

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-19648-2 - Thomas Hardy in Context  
Edited by Phillip Mallett  
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PART I

Life and Works

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## I

*Life and Life*

DAVID AMIGONI

The two volumes of biography published after Hardy's death as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892–1928* (in 1928 and 1930, respectively) were late arrivals in the tradition of the Victorian biographical monument. Hardy was the last of the really eminent Victorian writers to die; his life was recorded, seemingly, in a way befitting the family-managed tradition of the 'life and letters' tribute that marked the Victorian literary celebrity. Both works were authored by Florence Emily Hardy, Hardy's second wife, 'Compiled', as the subtitle ran, 'largely from contemporary notes, letters, diaries, and biographical memoranda, as well as from oral information in conversations extending over many years'. To this extent, Hardy's monument and its ostensible architect followed in the tradition set down for other canonical Victorian authors and intellectuals: George Eliot's life, edited from her letters and journals by her husband of late life, J. W. Cross (1885); Tennyson's biography, compiled by his son, Hallam (1897); Charles Darwin's life, written by his son, Francis (1887). Francis Darwin cast the net wide in an effort to recover the letters, papers, and notebooks that would reveal his father 'the man', as he emphatically put it in correspondence with the publisher John Murray.<sup>1</sup>

As is so often the case with Hardy, though he appeared to follow and be bound by a Victorian convention and aspiration, something much more complex was at work in the two-volume *Life*. Hardy was concealing tracks rather than assembling a paper chase that would definitively reveal him. Reflecting on the materials from which the 'life' was compiled, the 'Prefatory Note' reminded readers that 'the opinions quoted from these fugitive papers are often to be understood as his passing thoughts only ... not as permanent conclusions' (*LW*: 3). Seldom had a Victorian life and letters monument claimed so openly to be founded on 'fugitive papers'; though

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[More information](#)

*Amigoni*

the 'fugitive' documents comprising Thomas Carlyle's posthumous 'life' similarly strayed beyond the Victorian life-writing pale – an example that is, I shall argue, instructive.

The *Life* that Hardy scholars recognise now is a significantly different text from the two volumes that appeared in 1928 and 1930, and which were merged into a one-volume edition as late as 1962.<sup>2</sup> The *Life* we read now has been 'restored' by the eminent Hardy scholar, Michael Millgate, under the title *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, and attributed to the authorship of Thomas Hardy. Though the *Life* was written in the third person, in the impersonal voice of the biographer, Millgate's edition confirmed what had long been suspected: that Hardy wrote it substantially by himself, in the third person, and that it was typed up by Florence and then corrected by Hardy.

Millgate suggests that the idea for the work perhaps came during 1912–13, following the introspective turn Hardy's mind took after the death of his first wife, Emma Lavinia Hardy, and the discovery of her memoirs and diaries, 'often hostile to himself' (*LW*: xi). There was thus a doubly defensive motive. Hardy was alarmed at the prospect of an unauthorised life; one such, F. A. Hedgcock's *Thomas Hardy: penseur et artiste*, had appeared in French in 1911, generating warnings (in the 'Prefatory Note') against the 'erroneous and grotesque statements' seeping into the public sphere (*LW*: 3). This prompted Hardy into a mechanically complex 'autobiographical impulse', to borrow James Olney's idea, which was anything but impulsive, and included an absolute proscription on the term 'autobiography'.<sup>3</sup> In order to recover his childhood and formative life experiences, he related stories to Florence, who took notes. Referring to papers, correspondence, notebooks, and press cuttings, Hardy himself came gradually to compose a holograph manuscript. The pages comprising this manuscript were typed up by Florence and corrected by Hardy, usually on the 'rough' copy so that Florence would enter the changes on the top copy destined for the printer. Hardy sought to ensure that his holograph did not appear in this copy; where it did, he disguised his customary handwriting (*LW*: xii–xiv). In short, Hardy did everything possible to conceal his role as an author, including burning many primary materials and the holograph manuscript. Hardy's home at Max Gate staged some of the

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[More information](#)

*Life and Life*

more extensive bonfires of personal papers that lit the skies of late Victorian and Edwardian England.

