate edition, thirdly, a particular narrative of Hardy’s character and motives has gained almost universal currency. It is best known from Robert Gittings’s ground-breaking, iconoclastic two-volume biography, published in 1975 and 1978.⁸ The *Life* was Gittings’s major source of facts about Hardy’s life, and (after the writing itself) the single most important collection of his ideas, opinions, and reflections. But it also proved, as Millgate later observed, ‘a formidable, sometimes absolute, barrier to knowledge’.⁹ In the absence of evidence, Gittings became suspicious of Hardy’s motives in suppressing that evidence. Here is someone who appears not to care about posterity, Gittings suggests, but who ghost-wrote his own autobiography in order to control his public image by censoring and manipulating information: confirmation, we might say, of Philippe Lejeune’s famous dictum that ‘it is impossible for the autobiographical vocation and the passion for anonymity to coexist in the same person’.¹⁰ Hardy is no ‘pale forewarned victim’ who, ‘with every track covered, every paper burnt and every letter unanswered, will, in the tower of art, the invisible granite, stand without a sally, the siege of all the years’, as Henry James would have it.¹¹ This is a man with something to hide. The *Life* is of a piece with the life, a narrative of ‘*petit-bourgeois* wish-fulfillment’, as Peter Widdowson succinctly puts it, where Hardy cannot speak of his low-born origins and so presents an image of a ‘well-born man of letters, familiar with the noble and famous, and above the pettiness of ambition, social climbing, and the market-place—the image of “the poet”’.¹²

Ironically—and appropriately, given Hardy’s lifelong delight in the play of aesthetic concealment and deception—the very exposure of this covertly self-authored work only served to increase its fictionality. As more than one critic has observed, the *Life* is an exemplary Hardyian ‘series of seemings’.¹³ Once we know that its ‘apparent deficiencies’, its disjointed form and miscellaneous contents, are actually ‘the product of calculation rather than naivety’,¹⁴ we are free to see it, as Widdowson does, as ‘Hardy’s last “novel”’, where he ‘creates a “character”—a fictional other—who develops as the novelist directs him to and who “turns out” correctly, as the novelist wishes him to be perceived’.¹⁵ This argument can be sustained because Widdowson collapses quite different senses of the word ‘fiction’ into one—the fiction of Florence’s authorship, the fiction of Hardy’s public self-image, and the fictionality of all (auto)biography—in the service of his radical critical reconstitution of Hardy and the meanings of Wessex. Nevertheless, here as elsewhere in his work Hardy is, as Widdowson shows, ‘strategically experimenting with forms and practices which ... crack open the discourses of realism’,¹⁶ discourses which are fundamental to the practice of autobiography, defined by Lejeune as a ‘*retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*’.¹⁷

It could be claimed that Millgate has no interest in the fictionality or truthfulness of the *Life*, and that his concern with its authenticity is strictly editorial, and begins and ends with substantives and accidentals. Yet the authority of the *Life and Work* depends upon two mutually validating conceptions of autonomous authorship: an editorial conception of the primacy of authorial intention; and a cultural conception of the primacy of the autobiographical subject. The *Life* is unsatisfactory to Millgate because, although it is undoubtedly ‘faithful to Hardy’s memory’, it does not always speak with his ‘own voice’ (*LW*, p.xxvi). Florence Hardy and Barrie had the best intentions, but they were ‘ultimately

misguided' in their 'well-meaning ... attempts to edit [Hardy's] text in the interests of presenting him as other than he was' (*LW*, p.xxvii). But does it follow that Hardy's own words give us access to Hardy's own voice, or present him 'as he was'? The editorial act, for Millgate, is aimed at producing a text that 'can be unequivocally read and accepted as an integral part of the Hardy canon' (*LW*, p.xxvi) and simultaneously at restoring that 'autonomous self so deeply ingrained in Western theories of life-writing',¹⁸ unique and separate.

My aim in what follows is to show that Millgate's project is misguided. The *Life* is a special case. It demands to be read and accepted as an integral part of the Hardy canon *just as it is* (needing, as Millgate remarks, 'only minor correction here and there' [*LW*, p.xxx]). There are good bibliographical and critical reasons for doing so. To begin with, the *Life and Work* cannot be said to embody the 'final decisions and intentions' of a man who intended it to be finished by another or others—not, at least, in any but the narrowly editorial sense of 'intention'. And even in that narrow sense, this is by no means a straightforward example of 'eclectic' editing, the aim of which is to reconstruct authorial intention from multiple witnesses. Millgate draws on the principles laid down by W.W. Greg and Fredson Bowers, choosing as his copy-text the closest thing to an authorial manuscript, and excluding all corrections and revisions except those demonstrated to be authorial.¹⁹ This is a widely practised editorial approach. In this case, however, the reconstruction of a "text that never was" (but by implication, *ought* to have been in the best of all possible worlds, since it constructed authorial intention in despite of the testimony of individual documents)²⁰ is in fact the reconstruction of a text that never *would have been*. Hardy well knew that the work would have to be finished, edited, and seen through the press by others. In a 'Private Memorandum' subtitled 'Information for Mrs. Hardy in the Preparation of a Biography', he wrote explicitly:

The facts to which she has access ... are not enjoined to be included every one in the volume, if any should seem to be indiscreet, belittling, monotonous, trivial, provocative, or in other ways unadvisable; nor are they enjoined to be exclusive of other details that may be deemed necessary' ...

