

THOMAS HARDY:  
SELECTED POETRY AND  
NON-FICTIONAL PROSE



EDITED BY PETER WIDDOWSON

THOMAS HARDY

ALSO EDITED BY PETER WIDDOWSON AND PUBLISHED BY MACMILLAN

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# THOMAS HARDY

Selected Poetry and Non-Fictional Prose

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for Jane again  
(who still manages to  
like Hardy's poems, too).

# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiv
<i>Note on the Text and References</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvi
<i>Introduction</i>	xx
I A SELECTION OF HARDY'S POEMS	
The History of an Hour	2
<b>The Familiar Hardy</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Wessex Poems</i>	3
Neutral Tones	3
She at His Funeral	3
Friends Beyond	4
Thoughts of Phena	6
Nature's Questioning	7
The Impercipient	8
'I Look Into My Glass'	9
<i>Poems of the Past and the Present</i>	10
Drummer Hodge	10
Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the Graves of Shelley and Keats	11
A Commonplace Day	12
At a Lunar Eclipse	13
To an Unborn Pauper Child	13
To Lizbie Browne	15
A Broken Appointment	17
An August Midnight	17
The Darkling Thrush	18
The Ruined Maid	19

The Self-Unseeing	20
In Tenebris I	20
<i>Time's Laughingstocks</i>	22
A Trampwoman's Tragedy	22
The House of Hospitalities	26
She Hears the Storm	26
Shut Out That Moon	27
Reminiscences of a Dancing Man	28
The Conformers	29
Former Beauties	30
A Church Romance	30
The Roman Road	31
One We Knew	32
The Man He Killed	33
<i>Satires of Circumstance</i>	34
Channel Firing	34
The Convergence of the Twain	35
'When I Set Out for Lyonesse'	37
A Thunderstorm in Town	37
Beyond the Last Lamp	38
Wessex Heights	39
In Death Divided	40
At Day-Close in November	41
Under the Waterfall	42
The Going	44
Your Last Drive	45
Rain on a Grave	46
'I Found Her Out There'	47
Lament	49
The Haunter	50
The Voice	51
After a Journey	52
Beeny Cliff	53
At Castle Boterel	53
The Phantom Horsewoman	55
Where the Picnic Was	56
II. In Church	57

<i>Moments of Vision</i>	58
Afternoon Service at Mellstock	58
At the Word 'Farewell'	58
Heredity	59
On a Midsummer Eve	60
'Something Tapped'	60
The Oxen	61
Transformations	61
Great Things	62
At Middle-Field Gate in February	63
The Musical Box	64
Old Furniture	65
Logs on the Hearth	66
The Sunshade	67
The Wind's Prophecy	67
During Wind and Rain	69
'Who's in the Next Room?'	70
Paying Calls	70
Midnight on the Great Western	71
The Choirmaster's Burial	72
In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'	73
Afterwards	74
<i>Late Lyrics and Earlier</i>	75
Weathers	75
Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard	76
An Ancient to Ancients	77
<i>Human Shows, Far Phantasies</i>	80
A Sheep Fair	80
Snow in the Suburbs	81
No Buyers	82
Nobody Comes	83
Shortening Days at the Homestead	83
<i>Winter Words</i>	84
Proud Songsters	84
'I Am the One'	84
Throwing a Tree	85
Lying Awake	86

He Never Expected Much	86
Christmas: 1924	87
'We Are Getting to the End'	87
He Resolves to Say No More	88
<b>The Less Familiar Hardy</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>i 'A brain spins there till dawn': Personal Poems</b>	<b>89</b>
A Young Man's Epigram on Existence ( <i>TL</i> )	89
Cynic's Epitaph ( <i>HS</i> )	89
The House of Silence ( <i>MV</i> )	90
'I Rose Up as My Custom Is' ( <i>SC</i> )	90
On an Invitation to the United States ( <i>PPP</i> )	92
In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury ( <i>WP</i> )	93
'I Said to Love' ( <i>PPP</i> )	94
Tragedian to Tragedienne ( <i>HS</i> )	95
The Dead Man Walking ( <i>TL</i> )	96
On Stinsford Hill at Midnight ( <i>LLE</i> )	97
His Immortality ( <i>PPP</i> )	98
In a Former Resort after Many Years ( <i>HS</i> )	99
The New Dawn's Business ( <i>WW</i> )	99
<b>ii 'The Figure in the Scene': More Poems for Emma</b>	<b>101</b>
The Figure in the Scene ( <i>MV</i> )	101
'A Man Was Drawing Near to Me' ( <i>LLE</i> )	101
Had You Wept ( <i>SC</i> )	103
'She Did Not Turn' ( <i>LLE</i> )	103
The Tresses ( <i>MV</i> )	104
On a Discovered Curl of Hair ( <i>LLE</i> )	105
The Head above the Fog ( <i>MV</i> )	105
<b>iii 'Coded creeds': Poems of Philosophy and Religion</b>	<b>107</b>
A Cathedral Façade at Midnight ( <i>HS</i> )	107
A Drizzling Easter Morning ( <i>LLE</i> )	108
Unkept Good Fridays ( <i>WW</i> )	108
Her Dilemma ( <i>WP</i> )	109
The Clasped Skeletons ( <i>WW</i> )	110
The Respectable Burgher ( <i>PPP</i> )	112
Queen Caroline to Her Guests ( <i>HS</i> )	113
The Last Chrysanthemum ( <i>PPP</i> )	114

	Going and Staying ( <i>LLE</i> )	115
	In a Wood ( <i>WP</i> )	116
	Before Life and After ( <i>TL</i> )	117
	'Nothing Matters Much' ( <i>HS</i> )	118
iv	<b><i>'In brotherhood bonded': Poems of Social Observation</i></b>	119
	Farmer Dunman's Funeral ( <i>HS</i> )	119
	At the Railway Station, Upway ( <i>LLE</i> )	120
	An East-End Curate ( <i>HS</i> )	120
	Whispered at the Church-Opening ( <i>WW</i> )	121
	The Old Workman ( <i>LLE</i> )	122
	Last Look round St Martin's Fair ( <i>HS</i> )	123
	At the Aquatic Sports ( <i>HS</i> )	124
	Music in a Snowy Street ( <i>HS</i> )	124
	Christmastide ( <i>WW</i> )	125
v	<b><i>'In brutish battle': More Poems about War</i></b>	127
	'Often When Warring' ( <i>MV</i> )	127
	'I Looked Up from My Writing' ( <i>MV</i> )	127
	The Going of the Battery ( <i>PPP</i> )	128
	A Wife in London ( <i>PPP</i> )	130
	Outside the Casement ( <i>LLE</i> )	131
	By Henstridge Cross at the Year's End ( <i>LLE</i> )	132
	A Jingle on the Times ('UP')	133
vi	<b><i>'The Riddle': Poems of the Male Gaze</i></b>	136
	The Riddle ( <i>MV</i> )	136
vi.a	<b><i>'The Woman I Met'</i></b>	137
	Faintheart in a Railway Train ( <i>LLE</i> )	137
	The Woman I Met ( <i>LLE</i> )	137
	The Photograph ( <i>MV</i> )	140
	The Collector Cleans His Picture ( <i>LLE</i> )	141
	The Young Glass-Stainer ( <i>MV</i> )	142
	Concerning Agnes ( <i>WW</i> )	142
	The Chosen ( <i>LLE</i> )	143
vi.b	<b><i>'Her large tenderness'</i></b>	146
	By the Barrows ( <i>TL</i> )	146
	The Mound ( <i>WW</i> )	146

