

Peggy BLIN-CORDON

Senior Lecturer in 19th century British Literature

Laboratoire AGORA (EA 7392)

peggy.blin-cordon@cyu.fr

**Thomas Hardy: Novelist, ‘Editor’ and Mentor —
Building a Fictional Community, a Community of Readers and a Community of Writers**

Abstract. — When considering the idea of community in Hardy, recollections of the novels conjure up images of a preserved rural community, threatened by modern times: the imaginary country of Wessex. If the fictionalized topography of an existing territory expanding beyond the borders of Dorset presents a certain uniformity today, it is mainly because it is the “final” product of substantial revisions by the author with the aim of giving consistency to a work spanning several decades. Indeed, after 1895 and the “Wessex Novels” edition, “Hardy the novelist” turned into “Hardy the would-be editor”. By way of the substantial revision of his work, (first in 1895 and then in 1912 with the “Wessex Edition”), he gave shape to another type of community: the community of “model Hardy readers”, as the author meant to target a community of readers which was quite different from that imposed by the magazines and publishing houses at the time of first publication. During his later years as a novelist, Hardy also expressed the desire to shape a community of writers who would follow in his footsteps, in what we could trivially call a “community of followers”. The targeted “artists in the making” were a group of malleable young women, who consented to writing under Hardy’s close literary guidance.

Keywords. — Thomas Hardy, Wessex, community, magazines, revision, Victorian publishing practices.

About The Author

Peggy Blin-Cordon is a senior lecturer in British literature at CY Paris Cergy University, where she teaches literature and translation. A founding member and the treasurer of the FATHOM association (French Association for Thomas Hardy Studies), she wrote a thesis on general experiments in the novels of Thomas Hardy. She specialises in Hardy and literary genres and also works on the influence of the publishing practice on 19th century fiction.

Thomas Hardy: Novelist, ‘Editor’ and Mentor — Building a Fictional Community, a Community of Readers and a Community of Writers

Discussing “community” seems particularly appropriate for a Hardy scholar. This is primarily to emphasize how much community meant for the man and the novelist, yet paradoxically feeling uncomfortable with the cliché of a now canonical writer fiercely eager to defend his South-Western England origins. It is now admitted that the marketing of Hardy’s local community of Wessex, either fictional or real, offered a powerful pretext in order to format and transform the novelist into a regionalist writer. If today the literary image of the man has long been revised, the name of Wessex still conjures up persistent images of a rural community full of “picturesque characters” living in a peaceful countryside, working the land, in symbiosis with Nature. All in all, a group of people who share (which is the essence of community) values, and most of all, a territory. The experience of community when reading Hardy’s fiction is the product of a tireless weaving which stretches over many years. Indeed, the vision of Wessex as we have it now derives from the last editions of the novels, and is extremely different from what can be experienced when reading Hardy in an original publication. Our current expectations as far as Wessex community is concerned have been craftily fashioned by the author (not to mention by the industry of literature) through a series of minute but extensive revisions, essentially concentrated at two crucial editorial moments in Hardy’s career, in 1895 (with the publication of the “Wessex Novels”) and 1912 (with the publication of “The Wessex Edition”). What is also at stake when dealing with the fictional community of Wessex, is the shaping of the image of an author by himself. However, the elaboration of a fictional(ised) Wessex only represents one of the many links tying Hardy and

community. The process of fashioning a *fictional* community had an actual repercussion on the community of *readers* of Hardy's fiction, the target of magazines, in which the serialized Hardy was published, was significantly different from the readership of the subsequent expensive, authoritative revised edition of 1895 (or 1912) released in several volumes. We can even go as far as to argue that the 1895 edition allowed Hardy to become a would-be editor, determining the final content of his texts considered as a whole, but also self-consciously re-writing a community and harmonizing a literary production in close collaboration with his publishing house, so that he could at last shape his own image for posterity and target the audience he had always wanted to reach. The last interesting step dealing with variations on Hardyan communities was the author's alleged will to father a community of young writers. In the 1890s, Hardy turned into a self-conscious and proactive Pygmalion. In the same way that he had been influenced by Horace Moule, William Barnes¹ or George Meredith, Hardy meant to leave a trace by inspiring what we could trivially call a "community of followers", deciding to be the literary counselor of several young female writers seeking advice from an experienced and respected author.