However, after Hardy's death and prior to publication, Florence, assisted by J. M. Barrie, radically edited the manuscript to produce an image of Hardy that was significantly altered from the one that he had, with her assistance, finalised. Using the only material available, an inconsistently edited first carbon copy of the typescript (*LW*: xxx), Millgate has restored much of what Florence and Barrie erased. However, readers have been left feeling that even though the image has been restored, the result is paradoxically reduced. Millgate's Hardy, who was to all intents and purposes Hardy's Hardy, seems rather too enamoured of the high social connections that he acquired in later life, and somewhat too inclined to enter into acrimonious dialogue with his numerous critics.

How should present-day readers evaluate Hardy's life-writing subterfuge, and the restored yet curiously unsatisfying image of the writer, in context? In part, they need to see it in the context of a 'life-writing industry' in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which was a particular manifestation of a fast moving Victorian publishing industry, greedy for disclosures about authors' lives. This is a field that Trev Lynn Broughton has surveyed authoritatively in *Men of Letters, Writing Lives* (1999). The 'men of letters' of Broughton's title took professional charge of projects such as the *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*), published from 1886, and a whole range of biographical projects that 'mapped' the literary past, such as the 'English Men of Letters' series, edited by John Morley.<sup>4</sup> In one sense, this context attested to the power of the life as a key to literature. It also produced a sense of indirection, defensiveness, and caution among those who might write their own lives in the later nineteenth century, or indeed have their lives written for them.

Broughton's book opens with Leslie Stephen, first editor of the *DNB*. She focuses on one of Stephen's less 'public' biographical duties, his *Mausoleum Book*, a 'private' letter addressed to his children, in which he wrote his recollected 'life' of their mother, his deceased wife Julia Stephen. However, as Broughton shows, Stephen's letter was tortuous, convoluted, and contradictory in its explanation of its purpose to its addressees (one of whom was Virginia Stephen, later Woolf). The letter also proclaimed the

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[More information](#)

*Amigoni*

impossibility of any attempt among the unqualified to write a life of Leslie Stephen: the biographer's own inner life, such as it was, should go unrecorded.<sup>5</sup> Stephen's writing enacted a defensiveness that would parallel Hardy's wary approach to the business of life writing.

Stephen, a professional biographer and man of letters, was a key figure in Hardy's life. Hardy contributed an anecdote about him in *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen*, the 'qualified' biographer eventually being F. W. Maitland (1906). As editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, Stephen had approached Hardy in 1872, asking him to write a tale for the magazine, *Far from the Madding Crowd* being the eventual publication (*LW*: 97–100). Hardy was later invited to witness an important moment in Stephen's inner, intellectual life: his renunciation of Anglican orders in 1875, conducted 'with due formality', so that even the consequences of inner life have a measured, semipublic solemnity. This story reappeared later in Hardy's own *Life*. Hardy's image of Stephen pacing his domestic library late at night in a 'heath-coloured dressing-gown' ends with Hardy's signature, and the turn of the conversation to 'theologies decayed and defunct, the origin of things, the constitution of matter, the unreality of time' (*LW*: 108–9).

There is a sense here in which the *Life* writes Hardy himself into an authorial elite: one among the men of letters who could concern themselves with the ultimate questions of evolution, matter, faith, time – and candour. Hardy's affectionate account of the episode marked the two men as homosocially bonded and 'apart' from the mainstream of the middle-brow literary culture through which Hardy's reputation was being made, in organs such as *Cornhill Magazine*. This episode of the *Life* includes stories about the fraught business of serialisation for writer and editor (*LW*: 100–2). Hardy's literary career was conducted amidst a publishing industry that had rapidly developed since the early nineteenth century, generating images and commodities associated with modern literary celebrity. Under Florence's posthumous management, Hardy's *Life* would become deeply embedded in this process: six extracts from the first volume appeared in successive issues of *The Times* (22–27 October 1928), just prior to volume publication.