	The Dark-Eyed Gentleman ( <i>TL</i> )	147
	One Ralph Blossom Soliloquizes ( <i>TL</i> )	148
	Julie-Jane ( <i>TL</i> )	149
	The Christening ( <i>TL</i> )	150
	The Elopement ( <i>SC</i> )	152
	To Carrey Clavel ( <i>TL</i> )	153
	The Milkmaid ( <i>PPP</i> )	153
	IX. At the Altar-Rail ( <i>SC</i> )	154
	X. In the Nuptial Chamber ( <i>SC</i> )	155
	XI. In the Restaurant ( <i>SC</i> )	155
	The Moth-Signal ( <i>SC</i> )	156
	In the Days of Crinoline ( <i>SC</i> )	157
	The Newcomer's Wife ( <i>SC</i> )	158
	Her Second Husband Hears Her Story ( <i>WW</i> )	159
	'A Gentleman's Second-Hand Suit' ( <i>WW</i> )	160
	The Third Kissing-Gate ( <i>WW</i> )	161
vi.c	<i>'The Woman Pays'</i>	162
	The Coquette, and After ( <i>PPP</i> )	162
	That Kiss in the Dark ( <i>WW</i> )	163
	Circus-Rider to Ringmaster ( <i>HS</i> )	163
	Love Watches a Window ( <i>WW</i> )	164
	Plena Timoris ( <i>HS</i> )	165
	At the Mill ( <i>HS</i> )	166
	The Fading Rose ( <i>HS</i> )	167
	The Dame of Athelhall ( <i>PPP</i> )	167
	The Chapel-Organist ( <i>LLE</i> )	170
	A Daughter Returns ( <i>WW</i> )	174
	On the Portrait of a Woman about to be Hanged ( <i>HS</i> )	175
vi.d	<i>'The play the town's to see'</i>	176
	A Victorian Rehearsal ('UP')	176
	The Ballet ( <i>MV</i> )	177
	The Harbour Bridge ( <i>HS</i> )	177
	A Leader of Fashion ( <i>HS</i> )	178
	The Lady in the Furs ( <i>WW</i> )	179
	A Poor Man and a Lady ( <i>HS</i> )	180
	A Beauty's Soliloquy during Her Honeymoon ( <i>HS</i> )	182
	A Watering-Place Lady Inventoried ( <i>HS</i> )	183
	A Question of Marriage ( <i>WW</i> )	184

	The Rejected Member's Wife ( <i>TL</i> )	185
	<i>Recasting Hardy the Poet: A Critical Commentary</i>	186
<b>II LITERARY AND SOCIAL COMMENT: A SELECTION OF HARDY'S NON-FICTIONAL PROSE</b>		
i	<i>Prefaces to Hardy's Volumes of Poetry</i>	220
	Wessex Poems (1898)	220
	Poems of the Past and the Present (1902)	220
	Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses (1909)	221
	Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922)	221
	Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres (1928)	228
	The Dynasts, Part the First (1904)	229
	General Preface to the Novels and Poems (‘Wessex Edition’, 1912)	232
ii	<i>Preface to Select Poems of William Barnes: Chosen and Edited by Thomas Hardy (1908)</i>	237
iii	<i>The Profitable Reading of Fiction (1888)</i>	242
iv	<i>Candour in English Fiction (1890)</i>	255
v	<i>The Science of Fiction (1891)</i>	261
vi	<i>The Dorsetshire Labourer (1883)</i>	265
vii	<i>Maumbury Ring (1908)</i>	283
	<i>Notes</i>	289
	<i>Reading List</i>	434
	<i>Index of Titles</i>	436

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT AND REFERENCES

Hardy was an inveterate reviser of everything he wrote, and the poetry was no exception. His revisions were made in a variety of different places, and were never collated by him in his lifetime. Once his *Collected Poems* appeared in 1919, however, many of the revisions were incorporated in later editions of it (1923; 1928 – includes *Human Shows, Far Phantasies*; 1930 – includes *Winter Words*). It is this last edition which is the basis for the present selection. However, since then, there have been two modern scholarly editions: i) James Gibson's *The Complete Poems* (1976), based on the *Collected Poems* of 1928 and 1930, which 'includes all the previously uncollected poems' plus six extracts from *The Dynasts*, which Hardy had printed as free-standing lyrics in *Selected Poems* (1916), and incorporates other revisions Hardy made after poems had appeared in earlier editions of *Collected Poems*; this text forms the basis of Gibson's *Variorium* edition of 1979, which lists all variants, etc.; ii) Samuel Hynes's *The Complete Poetical Works* I, II, III (1982–5) which also shows all variants and further 'corrections' Hardy made in his own copies of various editions of his poetry. Both works, and especially the latter, have been invaluable to the present editor, and the 1930 *Collected Poems* copy-text has been adapted, for this selection, to incorporate many of the suggestions made in them.

In most cases, the prose writings included here are based on the text of their original publication, although the prefaces to the volumes of poetry derive from the revised versions of the 'Wessex Edition'. However, a debt must be acknowledged to Harold Orel's pioneering editorial work, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* (1966), in establishing the text of the present selection.

Throughout the references and editorial commentary, abbreviations are used which are listed at the start of this volume. A selection of other works cited can be found in the Reading List at the end. Page references for poems and prose extracts relate to the present volume; if the piece is not included here, the abbreviation 'n.i.h.' is used.

## ABBREVIATIONS

[The abbreviations listed here are used throughout the book; further abbreviations, specific to the Notes, appear as part of the headnote there.]

### I PROCEDURAL

<i>c.</i>	<i>circa</i> : about (of dates, numbers, etc.)
cf.	confer (standard form for cross-referencing)
ch., chs.	chapter, chapters
cp.	compare
Crit. Comm.	the Critical Commentary section of this book
ed	editor, edited by
edtn	edition
'FH'	the 'Familiar Hardy' section of this book
H/TH	Hardy/Thomas Hardy
hn., hns.	headnote, headnotes to a volume, poem or essay
Intro.	the Introduction to this book
'LFH'	the 'Less Familiar Hardy' section here
l., ll.	line, lines
ms.	manuscript
n.	note or notes to a line/lines in a poem or essay
n.i.h.	not included here (of a poem, etc.)
<i>passim</i>	dispersed throughout
p., pp.	page, pages
'Sel.Prose'	the 'Selected Non-Fictional Prose' section of this book
st., sts.	stanza, stanzas
<i>v.</i>	<i>vide</i> : see (as in ' <i>v.</i> below, p. —')
WWI	World War One (1914–18)

### II HARDY'S WORKS

<i>Barnes</i> , Pref	the 'Preface' to <i>Select Poems of William Barnes</i> (ed TH)
'CEF'	'Candour in English Fiction' (1890, essay)
<i>Coll. P</i> (1919)	<i>The Collected Poems of TH</i> (Macmillan, 1919)
<i>Coll. P</i> (1923)	<i>The Collected Poems of TH</i> (Macmillan, 1923)
<i>CP</i>	<i>Chosen Poems of TH</i> (1929)
<i>Ds</i>	<i>The Dynasts</i> (1902–7)
<i>Ds</i> , Pref	the 'Preface' to <i>Ds</i> , Part I
'DL'	'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (1883, essay)

<i>DR</i>	<i>Desperate Remedies</i> (1871)
<i>FMC</i>	<i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i> (1874)
<i>GND</i>	<i>A Group of Noble Dames</i> (1891)
'GP'	the 'General Preface to the Novels and Poems', for the 'Wessex Edition' of TH's works (1912)
<i>HE</i>	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i> (1876)
<i>HS</i>	<i>Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles</i> (1925)
<i>Jude</i>	<i>Jude the Obscure</i> (1895)
<i>Laod.</i>	<i>A Laodicean</i> (1881)
<i>LLE</i>	<i>Late Lyrics and Earlier with Many Other Verses</i> (1922)
<i>LLE</i> , Apol	the 'Apology' to <i>LLE</i>
<i>LLI</i>	<i>Life's Little Ironies</i> (1894)
<i>MC</i>	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i> (1886)
'MR'	'Maumbury Ring' (1908, essay)
<i>MV</i>	<i>Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses</i> (1917)
<i>PBE</i>	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i> (1872)
<i>PPP</i>	<i>Poems of the Past and the Present</i> (1901)
<i>PPP</i> , Pref	the 'Preface' to <i>PPP</i>
'PRF'	'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' (1888, essay)
<i>RN</i>	<i>The Return of the Native</i> (1878)
<i>SC</i>	<i>Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries with Miscellaneous Pieces</i> (1914)
'SF'	'The Science of Fiction' (1891, essay)
<i>SP</i>	<i>Selected Poems of TH</i> (1916)
<i>Tess</i>	<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> (1891)
<i>TL</i>	<i>Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses</i> (1909)
<i>TL</i> , Pref	the 'Preface' to <i>TL</i>
<i>T-M</i>	<i>The Trumpet-Major</i> (1880)
<i>TT</i>	<i>Two on a Tower</i> (1882)
<i>UGT</i>	<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i> (1872)
'UP'	'Uncollected Poems' (separately sectionalised in 'Complete' edtns. of TH's poetry, these were ones never published in any of his own volumes)
<i>Ws</i>	<i>The Woodlanders</i> (1887)
<i>W-B</i>	<i>The Well-Beloved</i> (1892/97)
'Wess. edtn'	the 'Wessex Edition' (Macmillan) of all TH's works (24 vols, 1912-31)
<i>WP</i>	<i>Wessex Poems and Other Verses</i> (1898)
<i>WP</i> , Pref	the 'Preface' to <i>WP</i>
<i>WTs</i>	<i>Wessex Tales</i> (1888)
<i>WW</i>	<i>Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres</i> (1928)
<i>WW</i> , Intro	the 'Introductory Note' to <i>WW</i>

References to TH's novels are, by chapter and page, to the 'New Wessex' edtn.

III EDITIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND REFERENCE BOOKS (REFERRED TO EXTENSIVELY THROUGHOUT THE PRESENT VOLUME)

- Armstrong Tim Armstrong, ed, *TH: Selected Poems*, Longman, 1993
- Bailey J.O. Bailey, *The Poems of TH: A Handbook and Commentary*, University of North Carolina Press, 1970
- Creighton T.R.M. Creighton, ed, *Poems of TH: A New Selection*, Macmillan, 1974
- Gibson James Gibson, ed, *TH: The Complete Poems*, 'New Wessex' edtn, Macmillan (1976), 1978
- Gittings, I, II Robert Gittings, I: *Young TH* (1975), Penguin, 1978  
Robert Gittings, II: *The Older Hardy*, Heinemann, 1978
- Hynes I, II, III Samuel Hynes, ed, *The Complete Poetical Works of TH*, OUP, vols. I (1982), II (1984), III (1985)
- Hynes (1984) Samuel Hynes, ed, *TH: A Critical Selection of His Finest Poetry*, 'The Oxford Authors', OUP, 1984
- Hynes (1994) Samuel Hynes, ed, *TH: A Selection of His Finest Poems*, 'Oxford Poetry Library', OUP, 1994
- Kay-R Denys Kay-Robinson, *Hardy's Wessex Re-appraised*, David and Charles, 1972
- Life* Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of TH, 1840–1928*, Macmillan (1962), 1975 (one-volume edtn of *The Early Life of TH, 1840–1891*, 1928, and *The Later Years of TH, 1892–1928*, 1930)
- Millgate Michael Millgate, *TH: A Biography*, OUP, 1982
- Motion Andrew Motion, ed, *TH: Selected Poems*, 'Everyman', J.M. Dent, 1994
- Orel Harold Orel, ed, *TH's Personal Writings*, Macmillan (1966), 1990
- Pinion I F.B. Pinion, *A Commentary on the Poems of TH*, Macmillan, 1976
- Pinion II F.B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion*, Macmillan (1968), 1978
- Pinion III F.B. Pinion, *A TH Dictionary*, Macmillan (1989), 1992
- SR Emma Hardy, *Some Recollections* (ed Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings), OUP (1961), 1979
- Thomas Harry Thomas, ed, *TH: Selected Poems*, 'Penguin Classics', 1993
- Wain I, II John Wain, I, ed, *Selected Shorter Poems of TH*, Macmillan, (1966), 1975  
John and Eirian Wain, II, eds, *The New Wessex Selection of TH's Poetry*, Macmillan, 1978
- Wright David Wright, ed, *TH: Selected Poems*, 'The Penguin Poetry Library' (1978), 1986



Hardy's own illustration for 'In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury' from *Wessex Poems*, Macmillan, 1898

## INTRODUCTION

### THOMAS HARDY: A PARTIAL PORTRAIT

It is a commonplace of literary criticism that 'major author X' was a 'transitional' writer who lived and worked in a 'transitional' period. This does not get us very far, however, since all periods are, in the nature of historical process, transitional; and all major writers, by dint of their perceived majority, will also be transitional in that they modify by innovation the literary culture of which they are a part. As Thomas Hardy has so often been awarded the 'transitional' accolade, we may ask: is it any more illuminating in relation to him than to anyone else?

Born a stonemason's son in a small Dorset village on 2 June 1840, Hardy died 88 years later on 11 January 1928, an internationally eminent novelist and poet. It is difficult to imagine how a period so long and eventful – beginning some 14 years before the Charge of the Light Brigade, when Tennyson and Dickens were in their prime, and ending ten years after WWI, when Hardy's literary contemporaries included Eliot, Joyce and Woolf – could be anything but 'transitional'.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it conceivable that Hardy's own work in two genres would not have been inscribed by the macro and micro social and cultural processes shaping that long life; nor again, that his *oeuvre* did not help to shape and inscribe the cultural theme-park in which he still remains so large an attraction. What this Introduction aims to do, therefore, is block in those aspects of Hardy's life and work which, it will propose, are most germane in establishing that to call Hardy a transitional writer is indeed to mean something.

Oddly enough, his long life was, compared with many writers, markedly uneventful. Furthermore, there are readily available several major biographies of him,<sup>2</sup> as well as Florence Emily Hardy's *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840–1928* (albeit dictated in the third person to his second wife during the 1920s with the clear intention that it should be passed off as a 'definitive' biography by her – and hence, in some senses, his last fiction<sup>3</sup>). It is not this Introduction's business, then, to chart in miniature the slow diurnal unravelling of Hardy's life. Rather, it takes three themes in his biographical narrative and uses each to construct a 'partial portrait', to set in place something of an

<sup>1</sup> Tim Armstrong makes a similar point in the introduction to Armstrong (see Abbreviations), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> V. Gittings I and II; Millgate; also Martin Seymour-Smith, *Hardy*, Bloomsbury, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> I develop this point at greater length in *Hardy in History: a Study in Literary Sociology*, 1989, p. 139; the whole of ch. 4, there, comprises a detailed analysis of *Life*.

historical context for it, and to bring into bold relief public and private issues which help to gloss Hardy's poetry in particular. The three themes are: war, class and sex – the second and third of which closely interrelate. Consideration will next be given to the fact that Hardy actually had *two* literary 'lives' in his lifetime – that of novelist, 'followed' (he claimed he was always *really* this) by that of poet. Finally, because the present volume is itself so overtly and strategically 'partial' in its presentation of Hardy's work, the Introduction takes a self-reflexive look at the premises underpinning a selection which is divided into two parts: the first presents a selection of poems in two sections – 'The Familiar Hardy' and 'The Less Familiar Hardy'; the second contains a selection of Hardy's non-fictional prose.

\* \* \* \* \*

The choice of war as a motif in Hardy's life is, of course, in part a way of plotting its long chronology, and of indicating the huge transition between the social and cultural world he was born into and the one he died in. But war also fascinated and repelled Hardy, and was the subject of a sizeable proportion of his poetry (Hardy as 'war poet' is itself, perhaps, a 'less familiar' designation). In addition, it helps to account – especially in relation to WWI – for the bleakness of his vision (in common with so many of his Modernist contemporaries) in what he saw as the 'new Dark Age'<sup>4</sup> of the post-war period.

When Hardy was born in 1840, the battle of Waterloo (1815) was only 25 years in the past; and the revolutionary wars with France, the spectre of Napoleon stalking Europe, and threat-of-invasion scares on the south coast of England were still fresh in older people's memories (*v.* 'One We Knew', *TL*, p. 32). Hardy, of course, was to use that recent past as the context for *The Trumpet-Major* and as the subject of his huge 'epic-drama' *The Dynasts* (1902–7). The Crimean War (in which the clash of traditional and modern modes of warfare became shockingly apparent) had begun when Hardy was 13; and the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (1870) coincided with his courtship of his first wife, Emma: *Life*<sup>5</sup> records that they were reading Tennyson in the garden at St Juliot, Cornwall (*v.* below, pp. xxix–xxx) 'on the day the bloody battle of Gravelotte was fought', and that Hardy, reminded of this occasion 'by a still bloodier war' in 1915, composed 'In Time of "The Breaking of Nations"' (*MV*, p. 73). The Boer War of 1899–1902 in South Africa – which coincided with the turn of the 19th century and signals British imperialism entering 20th-century crisis – involved Hardy more directly: his friend (*v.* below, pp. xxviii, xxix), Florence Henniker's husband, fought there, as

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *LLE*, Apol, p. 226, l.166; also here, p. xxiii.