The Writing of a Fictional (?) Community

Hardy was first published in 1871, curiously enough, not in serial form as one would have expected for a publication at that period in publishing history, but in a one volume edition by the Tinsley Brothers. His first anonymous novel, *Desperate Remedies*, met with no success at all, so much so that some reviewers saw in it the "'desperate remedies' [the author] had adopted as a cure for ennui or an emaciated purse" (F. E. Hardy, 1928: 111). Yet, it came in for considerable praise for (and only for) its description of country life, its rural community, and the author's "very happy facility in catching and fixing phases of peasant life".²

The story, just like almost any story by Hardy, is located in the South West of England, and mainly hinges around a plot *à la* Wilkie Collins, the book being indeed a pseudo-sensation novel. Hardy's subsequent reaction after the publication is significantly determined by the reviews *Desperate Remedies* received, for he chooses with his second novel in 1872, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, subtitled 'A Rural Painting of the Dutch School',

¹ He indeed edited a selection of poetry by William Barnes, see *Select Poems of William Barnes* 1908, with a Preface by Thomas Hardy.

² Anonymous article in *The Spectator*. Xliv (April 22, 1871): 481-83.

to write an unmistakably pastoral novel, thus undertaking a complete generic *volte-face* since the novel is utterly deprived of the sulfurous matter present in his first opus. It would appear that, prior to its formal and official creation, Wessex was already encapsulated in the community of Mellstock (the actual Bockhampton), and for some critics including Philip Mallet, in *Under the Greenwood Tree* “[p]ast and present, loss and gain, community ties and individual aspiration, are brought into a satisfying if provisional harmony, and most readers have seen the novel much as J. M. Barrie did in 1889, as not Hardy’s ‘greatest’ book but ‘his most perfect’” (Mallet, 2013: xi-xii). One might want to tone down the praise of the almost ideal caricature of a rural community. If the local community of Mellstock (Bockhampton in Dorset, Hardy’s birthplace) is glorified in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the novel establishes a somewhat condescending and ambivalent distance which may provoke contempt or even mockery from the reader-spectator admiring this perfect rural painting (Tomalin, 2007: 115). Still, we must admit that the embryo of Wessex was here, probably prompted by the critics who acclaimed *Under the Greenwood Tree* when published (by Tinsley, against all odds),³ paving the way for the crystallization of what was still a budding idea. The same critics, including his friend Horace Moule in the *Saturday Review*,⁴ deemed that:

“This novel is the best prose idyll that we have seen for a long while past. Deserting the more conventional, and far less agreeable, field of imaginative creation which he worked in his earlier book, called *Desperate Remedies*, the author has produced a series of rural pictures full of life and genuine colouring [...]. Anyone who knows tolerably well the remoter parts of the South-Western counties of England will be able to judge for himself of the power and truthfulness shown in these studies of the better class of rustics, men whose isolated lives have not impaired a shrewd common sense and insight, together with a complete independence, set off by native humour, which is excellently represented in these two volumes (Cox 1970: 17).”

Having thus impressed some reviewers, Hardy sought for more respectable publishing houses, and in his next novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*, he persevered in displaying, with more generic ambivalence though, the hallmark of pastoralism the novelist had taken as a distinguishing literary feature. The label for this hallmark, the name of Wessex, appeared in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (but is almost anecdotal and refers to the name of the territory of an ancient tribe in the 6th century). Naturally, one can already guess in this novel that the

³ Published in a two-volume edition in 1872.

