
Part I
The Life



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Hardy as Biographical Subject

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Thomas Hardy was, for the greater part of his life, an actively publishing author and a prominent public figure, frequently written about, interviewed, and photographed. By his final decades he had become one of the most famous men in the world, and his death in the early days of 1928 prompted widespread national and international mourning, culminating in the ceremonial interment of his ashes in Westminster Abbey. Because of Hardy's fame, the obituarists, reporters, and other commentators of the day had only to turn to the standard biographical sources – most notably the *Who's Who* entry that Hardy had himself written and kept up to date (*THPV* 142–3, 473–4) – in order to be able to produce confident if brief accounts of his personal history and literary career. A few poorly informed biographies had already appeared – Hardy having reacted to the best of them with angry comments in the margins of his own copy – but it was only after his death that knowledge about his life was immensely enhanced and expanded by his widow's publication of a full-scale two-volume biography, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1891* appearing before the end of 1928, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892–1928* just two years later. The *Life of Thomas Hardy* – so called long before its first single-volume publication in 1962 – immediately became the standard work of biographical reference and has inevitably remained the foundation document for all subsequent Hardy biography.

Inevitably, but by no means unproblematically. Although the two volumes of the *Life* were published over Florence Hardy's name and initially accepted as being of her own composition, it was always recognized that she must have depended largely upon Hardy's prior assistance, and following her own death in 1937 it became known that the work had been almost entirely ghost-written by Hardy himself in his late seventies with the specific intention of its being posthumously published over the name of his widow. Florence Hardy's actual role, though certainly important, was essentially secondary, Hardy having first written the manuscript pages in secret and then handed them successively to Florence to be typed up in triplicate – at which point the manuscript pages themselves would be destroyed in order to remove all traces of Hardy's

participation. The typescripts then became the project's working papers, subject as such to Hardy's further and sometimes extensive revisions and, when necessary, to his wife's retyping. After Hardy's death it fell to Florence to write up the two final chapters, largely on the basis of notes that her husband had left, and then see through the press the two volumes bearing her name. Ironically enough, it was her failure to destroy the working typescripts, many of them containing corrections and revisions in Hardy's hand, that facilitated the subsequent discovery of the work's true authorship.

For Hardy himself, writing at the pinnacle of his fame and out of a profound opposition to all invasions of his own and his family's privacy, the composition of the *Life* had been a largely self-protective hence minimally revelatory exercise that drew with deliberate caution on personal memories and correspondence and on the rich store of anecdotes and observations contained within the numerous notebooks, small and large, that he had accumulated over the course of a lifetime. Written in the distancing third person, the work was clearly intended to find its place within the well-recognized tradition of family-generated memorializations as an "authorized" and as it were official biography, capable as such of anticipating and, ideally, pre-empting the production of more intrusive biographies written by outsiders. After Hardy's death, however, and before its first publication, the *Life's* underlying autobiographical character was significantly compromised by the additions, deletions, and alterations introduced by Florence Hardy on the advice and under the influence of Sydney Cockrell and James Barrie, whose assistance she had sought and whose male assertiveness she found difficult to resist.

The term "autobiography" does, however, sit somewhat better – if still imperfectly – with the comprehensively re-edited one-volume edition of 1984 that restored Hardy's intended title, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, and sought to reconstruct his originally intended text on the basis of those working typescripts that his widow had so remarkably failed to destroy (LW x–xxix). As thus purged of post-Hardyan interventions, *Life and Work* can fairly claim autobiographical status as Hardy's own account of his own life – the personal information he felt able to share with his readership, the self-image (to put it another way) he wished to project. So considered, it certainly has value, especially since the dates and details supplied for public events customarily jibe with those ascertainable from contemporary sources – Hardy having evidently worked through his old notebooks in chronological sequence – and the references to friendships and social occasions mesh well enough with Hardy's own correspondence, both outgoing and incoming, and with the recollections of the journalists, admirers, friends, and fellow writers who encountered him in London clubs, on social occasions, or over tea at Max Gate. It also provides unique insights into Hardy's pre-adult and early adult years, although it necessarily defers to the endnotes the four expressive letters written from London to his sister Mary that were introduced into *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* only after his death.