<sup>5</sup> *Life*, p. 78. All further references to this work appear as bracketed numbers in the text.

did Hardy's nephew, and he produced a sequence of war poems prompted by it (in *PPP*). His response was characteristically ambiguous: although he and Emma were, like many English 'liberals', 'pro-Boer',<sup>6</sup> and despite a life-long loathing of war as *realpolitik*, he was, nevertheless and self-confessedly, stirred and fascinated by matters military. He wrote to Mrs Henniker: 'It seems a justification of the extremist pessimism that at the end of the 19th Centy [*sic*] we settle an argument by the Sword, just as they wd have done in the 19th Centy B.C'; and later: 'I constantly deplore the fact that "civilized" nations have not learnt some more excellent . . . way of settling disputes than the old & barbarous one, after all these centuries; but when I feel that it must be, few persons are more martial than I, or like better to write of war in prose or rhyme'.<sup>7</sup> In fact, however, none of Hardy's war poems, then or later, could be classed, in his own phrase, as 'Jingo or Imperial'.<sup>8</sup>

It is sometimes held that the 'real' end of the 19th century was in August 1914, with the outbreak of the so-called 'Great War' – a watershed between the 'old' world and the 20th century heralded by an event which, in scale and nature, seemed to be symptomatic of what the 'new' world held in store. Certainly for Hardy, now 74, it was a profoundly shattering occurrence; and, despite publishing the patriotic (if subdued) 'Men Who March Away' in *The Times* on 9 September 1914 and contributing to the war effort in small ways,<sup>9</sup> it is to his credit that he abhorred the war from the start, when much of the nation was seized by wild patriotic fervour and other poets were producing works of 'heroic' banality. *Life* (364-5) records his shock (he had not anticipated this 'convulsion of nations' so soon), and his fear that, rather than being 'over by Christmas . . . it might be a matter of years and untold disaster'. The following extract from *Life* encapsulates both Hardy's horror at the war, and his cast of mind after it:

A long study of the European wars of a century earlier had made it appear to him that common sense had taken the place of bluster in men's minds; and he felt this so strongly that . . . as long before as 1901 he composed a poem called 'The Sick Battle-God', which assumed that zest for slaughter was dying out. It was seldom he had felt so heavy at heart as in seeing his old view of the gradual bettering of human nature . . . completely shattered by the events of 1914 and onwards. War, he had supposed, had grown too coldly scientific to kindle again for long all the ardent romance which had characterized it down to Napoleonic times, when the most intense

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gittings II, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> 17 Sept. and 11 Oct. 1899. Quoted in Millgate, p. 401.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Mrs Henniker, 24 Dec. 1900. Quoted in Millgate, p. 403.

<sup>9</sup> 'Men Who March Away' (*MV*, n.i.h.). This poem, together with 'In Time of "The Breaking of Nations"' (*MV*, p. 73) and 'A Call to National Service' (*MV*, n.i.h.), was published with a note indicating that it was not in copyright in order to increase its circulation and contribute to the war effort (cf. Hynes II, p. 503).

battles were over in a day, and the most exciting tactics and strategy led to the death of comparatively few combatants. Hence nobody was more amazed than he at the German incursion into Belgium, and the contemplation of it led him to despair of the world's history thenceforward. He had not reckoned on the power still retained there by the governing castes whose interests were not the people's. (365–6)

A letter of 28 August 1914 to a friend also confirms what the likely effect on his poetry was to be: 'the recognition that we are living in a more brutal age than that, say, of Elizabeth . . . does not inspire one to write hopeful poetry . . . , but simply to sit still in apathy, and watch the clock spinning backwards, with a mild wonder if, when it gets back to the Dark Ages, and the sack of Rome, it will ever move forward again to a new Renaissance, and a new literature'.<sup>10</sup> And a note to the poet Henry Newbolt, shortly after the war ended in 1918, sums up Hardy's feelings by then: 'I confess that I take a smaller interest in the human race since this outburst than I did before'.<sup>11</sup>

Hardy was to live for another ten years; and the notion of a return to the 'Dark Ages' is repeated and developed in the long prefatory 'Apology' to *LLE* in 1922 (v. here, p. 226), with late poems also conveying this state of mind, especially in the posthumously published *WW*. By this time, as noted earlier, he was now the contemporary of the Modernist writers (*LLE* was published in the same year as *The Waste Land*). The poet who was born two years after an upbeat Victorian Tennyson, in 'Locksley Hall', wrote:

Forward, forward let us range,  
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

Thro' the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day:  
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay

could now ponder, if he chose, T.S. Eliot's cultural despair: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'. Ezra Pound sent a presentation copy of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and famously recognised Hardy as a fellow modern poet;<sup>12</sup> the contemporary of George Eliot (reviewers thought *FMC* was by her<sup>13</sup>) was now the contemporary of Virginia Woolf (who wrote perceptively that Hardy always seems to hover on 'the margin of the unexpressed'<sup>14</sup>);

<sup>10</sup> To Sydney Cockerell. Quoted in Hynes II, p. 506.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hynes II, p. 504.

<sup>12</sup> H read, made notes on, and copied extracts from *The Waste Land* into his commonplace book (cf. Trevor Johnson, *A Critical Introduction to the Poems of TH*, 1991, p. 7). For H and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, cf. Millgate, p. 534. Pound recognized his debt to, and admiration for, H on a number of occasions.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Life*, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> In her essay, 'The Novels of TH', in *The Common Reader*, Second Series (1932), 1959, p. 248.

the novelist who was recommending Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) as 'one of [his] best' to his sister in 1863<sup>15</sup> could now have recommended *Ulysses* (also 1922), had he been so minded and she not long-dead; the D.H. Lawrence who had written so acutely on Thomas Hardy's fiction in his *Study* . . . of 1914<sup>16</sup> had already published *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* years before and, by 1928, had completed (and had banned) *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The writer whose family, in his youth, had played the violins in the gallery 'quire' of Stinsford parish church now listened to Big Ben ring in the New Year (1924/5) on the 'wireless';<sup>17</sup> he who was born only six years after the Tolpuddle Martyrs (six Dorset farm-workers) were sentenced to transportation for forming a trade union branch now lived through the General Strike of 1926; he who had grown up in the world of Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, Garibaldi and Bismarck now grew old in that of Ramsay MacDonald, Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini.

How far, and in what ways, Hardy's poetry may in itself register any of this is an open question, but that it is a poetry 'of transition' cannot be doubted. And it is apposite here again to recall that a central aspect of Hardy as 'transitional' writer is that in 1896, after the publication of *Jude*, he effectively ceased writing prose fiction, thereafter devoting himself exclusively to poetry for the next 30 years. In other words, while Hardy may be seen chronologically as a 19th-century novelist, or at least as a transitional novelist poised on the brink of Modernism who never quite took the plunge (*v.* below, p. xxxiii), as a poet he belongs almost entirely to the 20th century – although whether his *poetry* is better seen as 'Victorian' rather than 'Modern' is a problem most secondary and tertiary education syllabuses invariably wrestle with, as they also do, in fact, with regard to his fiction: the ultimate index, perhaps, of 'transitional' status.

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Hardy was born into what Raymond and Merryn Williams have called the 'intermediate class'<sup>18</sup> within 19th-century rural society. Neither labourers nor landowners, its members were usually copyholders or lifeholders (about whom Hardy wrote sympathetically and bitterly in *Tess* and, included here, in 'DL' (*v.* p. 281 and Notes)) who supplied most of the skills which the rural community then needed. For Hardy, it was this, his own class which was most comprehensively dispossessed and deracinated by developments in the rural economy in the second half of the 19th century, 'migration' to the large

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Life*, p. 40

<sup>16</sup> *Study of TH*, in Edward D. McDonald, ed, *Phoenix*, Heinemann (1936), 1970, pp. 398–516.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Life*, p. 430.

<sup>18</sup> 'Hardy and Social Class', 1980, p. 32.

towns being only the most common and visible symptom of this. However, another characteristic of this group – less crudely economically determined – was the tendency of its members to be meritocratically upwardly mobile and, by way of education in particular, to ‘migrate’ to other physical and *other class* locations. This is clearly true for Hardy himself (but also, in an equally significant way, for his cousin Tryphena Sparks, who attended a teacher-training college in London and then became an elementary school headteacher until she married). Hardy acquired a considerable basic education (he left school at 16 – late, for one of his social group) and then became an architect’s ‘pupil’. He went to London in the same business in the 1860s, where he read voraciously, visited theatres, art galleries and museums, and became a (self-)educated young man – up to a point. However, he did not receive the advanced formal (classical) education he was acutely conscious some of his acquaintances had (such as his friend and mentor Horace Moule and his brothers – sons of the vicar of Fordington in Dorchester and Cambridge graduates – together with other young men he met in the architects’ offices in Dorchester and London); there was never any real chance of his going up to Cambridge (despite *Life’s* implication that there was<sup>19</sup>) and, in the event, the ‘native’ returned from London to Dorset in 1867 with his career still to make.