⁴ See Horace Moule’s review in *The Saturday Review*, 28 September 1872, (Cox 1970: 17).

fictional territory was much more than a geographical delimitation or a fictional mapping, that it represented the merging of people and land, and on a grander scale, the symbolic representation of the bond between man and nature. But at that time it was not meant to represent a literary purpose in itself: there would be no resolution after 1874 and no attempt even in the 1870s and 1880s, to make *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) or even *The Return of the Native* (1878) part of a concept labelled “Wessex”.

However, encouraged by the critics and enticed by the readers themselves, Hardy came to be the creator of the Wessex community, the father of Wessex. For better, since Wessex helped him gain a clearer literary outline on the literary market, formatting him as the champion of a receding rural community blighted by industrialism, but also for worse, since such a compelling and static vision assimilated him to a brand. The same way the writer of a successful series can be tied to, then tired of his hero (such as Conan Doyle with the Sherlock Holmes series) and restrained to well-known themes by demanding fans, Hardy found in Wessex a blessing and a curse, a *topos* which drew his fiction in a direction which was hard to resist.

As the element of his writing most easily associated with realism, reviewers insisted that Wessex was both his unique and his most successful contribution to literature. Few authors would have been able to completely oppose such concerted encouragement to develop in a certain direction, while by the same token few authors could have avoided the thinly concealed coercion that was involved. (Mallet, 2004: 39)

Community, as rendered by the creator of Wessex, channeled the audience and conditioned them to read his work in sociological and historical terms more than in a true literary perspective. Hardy has often been described as a “(parish) chronicler”, as the voice of an actual community in his fiction. Such an image, as far as reception is concerned, is quite fitting, but it is also quite reductive, as it entails a certain profile of readership. It also casts aside what is subversive in Hardy and is not really inclusive of his later works (*Jude*, *Tess*...), in which Wessex was no longer as significant, at least the way it had primarily been defined. Actually, it is quite the opposite, since later works focused on individualism and the crushing force of a community which was in no sense inclusive. It appears that Hardy did abide by the rules strongly suggested by the critics, reviewers and readers, luring his readers into the vales and cliffs of Wessex, the better to rough them with questions that went beyond the mere predicament of a nineteenth-century community threatened by industrialization.

The construction of the “Wessex” concept was also the product of actors outside the literary sphere. For instance, in “The Wessex Labourer”,⁵ the publisher Charles Kegan Paul first took the word outside the context of Hardy’s fiction, in an article meant to put forward the condition of the Dorset labourer. Quite conspicuously enough, the first hint at what could (and would) become a thriving industry appeared in an 1881 article in the *Bookman*, entitled “Thomas Hardy’s Wessex” (Watson, 2006: 181), displaying the first map ever drawn of Wessex. The article openly encouraged the public to take Hardy’s novels as guidebooks, urging the reader to indulge in sight-seeing, and judging that “to follow the fortunes of the people of [Hardy’s] fancy through their native Wessex would be as good an itinerary as any need desire”. This was how the once purely fictional community extended to a community “in real life”, a community which gradually became a thriving industry based on literary tourism. But it was really in 1895 that Hardy undeniably took over the community of Wessex and became the undisputed editor of his own production.

Editing a Fictional Community and Fashioning a Community of Readers

Naturally, at the start of their career, authors will hardly consider the challenge of shaping an ideal audience, an ideal community of readers. In Victorian Britain, the reputation of the magazine and publishing houses and the main authors associated with them provided them with an editorial policy and a predefined target readership. Considering that young authors were often focused on financial matters, some of them were mainly intent on satisfying mass readership, and this was precisely the reason why Hardy wrote *Desperate Remedies* in 1871. By 1878 however, the novelist was hoping to find his way in the literary marketplace and to gain literary respectability, partly because he had published two novels in the respectable *Cornhill*: once in 1874 with *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and a second time with *The Hand of Ethelberta* in 1876. The generic coherence of his early production was yet to be confirmed, but at that time he enjoyed sufficient trust on the part of publishers to overcome anxieties concerning publication. The publication of *The Return of the Native* in 1878 proved him wrong: by accepting his novels in the *Cornhill*, Leslie Stephen, its editor, had provided Hardy with an identifiable community of readers which corresponded to his aspirations, far more than the readers of Tinsley’s magazine, the publishing house with which he published his first

