

THE CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF THE
NOVELS AND STORIES OF
THOMAS HARDY

Life's Little Ironies

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THOMAS HARDY

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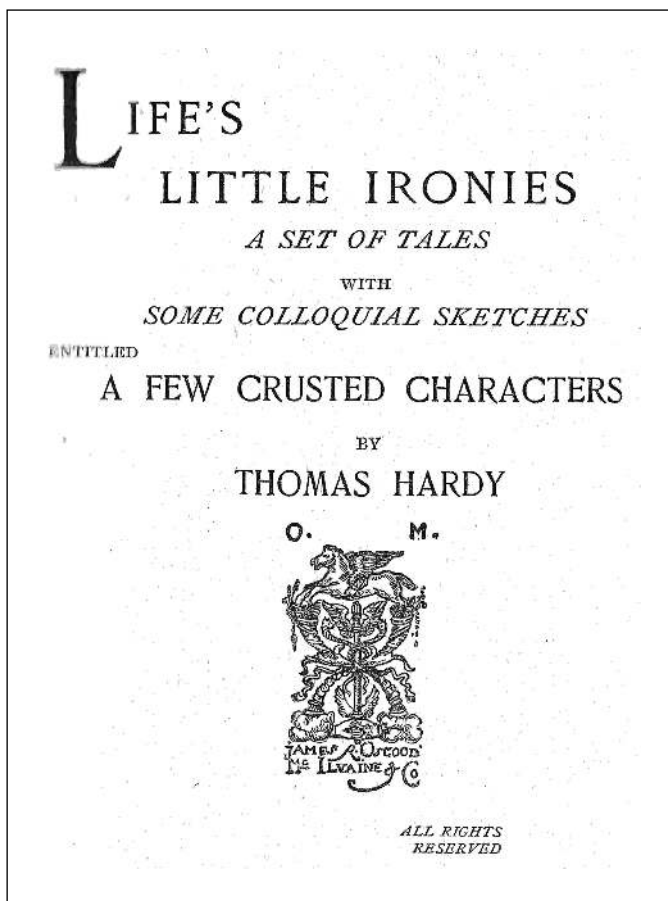
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THOMAS HARDY

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Title page of the first edition of *Life's Little Ironies*.

THOMAS HARDY
Life's Little Ironies

EDITED BY
ALAN MANFORD



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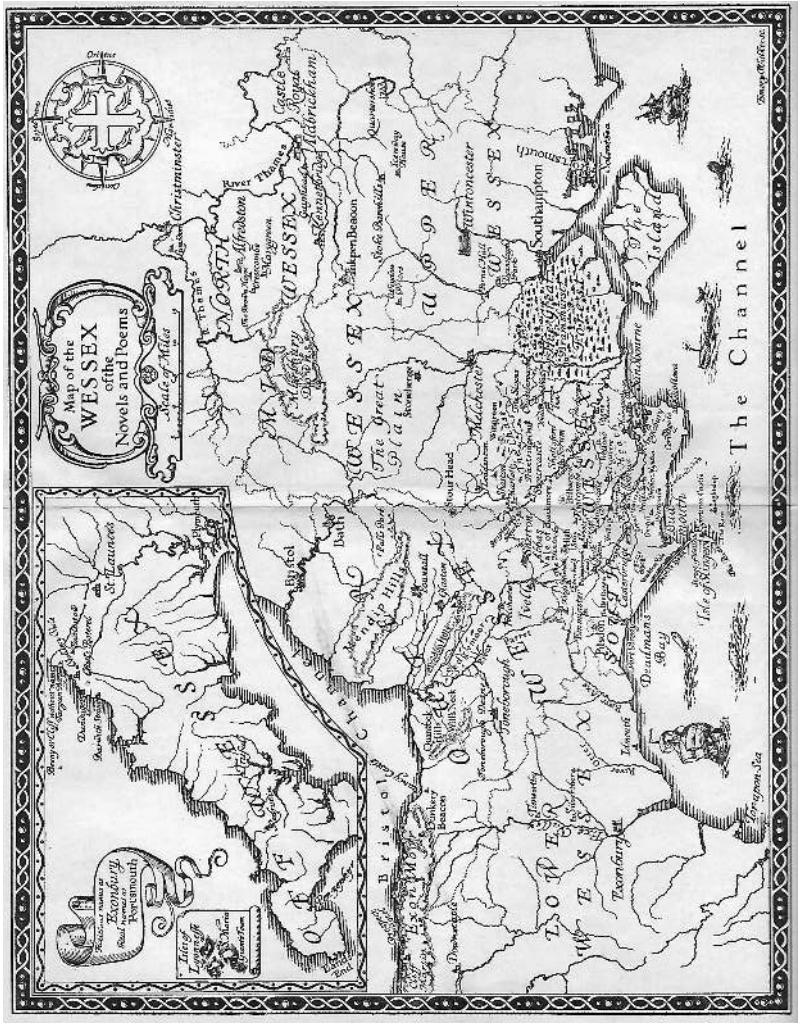
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‘Map of the Wessex of the Novels and Poems (revised 1914 – prepared by Emery Walker from a holograph originally provided by Thomas Hardy)’.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