Biographers – and all students of Hardy – are clearly better off with *Life and Work* than without it, but they can only regret its failure, or refusal, to address a large number of central issues. Almost nothing of significance is said about Hardy's political

and religious beliefs and values or about either of his marriages, and although his publicly acknowledged friendship with Florence Henniker is mentioned a few times, as is his elderly attraction to Agnes Grove, there are no references, direct or indirect, to his earlier relationships (such as they may have been) with Cassie Pole, Eliza Bright Nicholls, and Graham R. Tomson, while his cousin Tryphena Sparks, though briefly invoked, is not actually named. Events and quotations are sometimes inadequately described or dated, and while there's nothing in *Life and Work* even remotely comparable to Henry James's wholesale rewriting, in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, of those letters by his brother William that provided the book with its ostensible *raison d'être*, it's nevertheless clear that Hardy was from time to time perfectly willing to stretch the truth a little in order to enforce a point. Indeed, his snide assertion that Henry James had at first been excluded from the Rabelais Club because his writings lacked "virility" (LW 136) must have been made in despite of the knowledge that James had been, like himself, one of the club's original members.

Especially disturbing is Hardy's insistence upon the destruction of the materials used in the composition of *Life and Work*, including what must have been those extraordinarily interesting diary-notebooks, dating back at least to the early 1860s, of which only a few detached leaves containing penciled sketches or rough drafts of never-completed poems were allowed to survive. It is true that a good many individual entries from the diary-notebooks were copied by Hardy himself – with or without revision – into one or other of the "accumulative" notebooks (sometimes called commonplace books) that he continued to use during his highly creative final years. Hardy had also included these more substantial notebooks among the documents that were to be destroyed following his death, but while Sydney Cockerell, as one of his literary executors, was ready and even eager to comply with that directive, Florence Hardy, as the other literary executor, succeeded in preventing the destruction of at least some of them – notably "Literary Notes" I and II, "Memoranda" I and II, "Facts", and "Poetical Matter" – on the grounds that she would need them when writing the closing chapters of "her" biography. She may also have openly or clandestinely protected one or two other notebooks – including "Studies, Specimens, &c." – simply because she could not bear to see them consigned to the flames that had already consumed so much that had been deemed precious and vital during her husband's last years.

These surviving notebooks are of particular and almost unique importance as allowing direct and fully authenticated access to Hardy's thoughts and ideas – even (if to a much lesser degree) to his beliefs – and it is very helpful to the biographer to have them all accessible in satisfactory and sometimes excellent editions, specifically C. J. P. Beatty's edition (recently revised) of *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy*, Richard H. Taylor's edition of *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (including the two "Memoranda" notebooks, the brief "Schools of Painting" notebook, and the preparatory notebook for *The Trumpet-Major*), Lennart Björk's two-volume edition of *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, William Greenslade's edition of *Thomas Hardy's "Facts" Notebook*, and the editions of the "Studies, Specimens &c." and "Poetical Matter" notebooks co-edited by Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate. The Dorset

County Museum, where the originals of most of the notebooks are preserved, also has pages surviving from Hardy's early pocket-books, other scraps of paper containing notes and occasionally drawings of his plans for the building of Max Gate and – no less importantly – the largest and most significant accumulation of books from Hardy's dispersed library. Other substantial collections of books once owned (and often annotated) by Hardy exist on both sides of the Atlantic, information as to the inclusion and location of individual titles being readily accessible through the comprehensive online reconstruction of the Max Gate library available at <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/fisher/hardy/>.