⁵“The Wessex Labourer,” published in *The Examiner*, in July 1876. Keagan Paul is the alleged writer of this unsigned article.

two novels. When Hardy submitted the ur-text of *The Return* containing only a few chapters, the response from Steven was immediate and irrevocable: “he feared that relations between Eustacia, Wildeve, and Thomasin might develop into something ‘dangerous’ for a family magazine” (Purdy, 1954: 27). Hardy had no other choice but turn to other less prestigious magazines, and against all odds, and much to the surprise of his relatives and friends, *Belgravia* published the novel from January to December 1878. *Belgravia*, a magazine founded by M. E. Braddon, is the emblematic provider of sensation fiction for lower-middle class readers at that time. The magazine, which “*stinks*” (Beller, 2012: 38),⁶ meant to challenge the supremacy of the *Cornhill* with a drastically different editorial policy, and a lower quality of published fiction. This second “choice” so to speak, prevented Hardy in 1878 from shaking off the sensational veneer he did not intend to keep after the publication of *Desperate Remedies*.

The publication of *The Return of the Native* explicitly focused on the love-hate relationship between Hardy and his editors, pointing to the difficulties which the author had to overcome in order to find and shape an audience of his own. His editors he considered as an obstacle between his work and a community of readers he might have more easily founded without them. In his general preface to the 1895 Wessex Novels edition, he wrote: “it may be assumed that [the novels] stand to-day [in 1895] much as they would have stood if no accidents had obstructed the channel between the writer and the public” (T. Hardy, 1895: vii). This paradoxical relationship partly explained the eagerness and the strain he put into the publication and edition of the “Wessex Novels” in 1895. In 1894, the copyright of most of his work came into the hands of Osgood, MacIlvaine, so that Hardy came with the idea of publishing a quality edition of his novels at a time when he was already tired of fiction. The idea of a Wessex Novels Edition was born. Such a move in his career also meant for Hardy that he would have the chance to take the upper hand on his literary production thanks to an enterprise of comprehensive revision. Editing the whole bulk of his prose came as a kind of consecration or recognition (not to say revenge) of his art for an author, who, although acclaimed and revered, saw in it the prospect of freely designing what could later represent the ultimate posthumous literary image of Thomas Hardy, offering the public a “definite version” of his works:

⁶ The emphasis is original, and the expression comes from A. G. Swinburne, when considering being published by M. E. Braddon.

“In accepting a proposal for a definitive edition of these productions in prose and verse I have found an opportunity of classifying the novels under heads that show approximately the author’s aim, if not his achievement, in each book of the series at the date of its composition. Sometimes the aim was lower than at other times; sometimes, where the intention was primarily high, force of circumstances (among which the chief were the necessities of magazine publication) compelled a modification, great or slight, of the original plan.” (Orel 1966: 44)

Hardy made hundreds of changes for this new edition, but the main aim, as the title of the edition suggests, is to “Wessexise” a disparate ensemble, harmonizing the fictional map and fictional place names, recalculating distances, all in all, entirely re-mapping his fiction.⁷ Even if in his General Preface to the 1895 edition, he urged the reader not to transpose fiction to reality, or argued that it is the critics and the audience who prompted the Wessexisation of his novels, Hardy here for the first time was the only one choosing to establish the community of Wessex as a system, as if it had been a scheme he had had in mind from the genesis of his work. He even provided the reader with a map in each volume of the edition. In the new preface to *Desperate Remedies*, a novel which did not originally belong to Wessex, Hardy wrote:

“In the present edition of *Desperate Remedies*, some Wessex towns and other places that are common to the scenes of several of this series of stories have been called for the first time by the names under which they appear elsewhere, for the satisfaction of any reader who may care for consistency in such matters.” (Orel 1966: 3)