Thomas Hardy's career as an author bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and during that time he could count among his accomplishments fourteen novels, more than nine hundred poems, a little over four dozen pieces of short fiction, and a verse drama in three volumes that took as its topic the Peninsular War and the fall of Napoleon. Yet on the brink of his first great success, the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* in the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*, he wrote to its editor Leslie Stephen that, although he might 'have higher aims some day', at that moment he wished 'merely to be considered a good hand at a serial'.¹ It is safe to say that those higher aims were achieved, for after Hardy's Westminster Abbey funeral, and after large crowds had silently filed past his open grave in Poet's Corner, *The Times* in its obituary for him mourned the loss of English literature's 'most eminent figure'.² Hardy's stature as a writer was, and remains, unassailable, and the continuing popularity of his fiction, in both print and other media, attests to his powerful and enduring representation of human experience.

Yet the professionalism that Hardy declared to be his goal in his publishing relationship with Stephen was as characteristic of his authorship as the exploration of large cultural issues, since Hardy fully understood that the production of a novel, or short story, took place both in the realm of artistic creation and in the literary marketplace. He became proficient at using (one is tempted to say manipulating) the requirements of Victorian publishing's modes of production for his own purposes. In particular the most common pattern, in which a novel was first serialized in a magazine, then published as a multiple-volume edition for the circulating libraries, and then published again as less expensive, single-volume versions, generated the opportunity for changes at each stage – and Hardy usually took advantage of those opportunities. Indeed, an author as successful as Hardy was given additional chances to modify his texts through the collected editions that demand for his work made attractive to him and his publishers.

¹ *CL* i, p. 28. ² Millgate, p. 535.

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Hardy's willingness to revise texts decades after they first appeared in print would crucially shape his later audiences' responses to his fiction.

As well, Hardy's tendency to stretch, not to say break, Victorian proprieties in his selection of subject matter, and in his unconventional sympathies with 'improper' characters, meant that he more than once found himself in conflict with his editors and their commitment to nineteenth-century status-quo attitudes. This situation came to a climax with the publication of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), two works which generated such extremities of negative reviewer responses that Hardy declared they destroyed in him any desire to continue producing novels. The fact that many reviewers were equally vociferous in defending Hardy rather undercuts his persona of besieged artist, and it is even possible to argue that he courted such conflict, since by that advanced point in his experience as a writer he could hardly be unaware of the contentious nature of his plots. Nonetheless, the bowdlerization often insisted upon for magazine publication meant that Hardy viewed the alterations made for subsequent, first edition volume publication as necessary to the truer realization of his art.

But even as Hardy was preparing to end his focus on the novel in the 1890s, and to instead concentrate on getting into print the poetry he had been writing since the 1860s, the next major stage of his fiction was being prepared. In 1894 Osgood, McIlvaine and Company, which had become Hardy's publisher in 1891, finalized the arrangements necessary to print those works whose rights previously had been held by other publishing houses, and immediately began preparing the first uniform edition of Hardy's novels and stories. The 'Wessex Novels' edition was published in sixteen volumes from 1895 to 1896, and consisted of thirteen novels plus three volumes of stories. It represents an important point in Hardy's oeuvre, not least because he wrote a set of short but revealing prefaces to accompany each text. He also proofread the volumes, made thorough and careful corrections and revisions, and, most significantly, brought more into congruence the topography of those narratives written before his full achievement of the setting of Wessex from which the collection took its name.

Osgood, McIlvaine had good reason to put the word 'Wessex' in its edition's title, since the description of this landscape, and its buildings, customs, and characters, was increasingly seen as Hardy's distinctive contribution to literature. His retroactive efforts to bring all of his fiction

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into line with this perception elided the fact that the development of Wessex was piecemeal at best, at least until the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887) and *Wessex Tales* (1888) which, with their powerful evocation of a 'partly real, partly dream-country',³ signalled Hardy's commitment to developing a setting uniquely his own. Unsurprisingly, then, when Hardy changed publishers yet again and decided to transfer his rights to the London firm of Macmillan and Company, the name chosen for its proposed collection of his works (this time including the poetry), was simple and direct: the Wessex Edition.