The facts here given can be supplemented by the insertion of some more of my letters of an interpretative kind at their several dates, if wished; or not, if otherwise.²¹

On the evidence of this memorandum, the typescript as it stood at the time of Hardy's death represents a special case of what in textual criticism has been described as 'a consciously unfinished state of intention'.²² Just as Hardy expected printers to normalize spellings, capitalization, and punctuation,²³ so too did he expect his wife to finish the narrative, or employ someone else to finish it, making any changes she or they felt were necessary.

What we have here is not a conflict between different philosophical positions informing the production of a scholarly edition. Nor is it a dispute over whether the *Life and Work* is better or worse for being a purely Hardyian text: whether, as J.B. Bullen argues, 'Florence was not entirely wrong to edit out the long lists of aristocrats' (judging them to be 'unadvisable'), or whether it is to be regretted that 'ideas and anecdotes which bear upon Hardy's more private and inner world have been removed'.²⁴ What is at issue is the way textual scholarship has been used to distort, and set limits to, our understanding of one of Hardy's most important works by using principles of intentionality to impose 'an autonomous, free-standing model of selfhood'²⁵ upon a work which presents and valorises quite different models of selfhood and self-writing. To return to Lejeune's early definition, Hardy *was* a real person who did write a prose narrative concerning his own existence; but his focus is not his individual life or the story of his personality. Two markedly passive activities dominate the *Life*: observing and listening. What they register it is not the

singularity of the creative life, but its inescapable *relationality*.²⁶ Hardy is sympathetic and responsive to the lives and life-stories of others, and under no illusions about his own powers of self-determination. As Donald Davie recognized, Hardy suffered ‘from having to depend too heavily on his own will, his own resolve to outwit circumstance and overcome it’,²⁷ because he knew how powerful circumstance was—it is the great life-force of the *Life*—and he knew the futility of trying to impose oneself upon one’s own life. Indeed, Hardy feared that he was not able to hold his own in the world at all,²⁸ and many of his actions, and much of his writing, represent a dialectical struggle between the claims of the sovereign individual in liberal modernity (embodied in the successful public man whose achievements as a creative artist attest to his uniqueness) and the dependent relational self, unable and unwilling to venture very far from the creative sources of family and community. The Millgate *Life and Work*, I will argue, suppresses that relational self and its struggles by insisting on the primacy of sole authorship and on the work’s status as autobiography, and by editing out the co-authors of the author’s life, whose role in its creation remains a vital part of its meaning.

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Hardy had been thinking about writing down, or having his second wife write down, some recollections of his early life since at least the latter part of 1915. In December that year the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, Sydney Cockerell, who had met Hardy in 1911 and arranged for some of his manuscripts to be deposited in major libraries in Britain and the USA, urged him to ‘write something down about yourself—and especially about that youthful figure ... of whom you told me you could think with almost complete detachment’.²⁹ Cockerell’s petition was prompted by what he knew of Hardy’s personal circumstances at this time. The month before, Mary Hardy, the sister to whom Hardy was closest, had died at the age of seventy-three. It was a severe blow: Mary was, Hardy wrote to Cockerell, ‘almost my only companion in childhood’.³⁰ Still chronically grief-stricken and guilt-stricken from

Emma Hardy's sudden death almost exactly three years earlier, this death of a favourite brought back old memories, some happy and some ill-omened.³¹ Even more balefully, it foreshadowed the approaching end of the entire Hardy family line (all three siblings were unmarried and childless, and Hardy's younger brother Henry was in 'a precarious state of health'³²); and the approaching end of Hardy's own life. Compounding these griefs, too, Mary's death seemed to intimate, in those darkest days of the war, an end to much else. It was 'a gloomy time', as Hardy put it to Cockerell, 'in which the world, having like a spider climbed to a certain height, seems slipping back to where it was long ago'.³³ His favourite cousin and chosen heir Frank George had been killed in the debacle of the Gallipoli landings in August, and neither Hardy nor Florence 'ever expected that we should defeat Germany'.³⁴ What that meant to Hardy may be inferred from a propaganda piece in a British newspaper pasted into one of his memoranda notebooks in 1915. From 'The German War Book', it commanded German soldiers to 'destroy the total intellectual and material resources' of the enemy State.³⁵ In early 1916, fearing the threat of a new Dark Age—and already in the 1890s he had foreseen in the rise of a strong proletariat 'the utter ruin of art and literature' (*EL*, p. 309)—Hardy arranged for Cockerell, whose contacts in archives would have proved invaluable in the probable event of a German victory, to join Florence as his literary executor.³⁶