⁷ In the Wessex Novel Edition preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy wrote an ambivalent justification for such a radical choice: In reprinting this story for a new edition I am reminded that it was in the chapters of “Far from the Madding Crowd” as they appeared month by month in a popular magazine, that I first ventured to adopt the word “Wessex” from the pages of early English history, and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend unity to their scene. Finding that the area of a single county did not afford a canvas large enough for this purpose, and that there were objections to an invented name, I disinterred the old one. The press and the public were kind enough to welcome the fanciful plan, and willingly joined me in the anachronism of imagining a Wessex population living under Queen Victoria; -- a modern Wessex of railways, the penny post, mowing and reaping machines, union workhouses, lucifer matches, labourers who could read and write, and National school children. But I believe I am correct in stating that, until the existence of this contemporaneous Wessex was announced in the present story, in 1874, it had never been heard of, and that the expression, “a Wessex peasant” or “a Wessex custom” would theretofore have been taken to refer to nothing later in date than the Norman Conquest. [...] Since then the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a merely realistic dream-country, has become more and more popular as a practical definition; and the dream-country has, by degrees, solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take a house in, and write to the papers from. But I ask all good and gentle readers to be so kind as to forget this, and to refuse steadfastly to believe that there are any inhabitants of a Victorian Wessex outside the pages of this and the companion volumes in which their lives and conversations are detailed. (Orel 1966: 8-10)

The drastic revisions in this edition were paramount in the vision of the novelist that we retain. The ensemble indubitably showed coherence, and not only a cosmetic coherence, it became a series (it is the term used by Hardy) enabling readers to identify with the Wessex community, going from one novel to the other, travelling Wessex, coming back to fictional places, discovering others. One must bear in mind that from 1895 onwards, even until today, a great majority of readers have been reading Hardy for the first time in this version only, “thus, he achieves a significant compromise with his audience’s realist expectations, but in doing so retains important elements that refuse those expectations in ways that are distinctively his own.” (Mallet, 2004: 61). Indeed, the imaginative construct in Hardy’s perfectly crafted new edition does ensure topographical harmony, but -and this is essential- no longer mirrors the original literary design of the novelist, since the patchy, rough, sometimes disparate aspects have been stripped off, which, for some scholars, are what is most stimulating in Hardy’s prose.

The Wessex Novels Edition provided the reader with a large peritext (A General Preface, and a Preface for each volume, a classification of the novels) the whole of which represents a real *vade-mecum*, virtual reading instructions introduced by the author himself. Such an undertaking narrowed the gaps in the texts, impinged on the textual cooperation of the reader, but contributed to building a “Hardyan Model Reader”, which was at last for Hardy no longer exclusively defined by the editors of the magazines. With the Wessex Novels Edition, Hardy created a model community of readers, and literally attempted to contain in the fictional world of Wessex what Umberto Eco defines as “the possible worlds” of fiction (see *Lector in Fabula*), in relation to the Model Reader. With the revisions, but also the annotations and prefaces (here indistinctly auctorial and editorial), afterthoughts or second-thoughts, Hardy openly organized a radical textual strategy.

Hardy the Mentor: Searching for a Community of “Literary Followers”

There might be one last phase in the creation or recreation of a Hardy community by the writer himself: it is the probable design to have authors following in his footsteps, authors gathered in what we could trivially call a “community of followers”. After having almost renounced fiction, at a time when poetry was his sole concern, Hardy finally became the master of his own art, and the quality of his literary production was never again challenged. He then started to have an eye on the production of others and took the opportunity to indulge

in literary patronage, a phrase poetic and euphemistic enough to suggest Hardy's desire to mentor and launch young would-be authors, preferably women writers. There were a few of them (Rosamund Tomson, Lady Agnes Grove, Florence Dugdale, Florence Henniker), and most notably two young women, among whom one was to become his second wife.

