

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 4
Issue 12 *November*

Article 4

November 1957

Hardy's Copy of Schopenhauer

Carl J. Weber

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 4, no.12, November 1957, p.217-224

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

Colby Library Quarterly 217

by "the light that lit the olden days," she embraced "that generation as the one to which I really belong—I who was brought up with grandfathers and grand-uncles and aunts for my best playmates."²⁶ Buttressing her sketches with personalities and principles hewn out of such granite, Sarah Orne Jewett shortly emerged as the spokesman of a rich, sequestered tradition and assumed permanent rank among the foremost local colorists in the annals of American literature.²⁷



HARDY'S COPY OF SCHOPENHAUER

By CARL J. WEBER

THOMAS HARDY died in 1928. After the death of his second wife in 1937, his library was sold at auction in London; but when the auctioneer's cataloguer came to prepare a catalogue for the sale, he did not think that every book in the novelist's library was worthy of separate mention, even by title. This paper¹ deals with one of the books dumped into that vague category of "and other volumes." The book is a work by Schopenhauer which one might be tempted to say had "fallen into obscurity" were it not for the fact that it has never really emerged from obscurity at any time, at least not in English. This is an undeserved fate from which the book ought to be rescued. Mention of a few bibliographical facts may be helpful.

In 1883, when Queen Victoria was upon the eve of cele-

²⁶ Matthiessen, 30.

²⁷ I am indebted to Mrs. Frances Dudley Shepard for the gift of Miss Jewett's letter and photograph, and to Mrs. Shepard, Dr. John E. Frost, and Mrs. Clara B. Bixler for supplemental information.

¹ This is a somewhat abbreviated version of a paper read by the author at the seventy-second annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America, Madison, Wisconsin, September 9, 1957. As listed on page 20 of the program, this paper was entitled "Schopenhauer and Hardy's 'food for final Hope' in *The Dynasts*." For this abbreviated report a briefer title has been provided.

218 Colby Library Quarterly

brating her Golden Jubilee, there became available in London for the first time in English a translation of a German work which had made its appearance in Berlin in the year of Queen Victoria's birth. Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and Queen Victoria were both born in 1819, but not until 1883 was the German work made known under an English title. Published by Trübner in London, Schopenhauer's book had had to wait sixty-four years to achieve this translation. *The World as Will and Idea* was the result of the collaboration of R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp.

This London publication missed being Schopenhauer's first appearance in English by only two years. A few of his essays had been translated by Garrett Droppers and C. A. Dachselt, and their book, bearing the simple title *Select Essays by Arthur Schopenhauer*, was published in 1881 in Wisconsin. The Sentinel Company of Milwaukee apparently holds the distinction of being the first to print Schopenhauer in English.

Neither of these translations, however, was of Arthur Schopenhauer's initial work. He had turned up as a student at Göttingen about a decade after one Samuel Taylor Coleridge had sojourned there. Schopenhauer gained his degree as Doctor of Philosophy by the publication, in 1813, of a dissertation *On the Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. Seventy-five years later, after Queen Victoria had celebrated her Golden Jubilee, this dissertation still remained unknown to English readers, even though it had gone through four editions in Germany.

Mrs. Karl Hillebrand's translation of *The Four-fold Root* into English finally appeared in London in 1889. It was published by George Bell & Sons. This book was Schopenhauer's third appearance in English, his second London publication, the first *English* publication of his doctoral dissertation. The book contained nearly four hundred pages. Bound in dull blue cloth, it sold in London for five shillings.

Colby Library Quarterly 219

This long delay in making the *Four-fold Root* known to English readers is surprising, all the more so because—to quote Mrs. Hillebrand's introduction—it has “so much importance for a profound and correct knowledge of Schopenhauer's philosophy that it may even be doubted whether the translation of his chief work, *The World as Will and Idea*, can contribute much towards the appreciation of his system without the help . . . of the *Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*.”

Within a year of its publication, a copy of this book was bought by Thomas Hardy. The purchase was a very characteristic act. Hardy had been among the very first to read Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859; he was one of the first to read John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. He was among the earliest readers of Newman's *Apologia*. And in (or about) 1890 he bought Schopenhauer's *Four-fold Root*. Hardy read the book just about the time when a work of his own entitled *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* had been rejected by the editors of both *Murray's Magazine* and *Macmillan's Magazine*.