Although the destruction of the materials drawn upon for *Life and Work* was in practice somewhat less than comprehensive, it was sufficient to reinforce both the indispensability of the work itself and its effectiveness as a barrier to further and deeper knowledge – resembling as such Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* of his father, also based very largely upon unique documents that were themselves promptly and irretrievably destroyed. Whereas biographers of, say, Virginia Woolf or Robert Louis Stevenson have rich resources for the narration of their subject's early lives, both having been born into families already highly literate (Stevenson's mother even kept and preserved a diary of his babyhood), biographers of Hardy start out with little more than the early pages of the so largely uncheckable *Life and Work*, a tithe map for Higher Bockhampton, an 1853 auctioneers' catalogue for the Kingston Maurward estate, some miscellaneous family documents (including a copy of Hardy's father's will, a few calculations related to the family's building business, and the receipt for his own instruction in Latin), the official records of births, marriages, and deaths, and the successive national censuses – the first conveniently dating from 1841, a couple of months before Hardy's first birthday, and the fourth, in 1871, unkindly revealing his fiancée, Emma Lavinia Gifford, as having claimed to be four years younger than she actually was. Also regrettably sparse are the additional Hardy family memorabilia, preserved by the family's last representative, Hardy's sister Kate, and now part of the Lock Collection on deposit in the Dorset County Museum. Together with the same museum's holdings of the few books that Hardy owned as a child and a further group of family items, mostly of later date, that were originally collected by Hardy's cousin James Sparks and are now in the library at Eton College, these comprise very nearly the totality of what physically survives from Hardy's early background. Although genealogists – Brenda Tunks above all – have successfully traced both sides of his family back through several Dorset generations, almost nothing is known of them as individuals.

There is a significant if sometimes superficial enhancement of biographical resources as Hardy grows older, produces successful novels, attracts attention, becomes the subject of journalistic articles and interviews, makes famous friends, and writes personal and business letters that are kept by their recipients. Such letters are of particular importance as bearing demonstrably authentic witness to Hardy's thoughts, feelings, and relationships throughout his adult life, and they are copiously available in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, published in seven volumes with a supplementary

eighth volume currently in progress. Sadly, this plenitude, though biographically crucial, sometimes yields less than might have been hoped: no more than fourteen Hardy letters dating from before his thirtieth birthday are currently known to exist – one of the most important of them, to his sister Mary, having been reproduced in facsimile in *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* – and there are few enough from any period of his life that could be described as genuinely intimate or self-revelatory. Hardy's transcriptions of two fragments from letters received from Emma Gifford are all that remains of the active correspondence they evidently maintained during their long and mostly long-distance courtship – Emma having apparently burned both sets of letters one angry afternoon well into their marriage. Florence for her part seems to have burned, if in a somewhat different spirit, the bulk of the exceptionally relaxed and interesting letters that Hardy was writing to her during the later stages of their pre-marital friendship, and although the collected edition includes all that survive of Hardy's sometimes painful letters to Florence Henniker it's possible to suspect that others may have been thrust into the fire by Mrs. Henniker at the time of their arrival – or even by Hardy himself in 1923 after they had been sent to Max Gate under the terms of Mrs. Henniker's will.

Hardy in his late seventies certainly disposed of many of the incoming letters he had thus far preserved, with the result that few items of substantial biographical importance are to be found among the 5,000 or so letters written to Hardy that are now in the Dorset County Museum (see Weber and Weber 1968). Appearing on a good many of those letters, however, are draft replies in Hardy's hand – subsequently to be typed and sent by Florence or by May O'Rourke, the part-time typist sometimes employed at Max Gate – and the correspondence as a whole usefully supplements the *Collected Letters* in documenting his dealings with publishers and witnessing to the character and importance of some of his personal friendships. Beyond Hardy's power to control or destroy – presumably beyond his knowledge – were the thoroughly indiscreet letters written by Emma Hardy (especially to Rebekah Owen) and, later, by Florence Hardy (especially to Edward Clodd and Sydney Cockerell). Extensively – though by no means exhaustively – represented in *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, these are useful documents for understanding life at Max Gate, the many hours that Hardy spent working alone in his study having supplied his wives with both motive and opportunity for the writing of long letters of domestic complaint. Such missives were often regretted afterwards – “I *hope* you burn my letters,” Florence wrote rather unhelpfully to Rebekah Owen, “Some are, I fear, most horribly indiscreet” (Millgate 1996: 114) – but likely to be followed by others equally indiscreet. The secret diaries to which Emma confided her resentments against her husband are now beyond reach, having been discovered and destroyed by Hardy following her death, but her autobiographical *Some Recollections*, including an account of her first meeting with her future husband, has been published (subsequently to Hardy's having adapted a portion of it for inclusion in *Life and Work*) and her capacity for outspokenness is reflected in the extraordinary letter in which she accused Hardy's sister Mary of being “a witch-like creature & quite equal to any amount of evil-wishing & speaking – I can imagine

you, & your mother & sister on your native heath raising a storm on a Walpurgis night” (Millgate 1996: 8).