That career, of course, was soon to be one of tyro-novelist, struggling to get his work placed in the literary market-place of publishers and periodicals – an experience, for the sharply class-sensitive Hardy, compounded by the fact that his earliest attempts at fiction were subjected (with luck, as it turned out) to the critical scrutiny of publishers and their readers from the Victorian *haut-bourgeois* intelligentsia (John Morely, Leslie Stephens, George Meredith). In the event, his rapid success as a novelist is a classic instance of a meritocratic 19th-century rise to fame and fortune by way of the metropolitan market-place of letters. But it should not be disregarded that, when successful, he nevertheless built a house, Max Gate, on the outskirts of Dorchester – and therefore lived most of his eminent professional life away from London (while visiting it extensively as a literary and social celebrity). For Hardy’s ‘true’ class position,<sup>20</sup> and one aspect, then, of his ‘transitional’ character, is at once that of *déraciné* countryman and metropolitan man-of-letters who elects to live in Dorset – belonging neither to his class of origin, nor yet to the urban intelligentsia amongst whom his professional success positions him. The result was that Hardy was obsessed by class and class-relations, and preternaturally attuned to their minutiae (as in this symptomatic casual observation: ‘The defects of a class are more perceptible to the class immediately below it than to itself’<sup>21</sup>). It is perhaps no surprise, therefore,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Life* pp. 33–4, 208.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, 1989, ch. 4 (especially p. 132), where I have argued this at greater length.

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, p. 55.

that his first ('lost') novel was entitled *The Poor Man and the Lady* (v. the poem here of similar title, 'LFH' vi.d, p. 180), 'a sweeping dramatic satire' on, amongst other things, 'the squirearchy and nobility, London society, the vulgarity of the middle class . . . the tendency of the writing being social-istic, not to say revolutionary' (*Life*, 61). Neither is it without significance that, in old age, while composing *Life*, Hardy should devote several sympathetic pages to this earliest and unpublished work, describing it as 'too soon for [its] date' (18), and explaining – pointedly in the present context – that it was suppressed because 'in genteel mid-Victorian 1869 it would no doubt have incurred . . . severe strictures which might have handicapped a young writer for a long time' (62). Class, compromise and chagrin indeed marked Hardy's career as a novelist throughout.

All his novels – but most overtly and significantly, perhaps, the strategically anti-realist *HE* (in some ways a more revealing 'Life' than the *Life*) and (the part-autobiographical) *Jude* – show the marks of this obsession. *Life* itself, however, written when he had become the Grand Old Man of English Letters, constantly betrays the inverted snobbery of the insecure parvenu in its passing comments on Hardy's 'lack of social ambition' (15), his shrinking from 'the business of social advancement' (53), his dislike of 'the fashionable throng' (266) – all juxtaposed (despite the disclaimer that 'Hardy does not comment much on these society-gatherings, his thoughts running upon other subjects' (201)) with an exhaustive, tedious and unilluminating catalogue of his hob-nobbings, from the 1890s onwards, with the great and the good of English society. But despite 'the popularity of Hardy as an author now making him welcome anywhere' (253), the class insecurity is still clearly heard in this note of 1887: 'I spoke to a good many; was apparently unknown to a good many more I knew' (199). It is not without point either, as we shall see below, that Hardy continually claims 'an indifference to a popular novelist's fame' (57) and gives up writing fiction – having 'made it' in that (second-class) genre – for what he calls 'poetry and other forms of *pure* literature' (63; my emphasis). Furthermore, *Life* is at pains to convey his studiously 'balanced' and impartial political stance (v. also 'DL', pp. 277, 282 and Notes, especially hn.) – he is 'quite outside politics' (169), 'not a bit of a politician' (268) – which is also likely to result from his anomalous class position. A revealing memorandum of 1880 suggests that the contradictions inherent in this produce a passive alternativism (typical of a 'superior', apolitical liberal-humanism) which may account for the deterministic philosophy and ironic quietism so often remarked in his poetry:

I find that my politics really are neither Tory nor Radical. . . . I am against privilege derived from accident of any kind, and am therefore equally opposed to aristocratic privilege and democratic privilege. (By the latter I mean the arrogant assumption that the only labour is hand-labour – a

worse arrogance than that of the aristocrat, – the taxing of the worthy to help those masses of the population who will not help themselves when they might, etc.) Opportunity should be equal for all, but those who will not avail themselves of it should be cared for merely – not be a burden to, nor the rulers over, those who do avail themselves thereof. (204)

The confusion in the articulation of this passage is symptomatic of the confusion in Hardy's class allegiance, although it is interesting to perceive here that 'meritocracy' is his real theme. His rejection of politics would seem to result in his conception of a neutral and unconscious power (the 'Immanent Will') governing the universe – a metaphysical displacement of his lack of a secure social and political philosophy. Irresolutely placed between belief in religion (a God-controlled universe) and materialism (a man-controlled history), the contradictions and ambiguities in Hardy's intellectual and class positions rendered him unable, on the one hand, to follow a 'socialistic' logic because of his newly-acquired social status, nor, on the other, to accept the conventional political, social and religious orthodoxies of the ruling class.

Hardy, then, is left occupying an apolitical space as 'writer', bolstered by an eclectic and factitious deterministic myth of 'History'. Much of Hardy's poetry – and certainly, as we shall see in the Critical Commentary, the critical 'shaping' of it within the cultural arena of 20th-century Modernism – may well result from the consciousness of displacement, insecurity and disaffection in one who does not 'belong' to any of the constituent locales in which he is nevertheless situated. And his consanguinity with the cultural pessimism of Anglo-American Modernism is, indeed, clearly traced in the following note of 1891: 'Democratic government may be justice to man, but it will probably merge in proletarian, and when these people ['crowds parading and traipsing round' the British Museum] are our masters it will lead to more of this contempt [for rare antiquities], and possibly be the utter ruin of art and literature'.<sup>22</sup>

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One inescapable manifestation of Hardy's insecurity – closely interrelated with his class-consciousness – is his preoccupation with women, sex and sexuality. It is notable that one of the earliest reminiscences in *Life* (18–20) is of the very young Hardy's relationship with 'the lady of the manor' in Stinsford, who 'had grown passionately fond of Tommy almost from his infancy . . . whom she had been accustomed to take into her lap and kiss until he was quite a big child. He quite reciprocated her fondness'. *Life's* language here – at once precociously sexual and sharply conscious of the woman's rank – is striking: ' . . . the *landowner's wife* to whom he had grown more attached

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 236; cf. also, *LLE*, Apol, pp. 225–6, ll.155–68.

than he cared to own. In fact, though he was only nine or ten and she must have been nearly forty, his feeling for her was almost that of a *lover*; 'in spite of his *lover-like* promise of fidelity to *her ladyship* . . .' (my emphases). From there on, the often dry and defensive pages of *Life* nevertheless mention the many women Hardy observes or has some, more or less eroticized, passing contact with. A small sample would include: 'the bride, all in white, [who] kissed him in her intense pleasure at the dance', when the 12-year-old Thomas was playing the fiddle at her wedding (23); the 'pink and plump' dairymaid, four years older, who was the 15-year-old's Sunday school companion 'though she was by no means a model of virtue in her love-affairs' (25); 'that girl in the omnibus [with] one of those faces of marvellous beauty which are seen casually in the streets but never among one's friends. . . . Where do such women come from? Who marries them? Who knows them?' (220); a 'Cleopatra in the railway carriage . . . a good-natured amative creature by her voice, and her heavy moist-lips' (229); the girl of 'the streets' who thanks him for sharing his umbrella 'by holding on tight to my arm and bestowing on me many kisses' (265); and, perhaps most revealingly, the 'handsome girl: cruel small mouth: she's of the class of interesting women one would be afraid to marry' (212).