Hardy had other reasons to fear posterity, too. He dreaded, Florence wrote, 'the person who comes here & goes away to write down things': autograph hunters, journalists and interviewers, academics, even friends.³⁷ In January 1916 he learned that his old friend Edward Clodd, the banker and anthropologist, intended publishing his memoirs. According to Florence—she was herself a rich source of news and gossip from Max Gate, who was happy to blame Clodd for it a month or two later³⁸—Hardy was 'horrified' at this prospect. He had believed Clodd 'would be perfectly safe—a man whom he trusted implicitly', but 'Now he

finds that he has been keeping a record of all conversations etc—& they will probably be published. Two other men of his acquaintance (friends I might say) also keep diaries & it is generally supposed that they will publish their reminiscences too'.³⁹ Hardy's fears were unfounded. But as he retreated farther and farther out of 'the active world',⁴⁰ the active world came in pursuit of him, and he was passionately determined to protect his privacy. The publication of a biographical chapter in a study by F.A. Hedgcock in Paris in 1911, *Thomas Hardy: penseur et artiste*, enraged him with its impertinence, inaccuracy, and invasiveness, and with its persistent refusal—the refusal of so many readers and commentators—to recognize 'the *key* to the books—i.e. the verse'.⁴¹

Although a constitutionally backward-looking man, Hardy's mood was so intensely introspective in 1915 that the idea of publishing his own memoirs must have seemed a trivial distraction—an occupation for retired bankers—especially when his poetic imagination was being so vigorously renewed by these onslaughts of personal sorrow, age, and cultural despair. 'My reminiscences: no, never!', he exclaimed in horror to George Douglas at the end of 1915 when he was working on many of the autobiographical poems that would form the emotional core of his next collection, *Moments of Vision* ('almost wholly the product of the years 1913-16', according to Purdy).⁴² When that collection was nearly ready to be sent to Macmillan in 1917—its working title had been *Moments from the Years*, indicating more explicitly its autobiographical character—he wrote to Siegfried Sassoon: 'I don't know how I should stand the suspense of this evil time if it were not for the sustaining power of poetry'.⁴³

So why did Hardy yield to Florence's and Cockerell's requests for reminiscences some time in the first half of that year? The answer may be found in the title poem of *Moments of Vision*, which signals at the head of that volume Hardy's intention to pursue in verse what he had begun in the excoriating 'Poems of 1912-13': a lyric poetry of self-exposure. Gone is the familiar disclaimer of previous volumes that the lyrics were to be read as 'dramatic

monologues by different characters'.⁴⁴ This is a collection of intimate poems from the 'night hours of ache' (l.12), when, he writes (claiming the reader as his accomplice), 'we see ourselves' in a 'strange mirror' that penetrates right into our hearts 'like a dart' (l.7). The moment of vision is the moment of reckoning, the final chance for the 'mortal' to face his wounded self honestly, before death, so as to 'catch his last thoughts, whole life foul or fair' (l.19). Yet *how*, Hardy asks, is he to capture those last thoughts, that whole life? The mirror reflects them, but '—where?' (l.20): into memoir? verse? This is a question about the right form of self-writing for an old man haunted by ghosts from his past, who kneels at the brook, as he does in 'On a Midsummer Eve', and sees that 'faint figure' seeming 'to stand / Above me, with the bygone look' (7-8): himself as another.

Richard Purdy remarked in his authoritative bibliographical study of Hardy's texts that there was a 'noticeable pause in publication after *Moments of Vision*',⁴⁵ during which the first sorting of letters and papers took place, and the working habits and compositional shape of the *Life* evolved. But it is surely truer to say that there was a noticeable pause in Hardy's poetic output *only in retrospect*. That Hardy genuinely believed *Moments of Vision* would be his last book is attested in its elegiac two-poem 'Finale' (comprising 'The Coming of the End' and 'Afterwards', a characteristically Hardyian epitaph in which he wonders whether he has the right to hope even for a quotidian afterlife), and in remarks he made to Florence Henniker in a letter written in the winter of 1918: 'I begin to think I shall never present any more of my own poems to anybody'.⁴⁶ In that light, the *Life* assumes the character of a posthumous work. Old notebooks, letters, and papers, formerly trawled for new poems, are sorted and filed in readiness for the biography, which Hardy, however, finds himself writing—not as the 'posthumous visionary' of the poems, identified by Tim Armstrong in the wandering disembodied ghost-self,⁴⁷ but as someone else altogether, whose task is only to

preserve the life and work of ‘a dead man held on end’ by reading, sifting, and organizing documents and memories: all that would remain at the end of his life.⁴⁸

The eighteen typescript pages headed ‘Notes of Thomas Hardy’s Life./ by Florence Hardy. / (taken down in conversations etc.)’⁴⁹ which were completed by December 1917 are Hardy’s first attempt to represent himself as another in prose. They have the appearance of any conventional amateur family history employing the plain method—one no doubt redolent of Hardy’s own past—of passing on recollections by word of mouth. But that innocuous ‘etc.’ is revealing, for these notes form the nucleus of what would become the first part of the *Life*, and their easygoing reminiscent air belies the pains Hardy took with them from the very beginning: his deliberate cultivation of ‘the sound of the speaking voice’, which Virginia Woolf later noticed in the *Early Life*.⁵⁰ In late July 1917, Florence informed Cockerell: ‘I have been taking notes, but find them very difficult to do without constantly appealing to T.H. for verification, and he is now almost at the end of his present job—revising his notebooks (they are practically diaries)—and we are going to work together. At least that is what we propose doing. Man proposes—’.⁵¹ Florence was an expert note-taker and typist as well as an author and journalist. The difficulties she experienced with the dictation method, and the fact that Hardy was not in fact recounting leisurely stories by the fireside but engaging in what looks like a methodical process of re-reading and re-ordering his notebooks and diaries, indicate that the scale of the enterprise was far more ambitious (in September, for instance, she reports to Cockerell: ‘I have got as far as the time he started work in London, but a lot can be filled in’.⁵²