The diaries kept by Emma during some of the Hardys’ European holidays, including the honeymoon in France in 1874, are among the important papers of hers, apparently overlooked by both Hardy and Florence, that Florence’s executor, Irene Cooper Willis, discovered in an old ottoman in the Max Gate attic Emma had formerly occupied. Subsequently deposited in the Dorset County Museum and now published in facsimile (Taylor 1985), the diaries are fascinating both as reflective of Emma’s personality and as constituting the nearest thing we have to a first-hand account not just of the travels themselves but of the ways in which she and Hardy related to each other on a day-to-day basis. It is not known just what diaries Florence Hardy may have kept during her marriage, nor whether those diaries at all extensively survive (Irene Cooper Willis had several at one time and an actual example, apparently devoted largely to household matters, was featured in a BBC *Antiques Roadshow* television program a few years back), but during her widowhood she certainly talked about Hardy to a number of deeply interested visitors – including Frederick Baldwin Adams, Jr., the American Hardy collector, and Richard Little Purdy, Hardy’s scholarly bibliographer. Purdy in particular, working extensively on Hardy’s papers while they were still in place in the Max Gate study, became over time very friendly with Florence and made a private record (now in the Beinecke Library) of some of their conversations. Florence’s observations on these occasions, especially as reflected in the more discursive segments of Purdy’s bibliography, have had a significant influence upon Hardy biography as upon other aspects of Hardy studies, and it’s necessary to keep in mind that she could on occasion have misconstrued or misremembered what Hardy said and that her remarks must in any case have been colored by her own emotions and biases, even by a concern for her own place in literary history.

It was during the course of Hardy’s career as a novelist that the literary interview became a prominent journalistic genre, and Hardy himself became a frequent target for its practitioners. Some of them did capture something of Hardy’s manner and record occasional passages of interest, but the vulnerability of interviews to manipulation and consequent misrepresentation always renders them somewhat suspect as source materials: in Hardy’s day, for instance, an interviewer who did not have shorthand would have had to depend upon a doubtful combination of notes, memory, and imagination. William Archer’s interview for the *Pall Mall Magazine* of April 1901 (Ray 2007: 28–37) is certainly important, Hardy having had the opportunity to correct or revise the record before publication, but because gossip about books was the staple of numerous newspaper columns and cheap magazines in the late Victorian and early Edwardian years it became common enough for interviews to be plagiarized, repackaged, or invented outright. Stuck as cuttings into one of Hardy’s scrapbooks in the Dorset County Museum are the published texts of several interviews that he has annotated as having been either partly or wholly faked. Printed along with some of the interviews – and often included among the illustrations to the growing number of books about “Hardy’s Wessex” – were sketches and photographs of Hardy

himself, interesting in themselves and as forerunners of the many images of him that eventually came into existence.

Hardy seems essentially to have stopped granting interviews round about 1912, and although he always remained quite visible as a public figure – attending productions of plays made from his novels, accepting public honors, welcoming at Max Gate visitors as various as Lawrence of Arabia, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, and the Prince of Wales – he seems neither to have been filmed nor had his voice recorded. But when he died early in 1928 he was of course outlived by many people who had known him to different degrees and in different roles, and witnesses both reliable and unreliable were from time to time prevailed upon, or came eagerly forward, to share their Hardyan memories. Hardy's younger sister Kate, whose surviving diary for the years 1915–39 is itself of occasional interest, was interviewed on at least two occasions, by Donald Winslow (Winslow 1970) and by another well-informed American scholar, Harold Hoffman (Rabiger 1981: 46–8), who in 1939–40 did remarkable research in England for a biography of Hardy he did not live to complete. Hoffman's surviving papers (at Miami University, Ohio) remain largely disorganized and unworked as a result of his early death, but – as is clear from the detailed account given by their discoverer, Michael Rabiger (Rabiger 1981: 6–39) – they are of considerable interest because of the witnesses then alive with whom he spoke or corresponded. Even in the 1960s and early 1970s the bookseller and publisher James Stevens Cox was able to conduct and publish quite an extensive series of interviews with people still living who had encountered Hardy in some way – as friends, servants, tradespeople, actors in stage versions of the novels, and so forth – and while the questions were often loaded, the answers concocted out of the faintest of memories, the sheer unrepeatability of the series guarantees its remaining of permanent value.