The phrase 'eroticized, passing contact' was used above for two reasons. First, as Hardy's biographers make clear, apart from his two marriages (*v.* below, pp. xxix–xxx), he had a number of more or less unsatisfactory 'love-affairs' in the course of his life – from the 'pretty girl' the 14-year-old 'fell madly in love with', who was 'a total stranger' and soon 'disappeared for ever' (25), to the (non-) affairs with the younger and beautiful upper-class married women, Mrs Florence Henniker and Lady Agnes Grove, in the 1890s when his first marriage was in serious trouble and he appears to have been undergoing a mid-life crisis. There has also been much (unverified) speculation about a 'mystery girl' in London in the 1860s, from whose 'free' intellectual and sexual thinking and behaviour Hardy retreated back to Dorset in 1867,<sup>23</sup> and about the possible affair with/engagement to his cousin Tryphena Sparks (*v.* 'Thoughts of Phena', *WP*, p. 6 and hn.) in the late 1860s – the result of which, it has been unreliably suggested, was an illegitimate son.<sup>24</sup> But, in addition, there are the many – literally – passing 'relationships' when Hardy simply *sees* a woman and reflects on her appearance, or fantasizes some kind of more intimate involvement with her (*v.* 'Faintheart in a Railway Train', 'LFH' vi.a, p. 137). This leads on to the second reason for my phrase above: Hardy very clearly eroticizes – i.e. invests with a gratuitous sexual charge – women and events otherwise innocent of erotic significance (note above, for example, 'the intense pleasure' that the bride, 'all in white', finds in the dance).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gittings I, ch. 9.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion – and rebuttal – of this story, cf. Gittings I, 'Appendix: Hardy and Tryphena Sparks', pp. 313–23.



during Hardy's visits, in the wildly beautiful countryside of the north Cornish coast (around Tintagel). For extra measure, Emma's father did not think Hardy good enough for his daughter, so the class/sex nexus was also in play. Nevertheless, they were married, and the relationship initially appears to have been happy (although they were never to have children). As Hardy worked at becoming a novelist, they lived for a while in London, then Weymouth, then back near Hardy's birthplace, finally settling at Max Gate on the edge of Dorchester. Relations deteriorated as Hardy became successful, and by the 1890s, with the publication of *Tess* and then *Jude*, the already troubled marriage soured badly – Emma loathing Hardy's 'atheism' and jealous of his relationships with younger women, and Hardy embarrassed by her behaviour and resentful of her antipathy. They struggled on, however, even when his volumes of poetry began to appear and clearly contained 'love' poems to other women. Emma's sudden – and to Hardy, apparently, unexpected – death in 1912 put an end, so it seemed, to a relationship which had begun as an intense (perhaps overcharged) love affair and ended in bitterly alienated cohabitation. What happened, of course, is one of the central Hardy myths: overcome with remorse and guilt, and leaving his new second wife at home, he revisited the scenes of his and Emma's courtship, wrote, in a burst of creative energy, his famous 'Poems of 1912-13' in which he 'rememorialised' (to use Toni Morrison's word<sup>26</sup>) their love affair in 1870, and created a sequence of love poems which revivifies the past, thus exorcizing and erasing the stricken years in between. The point here, in the context of Hardy's sexual mindset, is that these poems are, in a very clear sense, the quintessence of the 'lost prize' syndrome noted earlier – the sense of failure and loss paradoxically charged now with the eroticism which had drained from the relationship itself. Here, Hardy can, as it were, realise the promise of that intense sexual bonding which he and Emma at once experienced and failed to fulfil by reanimating it in the 'present' of his poetry. Florence Emily, with a perceptiveness perhaps honed by vexation, is reported as saying: 'all the poems about [Emma] are a fiction but fiction in which their author has now come to believe'.<sup>27</sup> Thus the 'Poems of 1912-13' are not so much of regret and nostalgia, but of the transposed reliving of a missed opportunity. Again, we may recognize in this a 'transitional' Modernist perception of 'reality' – for the artist if for no one else – where it lies, not so much in the material experience itself, but in the consciousness that registers it. 'The poetry of a scene', Hardy once reflected, 'varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> E.g., in *Beloved* (1987), Plume Books, 1988, pp. 36, 99, 191.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Creighton, p. 335.

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, p. 50.

To say that Hardy had 'two careers' – first novelist, then poet – is to misrepresent him, at least in his own estimation, since he presents himself as *always* primarily a poet. I noted earlier his disdain for novel-writing and his snobbish hankering to enter the realms of 'pure literature', but this is, in fact, a structuring theme of *Life*, and is inflected there in a number of ways. Early on, when Hardy was first in London, and immediately prior to his starting *The Poor Man and the Lady*, it notes that he 'had begun to write verses, and by 1866 to send his productions to magazines' (47); that although unsuccessful, he did not 'by any means abandon verse which he wrote constantly, but kept private'; and that he read only poetry at this point (1866-7) since he believed that 'in verse was concentrated the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature' (48). Later, the primacy of his preference for poetry is kept regularly in our view: 'the poetic tendency had been his from the earliest' (384); "I wanted to write poetry in the beginning. Now I can" (401).

This strategic self-presentation is reinforced by one, surely disingenuous, aspect of the (auto)biography: the disrespect with which it treats his novel-writing career, despite the fact that for 30 years Hardy had laboured, with dedicated care for his craft, to produce serious fiction. Purely material factors are adduced as the impetus to start ('he was committed by circumstances to novel-writing as a regular trade' (104)), and the notion of Hardy as no more than a paid professional hack is reiterated throughout, despite some revealing slippages which suggest what a grotesque misrepresentation this is. In an early 'quoted' letter to Leslie Stephens, he expresses his willingness to court a popular readership at the expense of artistic integrity, and rejects, 'for the present circumstances', any 'higher aims' in favour of getting 'to be considered a good hand at a serial' (100). While commenting on the 'damage' Hardy had done to *MC* 'as an artistic whole' (my emphasis) in the interests of newspaper serialization, *Life* adds, nevertheless, that 'as he called his novel-writing "mere journeywork" he cared little about it as art' (179). After *W*, which, it is reported, 'he often said . . . in some respects . . . was his best novel' (185), and as Hardy was commencing the immense creative labour of writing *Tess* and *Jude*, we are told: 'He now went about the business mechanically' (182-3). Finally, after the publication of *Jude* and *W-B* (1896-7), *Life* neatly sums up its theme: 'and so ended his prose contributions to literature . . . which had ever been secondary to his interest in verse' (286), adding, in a shameless perjury, that 'if he wished to retain any shadow of self-respect' he must abandon fiction and 'resume openly that form of [literary art] which had always been instinctive with him . . . the change, after all, [being] not so great as it seemed. It was not as if he had been a writer of novels proper . . .' (291).

If we relate this extraordinary depreciation of his own fiction to Hardy's over-wrought class-consciousness, then the sub-text of the narrative of his

'two careers' becomes apparent. For the 'character' of Hardy that *Life* wishes to depict is that of eminent man-of-letters; familiar of the noble and famous; above the pettiness of ambition, social climbing, 'popularity' and the literary market-place; always the 'true' poet ('his bias towards poetry . . . instinctive and disinterested' (305)); and not, by nature, the novelist toiling away in the sweat-shops of the publishing trade (what George Gissing in 1891 had pilloried as 'New Grub Street'<sup>29</sup>). When Hardy could afford to stop novel-writing, he did so – tainted as it was by representing his escape-route from his class-origins. What *Life* proffers, in other words, is a piece of petit-bourgeois wish-fulfilment (a publisher's reader for *The Poor Man and the Lady* had described the novel, back in 1868, as 'some clever lad's dream', 59): an image of the 'pure' literary man Hardy desired to be.<sup>30</sup>

However, the explanation of why Hardy gave up fiction is rather more complex than the simple economic reason given above (although that must remain a credible factor). A further clue may lie in his comment, after the furore over *Jude*, that 'his experiences of the few preceding years [had] killed all his interest in this form of imaginative work' (286). Always preternaturally sensitive to criticism (as he was later over his volumes of poetry), he had been badly affected by the scandalized response to *Tess* and *Jude* from the late-Victorian Grundyite lobby: in no way could *Tess* be 'a Pure Woman' (as Hardy's provocative sub-title claimed), nor should the kinds of experience she undergoes be the stuff of fiction (v. 'CEF', pp. 257–60); and the 'immorality', 'atheism' and 'gloom' of *Jude* were the last straw.<sup>31</sup> Again, there is every reason to believe that he was indeed fed up with it all and, financial circumstances now allowing (in part, ironically, because of the very success of *Tess*), he took the opportunity to stop and do something more congenial.

But there is a further, more tangled and contentious, dimension to Hardy's decision. His fiction had, from the start, been subject to criticism of its 'improbability' (especially of plot) and of its 'awkward', 'mannered' style. Certainly, those novels, like *HE* and *Laod.*, which manifestly deviated from the 'Wessex' canon of 'Novels of Character and Environment' (v. 'GP', p. 232) were execrated on both counts. With *Tess*, and more overtly still with *Jude* and *W-B*, these tendencies were foregrounded. Hardy, in other words, was flouting – by ineptitude or design – the laws of a dominant realist orthodoxy which demanded a kind of transparent window onto 'real life'. Much in the various prefaces to the novels, in *Life*, and in the three essays on fiction of 1888–91 included here suggests that it was, in fact, by *design* that

<sup>29</sup> Gissing's bitter novel of that title is set in the early 1880s.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Zeitlow, in *Moments of Vision*, 1974, calls it 'a myth of retrospective self-justification', p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Armstrong (p. 1) cites a further view (Michael Mason, 'The Burning of *Jude the Obscure*', *Notes and Queries*, 1988, 233: 332–4) that H may have found public acclaim for the 'radical' late novels as upsetting as the opprobrium, because he did not wish to be regarded as a 'free-thinker' (cp. my comments on H's rejection of 'politics', above, pp. xxvi–xxvii).