Early the following year, Florence warned Cockerell that ‘*on no account* must we mention the word “autobiography” or call [the ‘Notes’] “autobiographical”. If they are regarded as being of that nature I am perfectly convinced that they will be promptly destroyed T.H. declares that he would never write an autobiography the mere idea—or

suggestion—annoys him’.⁵³ This may simply mean that Hardy was more comfortable with the idea of reminiscences, because they connoted a certain rural informality and incompleteness, and belonged in a tradition of communal oral transmission. On the other hand, the project already seems much too systematic and inclusive for that, and it is likely Hardy would not regard it as autobiography for a number of other reasons. First, it was more like an initial tentative experiment in what would become the major undertaking of his wife’s literary executorship. Hardy’s overriding aim in setting out was not to write about his own life at all, in other words, but to prevent anyone else from doing so by tying the production of a ‘widow’s life’ to the execution of his will, in order to ensure that his papers did not fall into the wrong hands when he died.⁵⁴ The ‘Notes’ are a practical implementation of methods Hardy was trying out: a working model for the use of Florence or any other authorized person who would later take up the job. His intention was, as she notes, that they would work together; but they were both perfectly well aware that there was a reasonable likelihood of Hardy not living to see the job very far advanced (hence ‘Man proposes—’). It would then be finished by her and published after his death with the perfectly accurate description on its title page that it was ‘compiled largely from contemporary notes, letters, diaries, and biographical memoranda, as well as from oral information in conversations extending over many years’.

Hardy’s ‘Private Memorandum’ laying out instructions for the production of the book seems originally (at some point still quite early in the process) to have been a quasi-legal document in which Hardy assumed the voice of his literary executors to prescribe how the ‘facts here given’ were to be supplemented and ‘put into correct literary form, by an experienced writer and scholar’ working in collaboration with Mrs. Hardy or, for a fee, ghost-writing it for her.⁵⁵ What happened, of course, is that Hardy lived a further eleven years, and ended up applying to most of the rest of his notebooks, diaries and letters the methods he had developed in 1917 for Florence’s benefit: the routine of reading and sorting materials, revising and copying

excerpts from them, incorporating them into a biographical narrative, and burning them. Hardy thus achieved himself what he set out to have others do: produce a satisfactory record of the ‘facts of his career’ (*EL*, vii) based on documents vulnerable to misuse after his death, which should then be destroyed. He did not, of course, intend dying sooner than he did; but the self-authorship of the majority of the *Life* was, nonetheless, the unintended outcome of a seventy-seven year-old man not dying.

The work that Hardy found himself writing steadily through 1918 and 1919, as Germany was defeated and he went on living, quickly absorbed him with its formal problems and possibilities. His belief that ‘he could write objectively and dispassionately about his own younger self’ (*LW*, p.xix) was balanced by the knowledge that he was, after all, only laying the foundations for a work that others *must* finish sooner or later. Under those circumstances, the protagonist that took shape in the *Life* was not only a younger self but an already dead self, reconstructed from chance literary remains and scraps of remembered conversation. If that posthumous point of view was congenial to Hardy, so too was the sense that this was a job that needed doing well—thus, he ended up being the professional ghost-writer he had recommended his wife to employ after his death: the reliable ‘good hand’ commissioned by the overwhelmed widow to write the life of her eminent late husband.⁵⁶ Important, too, as time passed, were the almost Shandean circumstances of his accidental authorship: destroying old notes and letters even as he was writing and saving new ones to record the details of his ongoing daily life for later use; living on to use and destroy those and write new ones to take their place.

While experiments were being made into the best arrangement and presentation of those documents and memories, the Hardys read (together) a succession of biographies—mostly of poets: Morris, Swinburne, Keats, Shelley—with an eye to possible models.⁵⁷ Significantly, they also read Lytton Strachey’s notorious bestselling *Eminent Victorians*, with

its scathing dismissal of the ‘life and letters’ biographies that enshrined, or entombed, the Victorians:

Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead—who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the cortège of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism. One is tempted to suppose, of some of them, that they were composed by that functionary, as the final item of his job. The studies in this book are indebted, in more ways than one, to such works—works which certainly deserve the name of Standard Biographies.⁵⁸

The assembled narrative of Hardy’s ‘two fat volumes’—the majority of the work consists of interpolated first-person notes and letters authenticating and filling in the gaps in a reticent, deferential third-person narration of the subject’s life—is closely modelled on the conventions of the Standard Biography so derided by Strachey. The original biographical ‘Notes’ had been carefully crafted to imitate the tradition of orally transmitted family stories, but the *Life* demanded a different kind of artistry. Hardy had to establish a tone and style wholly consistent with Florence’s limited capabilities: he must begin as she meant to go on. For someone whose success as a novelist had been founded on his ability to make the most of unpromising conditions and materials—the demand for melodrama and incident in the commercial serial fiction market—and who relished the ‘art of concealing art’,⁵⁹ he quickly saw the artistic potential in the dogged fidelity of the amateur chronicle, with its ‘obligation to include’.⁶⁰