The recorded impressions of those who encountered Hardy on a more equal footing, as fellow writers, or as friends of long standing, are in general disappointing, perhaps in part because he rarely risked intimacy and tended to become genuinely close to, hence perceptively readable by, only those friends, whether male or female, whom he thought capable of respecting and reciprocating his own intense instinct and need for privacy. In the 1950s, however, the poet Henry Reed, himself a devoted Hardyan and the author of an acerbic Hardy-related radio play about biographical research called *A Very Great Man Indeed*, put together an excellent radio program (BBC Archives) in which Dorothy Allhusen, Middleton Murry, Walter de la Mare, Lady Cynthia Asquith, and others spoke interestingly and at some length about the Hardy they had known. Other rewarding reminiscences are conveniently gathered into *Thomas Hardy Remembered*, edited by Martin Ray, and it is striking that several of those who wrote most memorably about Hardy – for example, Edmund Blunden, Elliott Felkin, Siegfried Sassoon, and especially Virginia Woolf – did so as relatively youthful figures encountering an ancient and hugely famous sage whose character and manners had long become settled and established and who had accumulated much experience of dealing graciously with visiting admirers, especially during the tea-parties for friends and pilgrims that became during the 1920s almost daily feature of the Max Gate summers.

Max Gate itself (now a National Trust property) was of course designed by Hardy and built under his supervision, and although many have found the house difficult to admire it makes better sense from the inside than from the outside and perhaps needs to be “read” like one of the more idiosyncratic of the Hardy texts. Hardy’s drawings for the house, like his other architectural drawings, testify to the persistence of his interest in his first career – later still, in 1893–4, he was the architect, his brother the contractor, in the restoration of the little Dorset church of West Knighton (Beatty 2007: 41–5) – and it is impossible to ignore the importance, at once direct and symbolic, either of Max Gate or of the nearby National Trust property known as the “Birthplace,” the Hardy family cottage in Higher Bockhampton in which Hardy was born. Scarcely less significant are Stinsford church and churchyard, where Hardy’s heart now lies, and those Dorset villages (e.g., Puddletown and Melbury Osmund) associated with family ancestors and relatives. Appreciation of Hardy’s distinctiveness as a specifically regional writer, often using identifiable settings for his novels, stories, and poems, similarly mandates a degree of familiarity with that wider area of southern England, centered upon Dorset and still largely rural, to which he gave the name of Wessex. Dorchester in particular, the county town, where Hardy received his schooling and his earliest architectural training, remained a central point throughout his life and became the model for the Casterbridge of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Also located within Dorset are two homes from the early years of Hardy’s first marriage: “Riverside,” Sturminster Newton, the beautifully situated house in which he and Emma spent what Hardy – in a rare confidential moment – called their “happiest time” (LW 122), and “Lanherne” in Wimborne, perhaps the most attractive of the houses in which the couple lived, even though they didn’t take to Wimborne itself.

The most zealous of biographers might well draw the line at checking out all the London addresses at which Hardy stayed at different periods of his life. The house in Surbiton in which he and Emma lived when first married is no longer standing, but 16 Westbourne Park Villas, in which he lived so intensely as a young architect and earnestly self-educating poet, is readily identifiable – it can even be glimpsed from the train at a point just short of the Paddington terminus – as is the house in Tooting (marked with an official plaque) in which Hardy endured a long period of illness. Especially suggestive from a biographical point of view are the church and rectory at St. Juliot in Cornwall, where Emma Gifford created for Hardy when they first met a magic that he would re-create in poems written after her death. The church itself and nearby Boscastle remain fully responsive to whoever comes with the poems and their occasion already in mind, and it is an illuminating experience to stay in the rectory, as one now very comfortably can (it currently offers accommodation to paying guests), and realize the closeness of the bedrooms in which Hardy and Emma must respectively have slept.