Hardy was already accustomed to re-reading the poems of his first wife, Emma, a self-proclaimed writer herself (she published several poems). But, although the hot and ill-tempered Emma projected her own social aspirations on her husband, and wished him success and popularity, she had strong views on his career, disapproved of some of his literary choices, and very much lived in his shadow. Certainly in the period leading up to her death, Hardy never sought to turn her into a disciple (which might have put quite a strain on their relationship), quite the contrary, and they both drifted apart as time went by.

The case of Florence Henniker

Hardy met Florence Henniker in Ireland, (she was the daughter of Lord Houghton whom Hardy has long been acquainted to), at a time when she had already published a couple of novels. She was a married woman, to Lord Henniker. Emma was in her fifties, Florence in her thirties, and Hardy, much charmed by the young, independent, strong-headed woman, started a correspondence with her, and a friendship which would last approximately thirty years. He made no secret of his strong attraction to Florence, much to Emma's fierce discontent, and he seized on the pretense of some kind of literary patronage in order to exploit "the element of male predatoriness in his deliberate exploitation of whatever links [...] might be established between them." (Millgate, 2004: 310). Unfortunately for Hardy, the ambitious and determined Florence knew exactly how to flatter the author's pride and ego but apparently never intended to succumb to the author's romantic overtures. He made the suggestion of a joint literary project: the writing of a short story. On his side, there was the eagerness to instill his experience and his favourite themes into the craft of a young hand, thus regaining control over the lost opportunity of developing a romance with her. She, was indubitably aware of the benefit she could derive from the collaboration: "Mrs Henniker's more consistent emphasis upon their shared literary interests had been largely motivated by her eagerness to deflect Hardy from his pursuit of other forms of attachment, but she was by no means unaware of his potential usefulness to her own career." (Millgate, 2004: 315). The result was "The Spectre of

the Real”,⁸ published in 1894, but written in 1893, only six months after their first encounter. “The Specter of the Real” is a short story with a plot chiefly designed by Hardy, and written by both of them.⁹ The letters sent by Hardy to Florence Henniker shed light on Hardy’s deliberate literary upper hand over the young woman, his tendency to give instructions and to change the ending, to correct and revise details, to express views on the future reception of the piece,¹⁰ display some awareness of the imposing shadow that his collaborative guidance might have cast over her reputation as a writer: “I suggest that we keep it a secret to our two selves which is my work and which is yours. We may be amusingly bothered by friends and others to confess” (Pinion and Hardy, 1972: 33). Some critics even suggested that “The Spectre” was not the only collaborative story by Hardy and Henniker.

Still, even after its publication, he continued to monitor her rather moderately successful career, for example urging the reviewers to give their opinion on Henniker’s production.¹¹ And later, to critic Clement Shorter, in 1895: “I am glad you liked the little story (‘A Page from a Vicar’s History’). Please write to author, & tell her yr opinion of the tale. Her address is The Castle; in Dublin” (Pinion and Hardy, 1972: 71). Such insistence prompted Shorter to reassess the piece and urged Hardy to put his name as joint-author of the story, which he categorically refused (Pinion and Hardy, 1972: 71). As late as 1907, he wrote to Florence in order to praise her latest novel *Our Fatal Shadows*, yet the gist of his letter was dedicated to giving his own vision of the subject chosen by Henniker:

⁸ Published in *To-Day*, Winter Number, 17 November 1894, 5-15.

⁹ See “Thomas Hardy and Florence Henniker: The Writing Of ‘The Spectre Of The Real’”, by Richard L. Purdy, in 1944 in *The Colby Quarterly*.