None of the biographies that he and Florence were reading in 1917 and 1918, written as they were by professional men of letters, exemplified the ‘widow’s biography’, that ‘worst of all the diseases of biography’ according to Hardy’s friend, Edmund Gosse. The most likely

example for Hardy was Frederic Maitland's *Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (1906), to which he had himself contributed letters and reminiscences from the 1870s, and from which he quotes back extensively in the *Life*.⁶¹ Maitland was a jurist and historian at Cambridge, a leading authority on the history of English law, and a lively writer, but he felt himself inadequate to the task that Stephen—the great biographer and critic, and editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*—had asked him to perform. Maitland accordingly began by explaining ‘why I turn my hand to work of a kind to which it is not accustomed’.⁶² Like Hardy, Stephen had been resistant to the idea of any biography—‘he did not care to tell everything even to those who were dearest to him’⁶³—and warned Maitland that he would give him ‘none of those narratives of inward events, conversations, or spiritual crises which give interest to some autobiographies’.⁶⁴ His dying request had been only that Maitland write ‘a short article or so’ based on the scant available materials.⁶⁵ Maitland found himself unable to ‘sum up a long life in a few pages, to analyse a character in a few sentences’, however, and decided to tackle a full-length work instead. And if ‘I am to write him at all’, he added, ‘I must use other words and other eyes than mine, more especially his own—which means that I shall copy a good many extracts from his letters, and report what has been told to me by his sister, his children, his pupils, and his friends’.⁶⁶

The purpose of these extracts is to do most of the work of the biography: to progress the narrative and reveal by reflection the character of a famously shy and cross-grained man. Their purpose in Hardy's *Life*, and their effect, is altogether different. Maitland relies on Strachey's ‘ill-digested masses of material’—entire chapters are strung together out of long letters, many of them by Stephen's friends and associates—and articulates them awkwardly with his framing narrative. By contrast, Hardy inserts hundreds of short journal and notebook entries, using their dated headings to fix their place in the narrative, usually without introduction or explicit transition.⁶⁷ The inverted commas and first-person pronoun encourage

us to view them as a series of innocently autobiographical revelations (innocent in the sense that they were never intended for publication, which is part of their meaning). They authenticate and authorize the reticent widow's account of events, given in the third person, and complement the retrospective *res gestae* history of a public life and career: the career of the man of letters and man about town (and county town). In the staid conventions of the life-and-letters biography, the widow is the guardian of her husband's unguarded utterances: we are privileged to witness such flashes of the great man's mind as the great man's wife permits. Despite the promise of the unifying 'I', however, these excerpts do not offer us direct insight into Hardy's inner life; nor do they constitute a sense of his continuous identity. If they disrupt and distance the public self of the third-person narrative, it is not by interpolating a confessional counter-narrative, but by alternating between generically diverse kinds of text: aphorisms, observations, arguments, anecdotes, and bare autobiographical and historical facts. As many critics have observed, the resultant work 'eludes the established categories of autobiographical description, memoir, apology, confession'.⁶⁸

There have been many attempts to explain this monadic chain of memoranda by reference to Hardy's aesthetic and philosophical concerns. Like Hardy's poems, they are a 'series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates' which 'will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring'⁶⁹: 'passing thoughts only, temporarily jotted down ... for consideration, and not as permanent conclusions'.⁷⁰ Their present tense gives them a vital immediacy, in striking contrast to the official past-tense narrative of the dead public man. The miscellaneous contents of a receptive, affective consciousness, hyper-sensitive to changing environments and the passing of time, they do, truly enough, leave us with the Hardyan sense of a life only intermittently (or belatedly) meaningful, and a life story constructed out of the competing and often conflicting assertions of other selves.

Hardy's imagination, Virginia Woolf suggested, worked in just this way 'when it was most at its ease',

flashing its light fitfully and capriciously like a lantern swinging in a hand, now on a rose-bush, now on a tramp frozen in the hedge. He has none of that steady and remorseless purpose that people would attribute to him. It was by chance that he saw things, not by design.⁷¹

What Woolf calls 'steady and remorseless purpose' is 'the cruel self-driving' of Donald Davie's analysis,⁷² the dogged will of a man who always felt the tenuousness of the human hold upon life, and the determining force of chance, and the lowliness and obscurity of his own birth. The *Life* is accordingly reluctant to assert or assume the power of self-determination, or to take for granted the autonomy of self-writing subject: the right to say, in John Paul Eakin's words, '*I write my story; I say who I am; I create my self*'.⁷³ As Eakin argues, drawing on feminist critiques of life-writing, many so-called autobiographies in fact describe 'a relational model of identity, developed collaboratively with others, often family members'.⁷⁴ Relational life stories characteristically focus on other people's stories; on 'the *already* established ways in which we *must* talk in our attempts to *account* for ourselves';⁷⁵ and on the intrasubjective dialogues of the self with its others. Hardy's interspersed first-person fragments within a framing third-person point of view naturalizes that mode of intrasubjective dialogue in the *Life*. The conventions of the widow's biography, on the other hand, emphasize the factitiousness of the narrative of the autonomous public self and the ultimate interchangeability (and hence non-singularity) of such narratives. Finally, if Hardy tells his own story as if it were someone else's story in the *Life*, he is also quick to displace his own story with other people's stories.