There are of course other sources that biographers might conceivably draw upon, but none of them seem sufficient to substitute or even greatly compensate for the evasions and blanknesses of *Life and Work* and the limitations of so many of the other potential source-materials. It can be reasonably said that, just as Tennyson biographers

have learned to accommodate themselves to the problems presented by Hallam Tennyson's memoir, so Hardy biographers must find – without desperate recourse to outright speculation – a way or ways around *Life and Work*. But it is one thing to question the available evidence or even the accepted interpretive wisdom, quite another to arrive at demonstrably satisfactory answers. *Life and Work*'s highly positive presentation of the childhood years, for example, has often prompted the suspicion – sharpened by knowledge of how the book was written – that Hardy may have deliberately exaggerated his family's social and economic status. As already noted, the sources for an exploration of such issues are few and largely indirect, and while the fragments of available evidence tend to indicate that the Hardy family may indeed have had marginal claims to social superiority over most of its neighbors, there is little in those same fragments to justify the romantic aura thrown over the entire place and period by emotional retrospections rooted in Hardy's domestic loyalties and inflected by his familiarity with Theocritus and with Dryden's translations of Virgil. That aura has for modern readers been effectively validated and even exaggerated by the association of Higher Bockhampton with the irresistible appeal of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and the much-exploited photogenic charm of the Hardy cottage itself, and yet it is clear from early notes of Hardy's (Millgate 2004: 37–8) that he vividly remembered the drunkenness and sexual license that had characterized the life of the hamlet during his childhood years and was keenly aware of the harsh living and working conditions endured by most of its inhabitants.

In a similarly problematic category, therefore, are the other references to those Bockhampton days that Hardy incorporated into his own writings, some entirely specific and incontestable, as in such poems as "Domicilium," "Friends Beyond," "A Bird-scene at a Rural Dwelling," and "Childhood Among the Ferns," others that may seem to the biographer equally authentic yet remain utterly incapable of proof. The domestic exchanges, for example, between Mr. and Mrs. Dewy in *Under the Greenwood Tree* are remarkably similar to those between Mr. and Mrs. Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and seem in both instances very likely to have been closely – and affectionately – based upon Hardy's memories of the ways in which his own parents characteristically interacted. Also suggestively present in the early writings are youngish male characters with surnames – Strong, Mayne, Oak – that seem echoes of Hardy's own, if less clearly so than Emma Hardy's choice of Durning as the surname of the distinctly undashing hero of her story "The Maid on the Shore." A more fundamental biographical challenge, however, is presented by Hardy's having so clearly made emotional, socially conscious, and essentially autobiographical investments in such novels as *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*.

Although it may be straightforward enough to acknowledge, say, the connection of *Tess* to issues of women's rights, or of *Jude* to issues of educational reform, it is altogether more difficult even to begin to take the measure of the personal anger and pain underlying Hardy's fictional explorations of such issues. Because his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, was never published, the class-based hostility that led to its rejection has remained invisible, hence largely disregarded. But while Hardy, as a

professional novelist, may well have learned from that experience to temper his texts to his desired audience, it is less clear that he significantly modified a fundamental radicalism that may have derived in part from exposure to the comprehensive social anger of his shoemaker uncle John Antell but was also fed by a personal sense of class inferiority and educational deprivation – above all, his not going to university – that even his untold youthful hours of laborious private study could never make good in respect of personal status or even of social and intellectual self-confidence. Here again, however, it is precisely the lack of clarity, of specifically documentable evidence, that so complicates and even obfuscates the task of responsible biography. The many articles, speeches, letters to newspapers, etc. reproduced in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice* sufficiently testify to Hardy's having spoken out in his own person on such issues as censorship, cruelty to animals, and the hypocrisy of the marriage laws, but for some indication of the full scope of his continuing radicalism it becomes necessary to turn to the private letter to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, dated November 30, 1906, in which he described his support of the women's suffrage movement as grounded in the belief that

the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own, except in cases of disease or insanity), sport (that so-called educated men should be encouraged to harass & kill for pleasure feeble creatures by mean stratagems), slaughter-houses (that they should be dark dens of cruelty), & other matters which I got into hot water for touching on many years ago. (CL III: 238)