Hardy signed his name in the book—boldly, on the title-page—and wrote in it and made various marks in it. It is fortunate indeed that this book still survives, with his name and his marks in it, for without it one would not know for certain that Hardy had ever read Schopenhauer's dissertation. The fact that he had read *something* by Schopenhauer could doubtless be assumed or inferred, but one would not know just *what* of Schopenhauer's Hardy had read and reflected upon. This book takes on additional significance when one notes the fact that Hardy never mentions the German philosopher in his autobiography.² In the index of that work, the name Schopenhauer does not appear. The two volumes were written and published as if Arthur Schopenhauer had not existed at all for Thomas Hardy.

² In saying “autobiography” I refer, of course, to those two volumes issued after Hardy's death by his wife—*The Early Life* and *The Later Years*, published in 1928 and 1930 as the work of Florence Emily Hardy but now known to be essentially Hardy's own autobiographical writing.

220 Colby Library Quarterly

Students of the Wessex novelist have, of course, long thought otherwise. Miss Helen Garwood, for example, earned a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania by writing a dissertation on Schopenhauer and Hardy. It was published in Philadelphia in 1911 under the title *Thomas Hardy, an Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. But when Miss Garwood sent Hardy a copy of this dissertation, he took occasion to state, when he wrote her in reply, that he really knew very little about Schopenhauer. "My pages," he declared, somewhat cryptically, "show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Hume, Mill, and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer."

In 1904, when a London reviewer of Part One of *The Dynasts* criticized Hardy for making Pitt, in a speech in the House of Commons, give utterance to Schopenhauerian ideas of the Immanent Will, with talk about "the strange fatality that haunts the times wherein our lot is cast," Hardy was quick to point out that Schopenhauer had nothing whatever to do with Pitt's final speech; that he (Hardy) had used Pitt's actual words, uttered in Parliament before Schopenhauer was ever heard of.

In the light of these silences and disavowals, one must examine Hardy's copy of Schopenhauer carefully before attempting to draw any conclusions from it. And one must be all the more cautious in attempting to draw conclusions, because one is aware of the false conclusions, the erroneous deductions, that have been offered to the scholarly world by careless workmen in the past.

In 1938, for example, Blackwell of Oxford published an Oxford dissertation in which William R. Rutland told his readers about Hardy's copy of George Eliot's translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*—a book which Dr. Rutland had seen in Hardy's library at Max Gate. On the strength of his hasty observation there, Rutland made a deduction which he announced on page 106 of his dissertation: "Har-

Colby Library Quarterly 221

dy read Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. . . . He must have studied it extensively if he went to the expense of buying it."

To speak frankly, this comment is worthless. The Strauss book contains 784 pages, but it interested Hardy so little that he never bothered to cut open the leaves beyond page 178. The book is now in the Colby College Library, and more than five hundred of its pages remain uncut to this day. Hardy did not write his name in the book, or write any notes in it, and there is only one slight mark in one of its margins to show that the eye of the novelist once glanced there.

In the case of the Schopenhauer, however, there is a very different story to tell. When the book reached the Colby College Library, *all* the leaves had been cut open, from first to last. Hardy underlined the two words "Sufficient Reason" in the title, and wrote in pencil his own explanation of their meaning: "i.e., [Sufficient Reason] for the existence of things." With some readers, it is a common practice to underline words in this way, in passages that seem to call for special noting. Hardy's usual practice was to draw a vertical line in the margin opposite such passages, and if *extra-special* emphasis seemed to him to be called for, he drew a pair of vertical lines. We are thus saved from repeating Rutland's mistake in relying on vague inferences and guesses. We can tell that Hardy read *all* of this book by Schopenhauer and that certain pages and certain passages held special interest for him. Even the statement that he read all of the book takes on added significance for anyone who has noted the fact that whole pages are in Latin, that some of the passages marked by Hardy are in Greek, that there are numerous quotations in French and in German. This is indeed a hard book to read—much harder than the *Life of Jesus*. Yet the contrast between Hardy's copies of these two books is striking. The Strauss shows that it failed to hold Hardy's interest, whereas the Schopenhauer kept his mind and eye riveted, from

222 Colby Library Quarterly

page one clear through to page 375 with its scornful defence of the philosopher's pessimistic view of things, and its reference to "the monstrous, nameless evil—the awful, heartrending misery in the world." In short, Hardy not only read Schopenhauer but studied him, diligently and long.