This is most apparent in the substantial fragments interleaved from other life narratives: Emma's 'Recollections', most notably, and the numerous reminiscences, anecdotes, legends,

and tall stories Hardy incorporates from his family and community, especially in the early chapters. But the *Life* goes much further than this, offering itself as a venue for an entire community of stories. Consider, for example, chapters viii and ix of the *Early Life*, which cover the period of *The Return of the Native*, when the Hardys were living in Sturminster Newton in Dorset (their ‘happiest time’ [EL, p.156]) and then Upper Tooting in London (where ‘their troubles began’ [EL, p.163]). Less than half of this two-chapter sample is taken up directly with the narration of biographical events. In a small number of entries Hardy pursues a line of thinking about art (on ‘the beauty of association’ [EL, p.157-8]) and poetry (‘The ultimate aim of the poet should be to touch our hearts’ [EL, p.167]) which will continue through these middle years of novel-writing. Elsewhere he sketches some sharply observed social vignettes (‘In railway carriage a *too* statuesque girl’ [EL, p.167]) and characteristic figures in the landscape (‘The light of the lamp at the bottom of the town shone on the reins in Henry’s hands, and showed them glistening with ice’ [EL, p.163-4]). He records observations of a philosophical kind, including the annual ‘New Year’s thought’ (EL, p.163), as well as fleeting meditations (‘The irritating necessity of conforming to rules which in themselves have no virtue’ [EL, p.146]).

By far the most common type of entry, however, is the recounted story. In the course of these two chapters Hardy retells no fewer than twenty anecdotes attributed to a variety of people, including his father and sister, Dorset characters, literary connections, and casual friends, all of them painstakingly written down in his notebooks. Again and again, the memoranda fragments begin with a phrase like: ‘A story has been told me’ (EL, p.147). In the course of some fifteen pages, we learn what ‘Mr. Warry says’ (EL, p.147), what ‘his father told them’ (EL, p.149), what ‘Mr Young says’ (EL, p.150), what ‘James Bushrod of Broadmayne saw’ (EL, p.153), what ‘Mr. Dashwood says’ (EL, p.154), what ‘Mr. George Smith informs me’ (EL, p.158), what ‘Mr. Alexander Macmillan ... told me’ (EL, p.158),

what 'Mrs. Hardy used to relate' (*EL*, p.161), what 'Father says' (*EL*, p.164), what 'A villager says' (*EL*, p.165), what 'I am told' (*EL*, p.165), and what 'Mary writes to tell me' (*EL*, p.165). The cumulative effect of these remembered acts of hearing or reading other peoples' stories is not to show what a good listener Hardy was (although that is clearly so), nor even to show how important these apparently ephemeral stories remained for him (the fact that he thought they were still worth writing down). What matters is that, although they provide a context in which to embed the onlooking subject—declaring: this is the kind of story that appeals to me, this is the kind of thing I think interesting, important, worth preserving—they have the effect of casting Hardy back into the deep shadows thrown by the lantern swinging in his hand, as if he were, in truth, a spectre 'not solid enough to influence [his] environment' (*EL*, p.275).

In the same way, too, Hardy shares his narrative with complete strangers, unnamed and unknown people caught at some incongruous moment and fixed in place with the vivid economy of the poet's eye: an anxious schoolmaster whose pupils' excursion to the seaside is ruined by August rains (*EL*, p.169); a man skating warily around the edge of a pond even after the spring thaw has arrived (*EL*, pp.173-4); a shopwoman in Regent Street (*EL*, pp.183-4); the sounds and images of children dancing in the background of a skeleton that dangles in a window (*EL*, p.204). Here, we might be tempted to say, are the moments of vision themselves—memories which 'succeed each other', as Woolf remarked, 'like poems, visualized and complete'.⁷⁶ But this is no 'strange mirror' to 'catch his last thoughts, whole life foul or fair' ('Moments of Vision', ll.18-19). No self-reflection is implied in these short paragraphs: we do not sense Hardy inviting us to notice how much he notices. These are the random memories of an old man, a partial and contingent view, rather than a history, of his subjective life.

The relational self and the relational life impinge on the bibliographical questions being debated here most emphatically in the overtly documentary character of the *Life*: the fact that this is not a narrated life-story but a compilation of other stories. The effect of the compilation method is exactly as Hardy predicted. It is almost impossible stylistically to distinguish those sections written by Hardy from those written by Florence (or Barrie). A brief citation of two unexceptional passages, the first by Hardy, the second by Florence (both taken from the *Life and Work*), makes the point.

In August they received at Max Gate a long-promised visit from Sir Arthur Blomfield, who had taken a house a few miles off for a month or two. Contrary to Hardy's expectations Blomfield liked the design of the Max Gate house. The visit was a very pleasant one, abounding in reminiscences of 8 Adelphi Terrace, and included a drive to 'Weatherbury' Church and an examination of its architecture.

'August 31. My Mother says she looks at the furniture and feels she is nothing to it. All those belonging to it, and the place, are gone, and it is left in her hands, a stranger. (She has, however, lived there these fifty-three years!)' (*LW*, p.263)

Towards the end of May Mr. and Mrs. Walter de la Mare stayed at Max Gate for two nights, and early in June, the day after Hardy's birthday, Mr. and Mrs. Granville-Barker came to see him, bringing with them friends he had not seen for many years, Mr. and Mrs. Max Beerbohm.