The conclusion of Hardy's sentence, though lightly phrased, is clearly indicative of a continuing sensitivity and even anger in respect of the brutal criticism that had been directed at some of the novels, notably *Jude*, in which his emotional investment had been particularly strong. As such, it could be taken as lending a general – though not necessarily a particular – plausibility to recent critical studies of Hardy that have tended to emphasize perceived elements of personal subversiveness in his works. On the other hand, it's impossible to calculate – perhaps even to overestimate – the importance that Hardy always placed upon the maintenance of his personal privacy. The publication of reissues and new editions of the novels throughout Hardy's last decades offered successive opportunities both for textual revision and for the alteration, addition, or replacement of authorial prefaces, but while he occasionally took advantage of such occasions to stress the socio-political implications of a particular work, it was only in rare instances (such as *Under the Greenwood Tree*) that he touched upon the possibility of the fiction's being in any sense reflective of his own or his family's experience. His concern with privacy, at once instinctive, reinforced by experience, and shrewdly politic, became over the years increasingly intense, leading almost ineluctably to the destruction in old age of working notebooks, incoming correspondence, corrected proofs, and other personal records,

the writing of a distinctly disastrous will (see Millgate 1992: 153–61), and the ghosting of a deceptively bland biography that sought to combine decorously positive self-projection with effective deterrence of alternative biographical intrusions from elsewhere.

It is of course true that the assiduously accumulated knowledge of a biographer can never account for more than a fraction of the life actually lived and never be entirely secure. No sources are entirely unproblematic, and sources of any kind may remain comprehensively deficient for those periods or aspects of a life – childhood, for example, or sexual relationships – that are commonly considered to be of particular significance. There are always gaps and puzzles and thickets to be negotiated, decisions taken as to the riskworthiness of sense-making but unproven speculations, and difficult choices to be made, some complex, others as basic as deciding – as seems crucially to have occurred with certain biographies of Emma, Florence, and even Hardy himself – whether the subject should be positively or negatively characterized and represented. All biographies, clearly, are to a greater or lesser degree shaped by their authors' personalities, life-experiences, and acknowledged or unacknowledged biases. But a biographer's degree of knowledge and depth of first-hand research is of even greater importance, given that knowledge of the biographical subject – especially of one deceased as recently as Hardy – is always likely to expand and render obsolete the speculations with which earlier biographers had sought to create narrative coherence.

Reviewers sometimes speak of biographer and subject as either sympathetically or antipathetically – and in any case ineluctably – intertwined. Leon Edel, the biographer of Henry James, used to speak of his life *with* Henry James, of their living together over many years much as Boswell lived with Dr. Johnson. But it seems questionable whether the relationship between dead subject and living biographer can usefully be figured in such comfortably domestic terms, especially since the sense of *not* being on entirely familiar terms with the subject would seem more likely to keep the biographer more persistently and productively alert. The biographical process might perhaps be more appropriately compared to the experience of reading a Jamesian or, better, a Faulknerian novel and of arriving through gradual and often hard-won increments of knowledge, perception, and sympathy at a progressively richer apprehension of significant moments from a past that can never be known except in fragments and never understood except in broad outline. When writing about Hardy and other creative figures there is of course the further difficulty – the ultimate frustration – that the most important events in their lives, their acts of creativity, are precisely those most resistant to biographical explication. Whatever fresh information about Hardy's life may be gained in the future, biographical understanding of the man himself may never get much beyond what Edmund Gosse, the oldest and closest of his literary friends, concluded after visiting Max Gate in 1912: "He remains what he has always been, a sphinx-like little man, unrelated, unrevealed, displaying nothing that the most affectionate solicitude can make use of to explain the mystery of his magnificent genius" (Gosse 1991: 106).

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