¹⁰ See the letter Hardy wrote in October 1893:

“I will send you back the pages of detail omitted, if you w[oul]d like to have them, as they might be useful. You will *quite* understand that they are not omitted because they weren’t good; but because the scale of the story was too small to admit them without injury to the proportion of the whole. I refer particularly to the description of the pool, and the bird tracks; which I *much* wished to retain.” “I did not mean to flow over into another sheet with literary affairs, but there are one or two things more to say under that head. One is the title. [...] When you have read the modifications, you will be able to choose; or suggest.” (Pinion and Hardy 1972: 34)

See in volume 2 of *The Collected Letters*, “To Clement Shorter, 16, Pelham Crescent, South Kensington, 25.4.94 “Mrs Henniker tells me that you have not yet reviewed her book (*Outlines*) in *The Sketch* -& that she is hoping you will. I am writing to inform her that I have given you a hint. (This is log-rolling, is it not?)” (Purdy and Millgate 1980: 55)

¹¹ See the most explicit letter to critic Clement Shorter in April 1894: “Mrs Henniker tells me that you have not yet reviewed her book (*Outlines*) in *The Sketch* -& that she is hoping you will. I am writing to inform her that I have given you a hint. (This is log-rolling, is it not?)” (Pinion and Hardy 1972: 55).

“To Florence Henniker, Max Gate, Dorchester, 29. 9. ’07.

In point of workmanship it shows I think a great advance upon your previous novels, and it is, in truth, a really literary production by a facile pen, which cannot be said of many novels nowadays. It is absolutely convincing — nothing in it made up to produce a melodramatic effect (my taste was depraved enough to make me wish there had been towards the end, to confess the truth; but please excuse me, it was late at night, when one can swallow anything.) [...] Of course *I* should not have kept her respectable, & made a nice, decorous, dull woman of her at the end, but should have let her go to the d---- for the man, my theory being that an exceptional career alone justifies a history (i.e. novel) being written about a person. But gentle F. H. naturally had not the heart to do that. The only thing I don’t care much about is her marrying the Duke’s son [...].

Yrs Affly ever

PS: I forgot to say that the situation before the story begins, that of the heroine having been engaged to Aurora’s *first* husband before she flirted with her second, is very good, & might have made a long novel of the whole story. T. H.” (Pinion and Hardy 1972: 133)

Florence Dugdale

The second female disciple or literary *protégée* was Hardy’s wife-to-be, Florence Dugdale. Of modest extraction, she was destined to be a teacher. Her fondness for literature drove her to become a professional writer, she then started writing children’s literature. A great admirer of Hardy’s work, a genuine “fan”, one day, aged twenty-six, she one day plucked up courage enough to write a letter to her sixty-five year-old favourite author in order to request a meeting at Max Gate. She sent him flowers, wrote letters as a manifestation of her admiration, and was granted a visit, perhaps in the company of no other but Florence Henniker (but that is not certain).¹² Hardy recommended her to editors (Macmillan among others), he gave her name to do a little editing for publishing houses and did his best to promote her children’s books. But most notably, he started to help her out in the process of writing stories, after having completely renounced fiction himself. He gave her strong advice on her story “The Apotheosis of the Minx”, proposed by him on her behalf and accepted by the *Cornhill Magazine*, in May 1908 (Millgate, 2004: 416).¹³ He more actively co-wrote another short story, titled “Blue Jimmy the Horse Stealer”, in 1911, published in the *Cornhill* again in February 1911 (Millgate, 2004: 435). She soon became a permanent help to him, assisting

¹² See Millgate, p. 410.

¹³ At the same time (1907), he was also proofreading Lady Agnes Grove’s book *The Social Fetish*, (Millgate, 2004: 417).

him in typing his writings for example. His first wife Emma died in 1912, Florence moved to Max Gate in 1913, and the mature artist and his fan got married in 1914.