'June 10. Relativity. That things and events always were, are, and will be (e.g. Emma, Mother and Father are living still in the past)'. (*LW*, p.453)

The first is a little more expansive in its expression of Hardy's expectations and pleasures, but the narrative styles are identical. This identity accentuates the difficulties raised by

Millgate's edition, which cannot allow Florence any degree of co-authorial involvement, even if it must rely on her, as Hardy did, to finish the job. What results is an awkward division of Florence's collaborations into those which are essential—the 'Conclusion' that Millgate is forced to attach to the end of his text (otherwise, how does the story end?)—and those which are inessential: the numerous 'post-Hardyan' interventions into the remainder of the text.

That Florence (perhaps spitefully, perhaps alone or on advice) removed many references to Emma; that she cut down the tedious lists of aristocrats; and that she added many details of colour, anecdotes, and excerpts from letters: all this is true. That Hardy took possession of his own biographical materials to 'prevent misrepresentation when [he] would be no longer able to correct it' and 'give ... gossip the lie', and that he suppressed particular facts about himself, is likewise incontrovertible.⁷⁷ But it remains that 'he took no interest in himself as a personage'.⁷⁸ His secret will-to-control his own life story was that same will 'to outwit circumstance and overcome it' that Davie identified as the mark of his personality and career. In writing down his story, Hardy was offering it back to those proximate others—his father and mother, his first wife, his friends and acquaintances, the old timers in Stinsford churchyard—whose lives 'always were, are, and will be' and who 'are living still in the past'. Florence Hardy shared the authorship of the *Life* with these many proximate others; and the *Early Life* and *Later Years* deserve to be restored to their place as the authoritative texts of a work that could never be described with any confidence as Hardy's autobiography.

Notes

¹ Michael Millgate (ed.), *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1984), iii. Further page references are given in the text as *LW*.

² *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London, 1928) and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928* (London, 1930).

³ Purdy published his findings in Edward Larocque Tinker, 'New Editions, Fine and Otherwise', *New York Times Book Review* (12 May 1940), 25.

⁴ *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London, 1962).

⁵ Cf. Norman Page, who suggested students of Hardy would 'likely need to keep both conveniently to hand' (*Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41.1, June 1986), 114.

⁶ R.L. Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 265.

⁷ For criticism of the *Life and Work* see, for example J.B. Bullen, 'The Buried Life: A New Edition of F. E. Hardy's "Biography"' (*Thomas Hardy Annual*, 5, 1987), 187–96; and Suzanne R. Johnson, 'Thomas Hardy the Obscure: Hardy's Final Fiction' (*ELT: English Literature in Transition*, 35.3, 1992), 300–08, who argues that 'neither *The Life* as published in 1928 and 1930, nor *The Life and Work* as published in 1985 [in the US edition], can be called an autobiography' (303). New impressions of the *Early Life* and *Later Years* continue to be published: in 1994, for instance, Studio Editions Ltd published *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, an amalgamation into a single volume of facsimiles of the two original volumes. The 1962 *Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*, is still used occasionally as a source, even where *Life and Work* is otherwise acknowledged: see, for instance, Tim Armstrong (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: Selected Poems. Longman Annotated Texts* (London, 1993), 347–60.

⁸ *Young Thomas Hardy* (Boston, 1975) and *Thomas Hardy's Later Years* (Boston, 1978).

⁹ Michael Millgate, 'Thomas Hardy: The Biographical Sources', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge, 1999), 3.

- ¹⁰ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, 1988), 20.
- ¹¹ 'George Sand', *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Morris Shapira (Cambridge, 1963), 160.
- ¹² Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology* (London, 1989), 154, 153.
- ¹³ 'Preface to the First Edition', *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham (Oxford, 1985), (xxxv-vi).
- ¹⁴ 'Your Story or Your Life? Reflections on Thomas Hardy's Autobiography' (*Thomas Hardy Annual* 2, 1984), 160.
- ¹⁵ Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, 139. See also Johnson, 'Hardy the Obscure'.
- ¹⁶ *Hardy in History*, 163.
- ¹⁷ 'The Autobiographical Pact', in Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, 1988), 4.
- ¹⁸ David Parker, 'Between Two Worlds': Modes of Identification in Seamus Heaney's Autobiographies' (*The Critical Review* 39, 1999), 47.
- ¹⁹ See Greg's 'The Rationale of Copy-Text' (*Studies in Bibliography* 3, 1950-51), 19-36.
- ²⁰ D.C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (New York, 1994), 334.
- ²¹ 'Private Memorandum', Dorset County Museum, ff.2.
- ²² Greetham, *Textual Scholarship*, 336.
- ²³ Cf. Simon Gatrell 'Hardy, House-Style and the Aesthetics of Punctuation', in *The Novels of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Anne Smith (London, 1979), 169-92

²⁴ ‘The Buried Life: A New Edition of F.E. Hardy’s “Biography”’ (*Thomas Hardy Annual*, 5, 1987), 193.

²⁵ John Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), 52.

²⁶ See Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, ch. 2.