The written *Life* itself is alert to these circuits of commerce. It records the rediscovery in 1918 of the '*revenant*' manuscript

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*Life and Life*

of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which Hardy believed had been ‘pulped’ after use by the *Cornhill* in the 1870s (*LW*: 416). The rediscovery of manuscripts could prove something of a headache for Victorian biographers and their families as they sought to establish a ‘canonical’ identity for a major author in a culture of publicity. In December 1892, W. T. Stead, editor of the *Review of Reviews*, wrote to the widowed Lady Tennyson asking her to authenticate an unpublished poem that had come into his possession; the letter goes so far as to cite inside ‘information’ on the location of the original manuscript in Tennyson’s desk at Farringford. Stead added that, if authenticated, he would publish it in the next number of the *Review*. Writing to the publisher Macmillan, Hallam Tennyson, with the embryonic biography of his father on his mind, opined that Stead’s behaviour was ‘scandalous’. Macmillan wrote to Stead asserting copyright on behalf of the Tennyson estate. The resurfacing of *revenant* manuscripts could lead to both panic and aggression among biographers and publishers.<sup>6</sup>

In Hardy’s case, the situation was handled with greater equanimity; *Far from the Madding Crowd* was, after all, published, and part of his *oeuvre*. However, there are legacy issues that the *Life* strives to contest. The commercial value of the rediscovery is noted: the narrative notes how the manuscript was sold initially as part of Christie’s Red Cross Sale (charitably assisting the war effort), then routed via a New York dealer to a wealthy American collector. Playing with questions of value, Hardy is made ‘whimsically’ to regret ‘that he had not written it on better paper’ (*LW*: 416). The situation of this moment is striking: it occurs in a chapter entitled ‘Reflections on Poetry’ in which the *Life* is keen to assert a continuous and lasting *poetical* identity for Hardy the writer. These claims are juxtaposed with ‘voices’ from contemporary criticism, such as the extract from a U.S. periodical, which styles Hardy as “‘a realistic novelist who ... has a grim determination to go down to posterity wearing the laurels of a poet’” (*LW*: 415). In this context, the *revenant* manuscript of the early novel comes to have something of an ironic identity, directing ‘posterity’ one way, whereas the *Life* clearly wishes it to be pushed in another. Millgate’s edition has restored reference to ‘an excellent article [in the *Edinburgh Review*] on Hardy’s lyrics from the experienced pen of Mr Edmund Gosse’, which acts as an immediate prelude to the anecdote about the

*Amigoni*

discovery of the *revenant* manuscript. This comment on Gosse's favourable review of Hardy's poetry was edited out of the version published by Florence.

Hardy's insistence on the source of Gosse's article – the *Edinburgh Review*, one of the great heavy-weight quarterlies from the first decades of the nineteenth-century – harks back to earlier, more exclusive monuments of nineteenth century literary culture. The *Life* records the passing of that culture through the deaths of many of his great Victorian literary predecessors. Hardy recounts that 'Crossing Hyde Park one morning in June [1870] he saw the announcement of Dickens's death' (*LW*: 79). In 1880, he records that 'George Eliot died during the winter in which he lay ill, and this set him thinking about Positivism' (*LW*: 150). Eliot's death was rapidly followed by that of Thomas Carlyle; Hardy reflects that 'both he & George Eliot have vanished into nescience while I have been lying here' (*LW*: 152). The emptying out of Carlyle's life force was an unsettling anxiety, reminding Hardy, in the throes of illness, of his own mortality. And yet, there is a sense in which Carlyle's 'living' presence and significance is an ambiguous, contradictory one in the *Life*, which generates complex insight into the composition of Hardy's identity as a writer.

Carlyle's presence seems to haunt Hardy's ostensibly enjoyable social networking in the literary world of London as he established himself as a writer. Thus in 1880, Hardy's pleasant excursion to the Tennysons (on a visit to London during the season), and his record of meetings with T. H. Huxley, Thomas Woolner, and George du Maurier, are followed by a note on "Hints for Reviewers – adapted from Carlyle". The dictum urges the reviewer to "Observe what is true, not what is false; what is to be loved and held fast, and earnestly laid to heart" (*LW*: 141). Carlyle, seldom viewed as an apostle of critical balance, sweetness, and light, becomes here a beacon of fortitude for Hardy in the face of persistent adverse criticism. However, the sentiments that are promised give way to Carlylean combativeness, and the note develops into a rant against 'hopeless' critics who 'prove nothing by their probings except their own incompetence for their business' (*LW*: 141). Florence preserved the noble sentiments of the 'Hints' but edited out the rant.<sup>7</sup>

This connects with an earlier significance attached to Carlyle, an actual sighting of the man of letters in 1869, forty years after the