This paper aims to expose the permeability between the well-known, canonical community of Wessex, either fictional or real, and the community of readers it entailed, a community oscillating throughout several decades according to Wessex's variations in shape, scope, and degree of radicalism. Whether it be thanks to external "active textual constructors" (editors, readers, reviewers or journalists), or thanks to Hardy himself, with an extraordinarily bold "paratexte récupérateur" ("an ample paratext designed to reclaim it", (Genette, 1987: 257), or with a strong will to initiate a literary descent with his *protégés*, both types of communities are tightly intertwined. The following enlightening definition by Hardy specialist Richard Nemesvari encapsulates what is at stake in the reading process one would need to go through to know Hardy thoroughly:

"One of Hardy's great strengths is his ability to create an intensely committed community of readers through his fiction and poetry. This is, of course, completely appropriate, given the emphasis on community that permeates his writing. For good or ill, his work tells us, individuals must negotiate their relationship to the group, for only in that way can either be understood. It is equally appropriate, therefore, that Hardy's own canon of writing be approached in this way. The first-time reader of a Hardy novel or poem is entering a world which has been profoundly mediated by the author and his previous audiences, and the further a reader enters that world the more necessary it is to comprehend that mediation." (Mallet 2004: 71-72)

The sense of community is not deprived of the question of control on one's art. Hardy went as far as mentoring, promoting, and most certainly ghost-writing for malleable women writers with little fame. Ironically enough, it enabled him to get his revenge on Leslie Stephen, since in the name of Florence Dugdale, and with the short story "'The Apotheosis of the Minx'", or "Blue Jimmy the Horse Stealer", an actually co-authored story, in the *Cornhill*, a magazine Hardy strained so much to be published in.

References

Bibliography

- Anonymous. Review of *Desperate Remedies*. *The Spectator*. Xliv (April 22, 1871): 481-83.
- Anonymous. Article in *The Bookman*, "Thomas Hardy's Wessex", (October 1891): 26-18. In Nicola J. Watson. *The Literary Tourist*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Barnes, William. *The Select Poems of William Barnes*. Ed. Thomas Hardy. Oxford University Press, 1908.

Beller, Anne-Marie. *Mary Elizabeth Braddon: A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*. London: McFarland & Company, 2012.

Cox, R. G. ed. *Thomas Hardy, the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and K. Paul; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970.

Eco, Umberto. *Lector in Fabula : le rôle du lecteur ou la Coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs*. Paris : Le livre de poche. 1989.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. 1987. Trans. Jane EL Lewin. London: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Life of Thomas Hardy: The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1891) and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928)*. 1928, 1930. London: Studio Editions, 1994.

Hardy, Thomas. *Under the Greenwood Tree or The Mellstock Quire. A Rural Painting of the Dutch School*. Ed. Simon Gatrell & Phillip Mallett. 1872. Oxford UP, 2013.

---, "Thomas Hardy And Florence Henniker: The Writing Of 'The Spectre Of The Real'", in *The Colby Quarterly* 1, issue 8, article 4, 1944, <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq/vol1/iss8/4>

Henniker, Florence. "The Spectre of the Real", in *To-Day*. Winter Number, (November 17, 1894): 5-15.

Millgate, Michael. *Thomas Hardy, A Biography Revisited*. London: Oxford UP: 2004.

Nemesvari, Richard. "Hardy and his readers" in Phillip Mallet, ed. *Palgrave Advances in Thomas Hardy Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Orel, Harold, ed. *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1966.

Paul, Charles Keagan. "The Wessex Labourer". *The Examiner*. (July 15, 1876): 793-794.

Pinion, Francis B. and Evelyn Hardy (eds). *One rare Fair Woman: Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893-1922*. Coral Gables, Flo.: University of Miami Press, 1972.

Purdy, Richard Little. *Thomas Hardy: a Bibliographical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954.

Purdy, Richard Little & Michael Millgate, eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Vol. 1-7. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-1989.

Tomalin, Claire. *Thomas Hardy: the Time-Torn Man*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.

---, *Under the Greenwood Tree or The Mellstock Quire. A Rural Painting of the Dutch School*, London: Tinsley Bros., 1872.

---, *Desperate Remedies*. 1871. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1998.

---, *The Return of the Native*. 1878. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1999.

---, "The Wessex Novels Edition". London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1895.

---, "The Wessex Edition". London: Macmillan & Co., 1912.