²⁷ *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London, 1973), 15.

²⁸ *Early Life*, 162. Further page references are given in the text as *EL*.

²⁹ 7 Dec 1915, Dorset County Museum.

³⁰ Richard Purdy and Michael Millgate (eds), *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88), v.135.

³¹ Recorded in the poems ‘Logs on the Hearth’ and ‘In the Garden’ in *Moments of Vision*.

³² *Collected Letters*, v.138.

³³ *Collected Letters*, v.135 (5 Dec 1915).

³⁴ FH to Sydney Cockerell, 24 Feb 1918. In *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Oxford, 1996), 140. Even in late 1917 Hardy seemed despairing about what he described as ‘the apparent reversal of our hopes in the war’ (*Collected Letters*, v.234: to Edmund Gosse, 11 Dec 1917).

³⁵ Richard H. Taylor (ed.), *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1978), 33.

³⁶ Hardy’s felt the threat of a ‘new Dark Age’ even more forcefully in the aftermath to World War I: see the ‘Preface’ to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, in James Gibson (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 560.

³⁷ *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 114

- ³⁸ *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 115.
- ³⁹ *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 113
- ⁴⁰ *Collected Letters*, v.214
- ⁴¹ *Collected Letters*, v.172.
- ⁴² *Collected Letters* v.137 (to George Douglas, 7 Dec 1915); Purdy, *Bibliographical Study*, 207.
- ⁴³ *Collected Letters*, v.213 (18 May 1917).
- ⁴⁴ 'Preface', *Time's Laughingstocks*, in *Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson (London, 1976), 190.
- ⁴⁵ Purdy, *Bibliographical Study*, 266.
- ⁴⁶ *Collected Letters* v.250.
- ⁴⁷ 'Supplementarity: Poetry as the Afterlife of Thomas Hardy', (*Victorian Poetry*, 26, 1988), 381-93.
- ⁴⁸ 'The Going', 'Poems of 1912-13', *Complete Poems*, 339.
- ⁴⁹ Dorset County Museum.
- ⁵⁰ Woolf, 'Half of Thomas Hardy' (*Nation and Athenaeum*, 1928), 289.
- ⁵¹ *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 133.
- ⁵² MS. Beinecke Library (GEN MSS 111. Box 21).
- ⁵³ *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 139

⁵⁴ The inside cover of Hardy's 'Memoranda, II' notebook, dated from the period of the *Life* reads: 'This book is to be destroyed when my executors have done with it for any necessary reference'. Taylor, *Personal Notebooks*, 43.

⁵⁵ Dorset County Museum, ff.2. At some point later in the project, Hardy rewrote the first page of the memorandum, addressing it specifically to his wife and altering third-person references into first-person throughout.

⁵⁶ "Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance of the completed work, but for the present circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial" (*Early Life*, 131)

⁵⁷ J.W.Mackail's *The Life of William Morris* (1899) in February 1917 (*Collected Letters*, v.203; *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 130); Edmund Gosse's *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1917) in April (*Collected Letters* v.211, 232; *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 130-31); Sidney Colvin's *Keats* in February 1918 (*Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 140); Edward Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1899) in late 1918 (*Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 153); and Henry Festing Jones's *Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon, 1835-1902: A Memoir* when it came out in 1919. They also read (significantly fewer) autobiographies and memoirs of public figures and writers: Lord Redesdale's *Memories* in December 1915 (*Collected Letters*, v.137), Lord Morley's *Recollections* (1917) in December 1917 (*Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 136), Mary Augusta Ward's *A Writer's Recollections* (1918) in December 1918 (*Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 153).

⁵⁸ 'Preface', *Eminent Victorians*, which the Hardys read in December 1918 (*Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, 152-53).

⁵⁹ *Later Years*, 78. See also *Early Life*, 138

⁶⁰ Reed Whittemore, *Pure Lives: The Early Biographers* (Baltimore, 1988), 10.

⁶¹ See chapter vii of *Early Life*.

⁶² Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 1.

⁶³ *Leslie Stephen*, 2. Cf. Hardy's 'Prefatory Note' to the *Early Life*: 'Mr Hardy's feeling for a long time was that he would not care to have his life written at all' (vii).

⁶⁴ *Leslie Stephen*, 3.

⁶⁵ *Leslie Stephen*, 2.

⁶⁶ *Leslie Stephen*, 2. This approach was entrenched in Victorian life-writing. In her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) Elizabeth Gaskell—obviously no amateur—had also insisted 'that where [a subject's] own words could be used, no others ought to take their place' (Oxford, 2002), 231.

⁶⁷ Except in the early chapters, where the third-person narrative lays out the history of his family and the events of his upbringing and youth.

⁶⁸ Gregor and Irwin, 'Your Story or Your Life', 170.

⁶⁹ Preface to *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902), *Complete Poems*, 84.

⁷⁰ 'Prefatory Note', *Early Life*, vii.

⁷¹ Woolf, 'Half of Thomas Hardy', 290.

⁷² *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, 15.

⁷³ Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 43.

⁷⁴ *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 57.

⁷⁵ *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 62.

⁷⁶ 'Half of Thomas Hardy', 289-90.

⁷⁷ *Collected Letters*, iii.282.

⁷⁸ *Later Years*, 179.