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[More information](#)

*Life and Life*

publication of the seminal 'Signs of the Times' in the *Edinburgh Review*, in the offices of Carlyle's publisher Chapman and Hall. Poised between a career in literature and architecture, Hardy was invited to a meeting with Frederick Chapman, who

said with nonchalance, ignoring Hardy's business, "You see that old man talking to my clerk. He's Thomas Carlyle.... Have a good look at him ... You'll be glad I pointed him out to you some day." Hardy was rather surprised that Chapman did not think enough of Thomas Carlyle to attend to his wants in person; but said nothing. (*LW*: 62)

This can be read as a striking moment of realisation and recognition in which, at some level, class and social origins play a role: the younger man from rural southwest England, son of a stonemason, aspirant to the office of writer yet hardly born to be one, sees in the heart of London the elderly man from rural lowland Scotland, son of a stonemason, an unlikely entrant to literature. The aged prophet of the heroism of letters is being dealt with by a clerk. Quite what 'gladness' Chapman expected Hardy to derive from seeing the elderly Carlyle in this situation is hard to specify; Hardy certainly observes but is, at the time, publicly silenced by the lesson.

It would be difficult to overestimate the centrality of the life of Thomas Carlyle – professional and domestic – to all aspects of Victorian life writing. He had struggled, in the best traditions of 'self-help', from a humble background to achieve independence through authorship. Carlyle was the writer who in the 1830s and 1840s declared that history was comprised of innumerable biographies; who legislated on the value of biography through his essay on 'Biography' (1832) and commentary on Boswell's *Life of Johnson*; and who articulated the heroism of the man of letters in the context of a culture of print through his lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841).<sup>8</sup>

Yet that culture of print would turn decisively against his legacy after his own death in 1881. Life writings about Carlyle were the source of this downturn, for as Broughton has demonstrated in *Men of Letters, Writing Lives*, the revelation of the deeply unhappy, indeed cruel, domestic life endured by Jane Welsh Carlyle generated an almighty controversy. J. A. Froude, his injudicious literary executor, published Carlyle's indiscreet *Reminiscences* in 1881, in which Carlyle drew less than flattering portraits of those who had

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[More information](#)

*Amigoni*

helped him into a literary career while revealing something of his wife's unhappiness. Later, Froude published his four-volume life of Carlyle, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life* (1882), and *Thomas Carlyle: A History of His Life in London* (1884), together with the *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1883); texts that had been partially edited and annotated by Carlyle himself, and which revealed much more about Jane's misery. As Broughton's anatomy of the controversy reveals, it erupted in the 1880s and was still being debated publicly in 1903. It raised questions not only about the ethics of life writing and publication but also about middle-class marriage and the place of literary masculinity in domestic relations.<sup>9</sup> For Thomas and Florence Hardy, writing a literary life in the early years of the twentieth century, Carlyle's influence was probably beyond evasion, particularly for complex reasons relating to their own emotional lives. The controversy also possibly affected the tone of the letter writing adopted by Emma Lavinia Hardy during the 1890s as she reflected on her marital and domestic alienation to a range of correspondents.<sup>10</sup>

There are striking parallels between the life writings that traced the married life of the Carlyles and the Hardys. Froude's biography of Carlyle had divided Carlyle's life into two parts: the first forty years of his life, followed by his life in London. Hardy's *Life* also originally appeared in two parts, covering an early and a later life. However, whereas the Carlyles moved from Scottish rustic isolation in part one to a life in London in part two, the Hardys moved from a life in suburban London back to Dorset. And whereas Carlyle was lonely in introspective mourning after 1866, Hardy's *Life* recorded in February 1914 that 'the subject of this memoir married the present writer, who had been for several years the friend of the first Mrs Hardy' (*LW*: 392). Emma Hardy having died in 1912 (*LW*: 387), the *Life* minimally records Hardy's marriage to Florence, formerly a companion to Emma.

There is a sense in which Hardy's *Life* can be read as a managed public response to the disclosure of marital unhappiness and the potential for scandal, a response that seems silently aware of the legacy of and controversy around Carlyle's *Reminiscences*, his atoning response to the death of the wife he had made deeply unhappy. They were a curious, unsettling performance, and it is hard to say whether they are about Carlyle's subjectivity, or the subjectivities