Hardy's novels disrupted realist expectations. 'CEF' and 'SF' in particular (*v.* their headnotes and notes *passim* for detail) also indicate that, in his own way, Hardy was involved in the late-19th-century literary debate on 'Naturalism' and 'Realism'. As with Maupassant in France (*v.* 'PRF', p. 247, ll.224–6n.), he opposed an 'inventory'-like transcription of facts 'from nature'; rejected a 'photographic' recording of detail; and wished to represent 'abstract imaginings'<sup>32</sup> by way of a 'disproportioning' (i.e. defamiliarizing) fictional writing, which would reveal the '*vraie vérité*' ('SF', p. 262, l.76) rather than the superficialities of life. Hence, he decided, "realism" is not Art'.<sup>33</sup>

The point here, surely, is – and it places Hardy squarely in the 'transitional' category – that he was pushing up against, indeed subverting, the limits of realism as a fictional mode, and finding it was no longer, if ever, adequate to his purposes. But rather than pursuing that logic in fiction, he gives it up and returns to poetry, in which his 'moments of vision' may now find a more appropriately non-realist form. That Hardy's own word 'disproportioning', above, translates so readily into Modernist critical terminology points clearly to his later fiction, at least, as having close affinities with the work of a younger generation of novelists who *were* to follow the logic of anti-realist discourses in making Modernist fiction: D.H. Lawrence, for example, who found so much to admire (and, in part, emulate) in *Jude*.<sup>34</sup>

It is not insignificant, either, that the large single work Hardy undertook shortly after ceasing to write novels was his non-realist 'epic-drama', *The Dynasts* (*v.* the 'Preface', pp. 229ff.). Planned over a long period (*Life* characteristically implies, throughout his years as a novelist, that it would be Hardy's truly major achievement), this enormous poetic drama involves many modes, some of which, in their affinity with cinematic techniques, again appear proto-Modernist in tendency. The first significant mention of the envisaged 'epic' in *Life* (May 1875; 106) coincides with Hardy's writing of his uncompromisingly anti-realist novel, *HE*; and in March 1886, a memorandum reflecting on the future of prose fiction proposes that

novel-writing cannot go backward. Having reached the analytic stage it must transcend it by going still further in the same direction. Why not by rendering as visible essences, spectres, etc? . . . Abstract realisms. . . The Realities to be the true realities of life, hitherto called abstractions. The old material realities to be placed behind the former as shadowy accessories.

Hardy's own response to these proposals is: 'this notion was approximately carried out, not in a novel, but through the much more appropriate medium

<sup>32</sup> The phrase is from a memo about the painter, J.M.W. Turner, in 1887 (cf. *Life*, p. 185).

<sup>33</sup> 'Disproportioning' and 'realism is not Art' are both phrases from an important memo of 1890 (*Life*, pp. 228–9; cf. also 'PRF', p. 247, ll.205–6n.).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. his *Study of TH* (n.16, above).

of poetry, in the supernatural framework of *The Dynasts* as also in smaller poems' (*Life*, 177).

Hardy's return to 'smaller poems', however, started before novel-writing had ceased. He woke before dawn on Christmas Day 1890, 'thinking of resuming "the viewless wings of poesy"' (230), and several new poems were written in the earlier 1890s. But by 1897–8, *Life* tells us, 'he had already for some time been getting together the poems [for *WP*]. In date they ranged from 1865 intermittently onwards, the middle period of his novel-writing producing very few or none, but of late years they had been added to with great rapidity . . .' (291–2). This first volume, then, appeared in 1898, with Hardy, typically, commenting sardonically on its reception 'by some critics [as] not without umbrage at [his] having taken the liberty to adopt another vehicle of expression than prose fiction without consulting them' (299). In addition to the monumental *Ds*, a further seven substantial volumes were to follow – some 950-plus poems in all. It is little wonder that Hardy, with some justification, aligned himself with other 'ancients' (Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) who produced major work late in life (384; *v.* also, 'An Ancient to Ancients', *LLE*, p. 77, sts. 8–9), and it seems fitting to conclude here with his own epigraph in 1918 for this second career: 'A sense of the truth of poetry, of its supreme place in literature, had awakened itself in me. At the risk of ruining all my wordly prospects I dabbled in it . . . was forced out of it . . . It came back upon me. . . ' (385; Hardy's ellipses).

\* \* \* \* \*

'To cull from a dead writer's whole achievement in verse portions that shall exhibit him is a task of no small difficulty and of some temerity': thus writes Hardy in the preface to his selection of William Barnes's poetry (*v.* here, p. 237). With a poet whose output is on the scale of Hardy's own, however, the 'difficulty' and 'temerity' are felt even more keenly. Furthermore, there are many other selections of Hardy's poems already published. How, then, is one to produce a selection which at once does justice to his large poetic *oeuvre* (minus *Ds*) and brings into view a fuller, differently inflected 'Hardy' from the one other volumes sustain?

The answer will, in effect, deal with both aspects of the question simultaneously – but first a word on the nature of 'Selections'. While they may look 'natural', almost self-selecting, objective, scholarly, neutral, disinterested, etc., in the nature of things they are nothing of the kind. Selections involve, as Hardy knew (cf. his 'Preface', pp. 237–8), personal choice, contemporary taste and more or less (usually less) random sampling of a writer's work. Indeed, compiling one is a fundamentally judgemental *critical* (not to say, ideological) activity, profoundly 'partial' (in both senses of the word) – hence the warning title of the present Introduction. And this is not to mention the

writing of introductions, biographical sketches, notes (themselves, as here, a deeply interpretative 'scholarly apparatus'), nor the compiling of 'selected further reading' (who's 'in', who's 'out?'), all of which frame the ostensibly unmediated 'text in itself'. Selections, in other words, effectively *construct* a writer rather more substantively – but also, because of their usually unspoken informing assumptions, more subliminally – than most other critical attention does.<sup>35</sup> What we take to be the 'primary text' has, in fact, already been heavily shaped and processed by the editors' and publishers' cultural predilections and market intentions (it matters, for example, if a volume is primarily intended for a sixth-form and first-year undergraduate readership, or is in a classic 'Poetry Library' series).

With all this in mind, it is intended that the present volume should, wherever possible, be a kind of self-deconstructing selection which wears its editorial mechanisms on its sleeve: i.e. recognizing and drawing attention to its partiality and to the fact that it is itself a 'critical' work, an 'interpretation' based on certain theoretical premises about literature and the study of it. Since there has latterly been a striking conformity (*v.* Crit. Comm., pp. 190–9) in the identification of which poems comprise Hardy's 'best', 'most characteristic', 'finest', etc., the solution to the problem of selecting just under 200 of his 'smaller poems' was to devote one section to the most 'familiar' poems – those every Hardy fan would expect to find in a selection and be mortified if they were not – and one section to those many poems which, for reasons usually unexamined, appear never or very seldom to be selected or anthologized – the 'Less Familiar Hardy'. The methodology used to ensure that, as far as possible, poems of both categories properly belong in them is explained in Crit. Comm. But one illustrative example may be apposite here: Samuel Hynes (editor of the invaluable Oxford University Press edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of TH*) has also edited (the Monopolies Commission take note) two paperback selections of Hardy's poems, also for Oxford: *TH: A Critical Selection of His Finest Poetry* (1984) in the *Oxford Authors* series, and *TH: A Selection of His Finest Poems* (1994) in the *Oxford Poetry Library* series. (Both books are in print, both covers reproduce a version of the same portrait of Hardy and, along with a *new* copyright date, the 1994 volume reproduces verbatim the 1984 introduction.) The larger *Finest Poetry* contains well over half of Hardy's poems, and many of my 'less familiar' ones are, of course, included there; the smaller *Finest Poems* is roughly half the size, and it scarcely needs to be added that the poems which have been left out, time after time, are those 'less familiar' ones. Perhaps the 1994 volume should have been called *The Finest of Hardy's Finest Poems!*

In the present volume, the two sections are intended to sit in juxtaposition, thus raising the questions: why are these here and those there? how did

<sup>35</sup> For a fuller discussion of what I there call a writer's 'critiography', *v.* *Hardy in History*, 1989, especially 'Introduction' and ch. 1.

they get to be there? on what principles, and why? what does it *mean*, in the culture of the 1990s and beyond, that these are here and those there? There is no a priori suggestion that the 'Familiar Hardy' should not be so, nor that the 'Less Familiar Hardy' is somehow 'better' or 'more representative' and should thus displace the other as the object of attention. However, the latter may possibly bring into view different emphases and inflections (as well as some comprehensively disregarded poems), whilst denaturalizing the 'Familiar Hardy' may illuminate his underlying constituent features and release some of those poems, too, from the thrall of literary-critical and cultural orthodoxies. Perhaps most pointed will be the question – and the answers to it – posed by the presence of two comparable poems in different sections: what is it that has made this one of 'the finest' and the other not?