The first two volumes of Macmillan's collected edition appeared in April of 1912, with the originally proposed total of twenty volumes being completed in 1914, and with four 'published at irregular intervals thereafter (the last, posthumously), to complete the series. Later impressions incorporate the slight revisions made for the Mellstock Edition in 1919 and some 4 pages of trifling corrections submitted in April 1920'.⁴ Thus the Wessex Edition could claim to provide something very close to a comprehensive representation of Hardy's literary accomplishment, and Macmillan had no hesitation in describing it as 'definitive', a claim that Hardy endorsed in the 'General Preface to the Novels and Poems' that he prepared for the edition.⁵ Once again he revised and proofread the volumes, and he also updated the Osgood, McIlvaine prefaces. For much of the twentieth century, therefore, the Wessex Edition was viewed as the final word on Hardy's fiction, and it was, and in many cases remains into the twenty-first century, the de facto choice for those reprints of his work that appeared after Macmillan's copyright lapsed in 1978. Yet scholars such as Michael Millgate have noted that this putative authority is at least somewhat problematic, since '[f]or all Hardy's devotion to the task of revision and correction there remains the irreducible fact that he was not starting from first principles but working with a text that had itself long lost the bloom and innocence of youth,' and that 'by 1912 each of Hardy's texts had gone through long, undramatic processes of erosion and accretion'.⁶ The crucial decision facing a scholarly edition of

³ PW, p. 9.

⁴ R. L. Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 286.

⁵ PW, p. 44.

⁶ M. Millgate, 'The Making and Unmaking of Hardy's Wessex Edition', *Editing Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. J. Millgate (New York: Garland, 1978), pp. 66, 68.

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Hardy's novels and stories, therefore, is whether to use the Wessex Edition to provide its copy-texts, and thus assent to the author's apparent wish that it be accepted as definitive, or to employ early text versions that both more nearly reflect Hardy's original artistic intention, and represent the works as they were initially received by Hardy's Victorian readers.

The Cambridge Edition of Hardy, in line with contemporary editorial theory, follows an early text model that allows its readers to trace, through each volume, the work's textual evolution. In most cases this entails the selection of the British first edition in volume form as copy-text, and the emendation policy is to edit the copy-text's 'moment' in order to achieve the best balance between authorial desire and authorial acquiescence to the realities of publication. Obvious mechanical errors are corrected and, in cases where sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the production process has changed legitimate authorial (textual) intention, additional emendations may be made. Emendations to the copy-text are recorded, but certain kinds of typographical elements (e.g. chapter heads, running titles) have been standardized. The record of substantive variants appears as footnotes on the page in which the changes occur, and they are keyed to the line numbers on that page. The quotation from the text is followed by the variant and the siglum or sigla of the text(s) in which it appears, and the variants are presented in chronological order. Variants in accidentals are listed in the apparatus section, and are likewise keyed to page and line number.

A chronology of Hardy's life appears in each volume. The Introduction describes the genesis of the work, its publishing history and cultural context, the process and significance of authorial revision, and the work's reception during Hardy's lifetime, in order to enable the reader to comprehend as fully as possible the text's composition and history. Each volume also provides a rationale for the choice of copy-text, along with a facsimile of the copy-text's title page and a bibliographical description of the principal textual witnesses. A full set of explanatory endnotes, keyed to superscript numbers, is included to offer clear and relevant information to the reader by identifying literary and cultural allusions, geographic locations and references to religion, philosophy, art and music. Appearances of dialect in Hardy's work are also translated in those instances where uncertainty of meaning may occur, and are recorded in a separate glossary. If a work was illustrated for periodical publication those illustrations are reproduced in

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the volume, usually as an appendix, unless the illustrations were present in the copy-text. The frontispiece illustrations for the Osgood, McIlvaine 'Wessex Novels' edition and the Macmillan Wessex Edition are likewise reproduced in an appendix.

I would like to thank the members of the Cambridge Hardy Editorial Board for their continuing advice and guidance. I am also grateful to Linda Bree, whose role as Commissioning Editor: Literature at Cambridge University Press during the early stages of the edition was instrumental in its development, and to Bethany Thomas, for her support of the project.

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