And with what results? To answer this question adequately would require far more space than is here available. All that is possible here is to note the influence of Schopenhauer only on *The Dynasts*; and even within this restriction, one can do no more than note the influence on the supernatural framework within which Hardy's Napoleonic drama is set; and even here, one must rest satisfied to make only two points.

The first has to do with "It." As all readers of *The Dynasts* know, "It" is the blind unconscious Force which, in Hardy's poem, replaces the God of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the Preface to Part One of the epic-drama, Hardy explains his use of the neuter pronoun as applied to what he calls the source of Causation, stating that his "abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the First or Fundamental Energy seemed a . . . logical consequence of the long abandonment by thinkers of the anthropomorphic conception of the same." In the drama itself, Hardy does not call "IT" the First Energy but "the Will." This use of the word WILL causes a great deal of ambiguity for many English readers of *The Dynasts*. When the poem was first published, some of Hardy's friends wrote to him to point out this ambiguity. But Hardy defended his use of the word. To Edward Clodd he wrote (March 22, 1904): "What you say about the WILL is true enough, if you take the word in its ordinary sense. But in . . . a secondary sense . . . that of effort exercised in an . . . unconscious manner" Hardy thought the word permissible. To Ed-

Colby Library Quarterly 223

ward Wright he wrote (June 2, 1907): "I quite agree with you . . . that the word WILL does not perfectly fit the idea to be conveyed—[that of] a vague . . . urging . . . force"; but again he defended his use of the word and claimed that his theory about the Will "settled the question of Free-will [hyphenated] vs. Necessity."

If we open Hardy's copy of Schopenhauer to page 236 and note the mark he placed there, we can easily see not only the source of this perverse use of the word WILL but also the reason for Hardy's defence of it. "The fundamental truth of my doctrine," declared Schopenhauer in the passage marked by Hardy, "which places that doctrine in opposition with all others that have ever existed, is the complete separation between the will and the intellect. . . . I am the first who has asserted that a *will* must be attributed to all that is lifeless. . . . With me, the will is not . . . an accident of cognition and therefore of life; but life itself is manifestation of will." Page 238 of the Schopenhauer book emphasizes the need "to distinguish WILL from Free-will" (hyphenated) and "to understand that the former can subsist without . . . a brain . . . implying deliberation and choice. . . ."

A second point in *The Dynasts* where a German thumbprint can be detected is closely allied with a passage on page 309 of the Schopenhauer book, in which the philosopher talks about conscious life being "itself a manifestation of will." In September 1907, just 50 years ago, when Hardy dated the last page of Part III of *The Dynasts*, he too wrote about consciousness developing in the WILL, and he found in this Schopenhauerian idea *not* a seed for pessimism but a cause for hope. For if man, as a fragment of the cosmic whole, has developed consciousness, awareness, sympathy, why may not the Unconscious Will eventually become similarly conscious, and aware, and sympathetic? Hardy felt that there was no limit to the possible

224 Colby Library Quarterly

development of the WILL: he wrote about It's "unscanted scope," and declared that this possibility of development "affords a food for final Hope."

This thought, this "final Hope," encouraged him to look forward to mankind's eventual "deliverance . . . from the darts that were," and to trust that the day will come, when, "Consciousness the Will informing, It will fashion all things fair." And it is on this hopeful, this optimistic note that Hardy's poem ends.

In looking at this faint glimmer of Hope, does it seem to any reader of these words that the Schopenhauerian mountain has labored and brought forth a very small mouse? If so, that reader must be told that Thomas Hardy would not agree with him. Hardy not only regarded this idea of "final Hope" as important—very important—but took pains to claim that the idea was wholly his own, characteristically concealing (or should one be kinder and say "forgetting"?) the part that Schopenhauer had played in it all. In a letter to Edward Clodd (February 20, 1908) Hardy wrote: "the idea of the Unconscious Will becoming conscious . . . is . . . new"; and in a letter to Edward Wright (June 2, 1907) he declared: "That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself, I believe I may claim as my own idea solely."

Whatever we may think of these claims, Schopenhauer's *Four-fold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* provides a thought-provoking summons to us to re-examine the philosophical framework of *The Dynasts*, if only to see how a note of optimistic Hope can be distilled by the imagination of a poet from the doctoral dissertation of a pessimist.