Finally, a couple of practical matters need to be noted. The 'FH' section is organized in the chronological sequence of Hardy's original published volumes, and the poems themselves are in the order in which they appeared (although obviously separated there by others not included here); those in the 'LFH' section are in contrived groupings across volumes, intended to bring out resemblances between disparate poems, and are often in mini-sequences to the same end. All Hardy's volumes are fairly evenly represented although, significantly (*v. Crit. Comm.*, pp. 202–3, for analysis of this), rather more of the 'FH' section is drawn from the earlier ones, and *vice versa* for the 'LFH' section. The greater proportion of his poems are undated as to their time of composition<sup>36</sup> and, given that some poems (often revised versions<sup>37</sup>) from earlier periods appear in later volumes, there is a problem in attempting to identify when poems were actually written. Any dates in the text, therefore, are Hardy's own.

As a supplement to the 'Less Familiar Hardy', the third section of the present selection is from his (not extensive) non-fictional prose writings, which have remained seldom reprinted – barring the volume prefaces – except in occasional and disparate locations or in Harold Orel's (reissued but unrevised) pioneering collection, *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* of 1966. Furthermore, these have never been as comprehensively annotated as they are here and it is to be hoped, as with the 'Less Familiar' poems (and *their* extensive notes), that they will help to bring into view a Thomas Hardy who is rather more various and complex a figure than his conventional construction as 'the poet of Wessex' allows him to be.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Hynes III, Appendix E, pp. 354–64, for a 'Chronological List of Dated Poems'.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e.g., *Life*, pp. 47, 54.

I A SELECTION OF HARDY'S  
POEMS

THE HISTORY OF AN HOUR

VAIN is the wish to try rhyming it, writing it!  
Pen cannot weld into words what it was;  
Time will be squandered in toil at inditing it;  
Clear is the cause!

Yea, 'twas too satiate with soul, too ethereal;  
June-morning scents of a rose-bush in flower  
Catch in a clap-net of hempen material;  
So catch that hour!

5

*Human Shows, Far Phantasies* (1925)



Unchanged my gown of garish dye, 5  
 Though sable-sad is their attire;  
 But they stand round with griefless eye,  
 Whilst my regret consumes like fire!

187-

## FRIENDS BEYOND

WILLIAM DEWY, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at  
 plough,  
 Robert's kin, and John's and Ned's,  
 And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock  
 churchyard now!

'Gone,' I call them, gone for good, that group of local  
 hearts and heads;  
 Yet at mothy curfew-tide, 5  
 And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes it back  
 from walls and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me – fellow-wight who  
 yet abide –  
 In the muted, measured note  
 Of a ripple under archways, or a love cave's stillicide:

'We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to  
 antidote, 10  
 Unsuccesses to success,  
 Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free  
 of thought.

'No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestrial  
 stress;  
 Chill detraction stirs no sigh,  
 Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave all that we  
 possess.' 15

*W.D.* – ‘Ye mid burn the old bass-viol that I set such  
value by.’

*Squire.* – ‘You may hold the manse in fee,  
You may wed my spouse, may let my children’s memory  
of me die.’

*Lady S.* – ‘You may have my rich brocades, my laces; take each  
household key;  
Ransack coffer, desk, bureau; 20  
Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept  
by me.’

*Far.* – ‘Ye mid zell my favourite heifer, ye mid let the charlock  
grow,  
Foul the grinterns, give up thrift.’

*Far. Wife.* – ‘If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan’t  
care or ho.’

*All.* – ‘We’ve no wish to hear the tidings, how the people’s  
fortunes shift; 25  
What your daily doings are;  
Who are wedded, born, divided; if your lives beat slow or  
swift.

‘Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or  
mar,  
If you quire to our old tune,  
If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar.’ 30

– Thus, with very gods’ composure, freed those crosses  
late and soon  
Which, in life, the Trine allow  
(Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath  
the moon,

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at  
plough,  
Robert’s kin, and John’s, and Ned’s, 35  
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me  
now.





## THE IMPERCIPIENT

*(AT A CATHEDRAL SERVICE)*

THAT with this bright believing band  
     I have no claim to be,  
 That faiths by which my comrades stand  
     Seem fantasies to me,  
 And mirage-mists their Shining Land,                     5  
     Is a strange destiny.

Why thus my soul should be consigned  
     To infelicity,  
 Why always I must feel as blind  
     To sights my brethren see,                             10  
 Why joys they've found I cannot find,  
     Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease  
     Which they know; since it be  
 That He who breathes All's Well to these                     15  
     Breathes no All's-Well to me,  
 My lack might move their sympathies  
     And Christian charity!

I am like a gazer who should mark  
     An inland company                                     20  
 Standing upfingered, with, 'Hark! hark!  
     The glorious distant sea!  
 And feel, 'Alas, 'tis but yon dark  
     And wind-swept pine to me!'

Yet I would bear my shortcomings 25  
     With meet tranquillity,  
 But for the charge that blessed things  
     I'd liefer not have be.  
 O, doth a bird deprived of wings  
     Go earth-bound wilfully! 30

. . .

Enough. As yet disquiet clings  
     About us. Rest shall we.

### 'I LOOK INTO MY GLASS'

I LOOK into my glass,  
 And view my wasting skin,  
 And say, 'Would God it came to pass  
 My heart had shrunk as thin!'

For then, I, undistrest 5  
 By hearts grown cold to me,  
 Could lonely wait my endless rest  
 With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,  
 Part steals, lets part abide; 10  
 And shakes this fragile frame at eve  
 With throbbings of noontide.



ROME:  
 AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS NEAR THE  
 GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS

(1887)

WHO, then, was Cestius,  
 And what is he to me? –  
 Amid thick thoughts and memories multitudinous  
 One thought alone brings he.

I can recall no word 5  
 Of anything he did;  
 For me he is a man who died and was interred  
 To leave a pyramid

Whose purpose was exprest 10  
 Not with its first design,  
 Nor till, far down in Time, beside it found their rest  
 Two countrymen of mine.

Cestius in life, maybe,  
 Slew, breathed out threatening;  
 I know not. This I know: in death all silently 15  
 He does a finer thing,

In beckoning pilgrim feet  
 With marble finger high  
 To where, by shadowy wall and history-haunted street,  
 Those matchless singers lie . . . . 20

– Say, then, he lived and died  
 That stones which bear his name  
 Should mark, through Time, where two immortal Shades abide;  
 It is an ample fame.

## A COMMONPLACE DAY

THE day is turning ghost,  
 And scuttles from the kalendar in fits and furtively,  
 To join the anonymous host  
 Of those that throng oblivion; ceding his place, maybe,  
 To one of like degree. 5

I part the fire-gnawed logs,  
 Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames, and lay the ends  
 Upon the shining dogs;  
 Further and further from the nooks the twilight's stride extends,  
 And beamless black impends. 10

Nothing of tiniest worth  
 Have I wrought, pondered, planned; no one thing asking blame  
 or praise,  
 Since the pale corpse-like birth  
 Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays –  
 Dullest of dull-hued Days! 15

Wanly upon the panes  
 The rain slides, as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts;  
 and yet  
 Here, while Day's presence wanes,  
 And over him the sepulchre-lid is slowly lowered and set,  
 He wakens my regret. 20

Regret – though nothing dear  
 That I wot of, was toward in the wide world at his prime,  
 Or bloomed elsewhere than here,  
 To die with his decease, and leave a memory sweet, sublime,  
 Or mark him out in Time . . . . 25

– Yet, maybe, in some soul,  
 In some spot undiscerned on sea or land, some impulse rose,  
 Or some intent upstole  
 Of that enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows  
 The world's amendment flows; 30