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Emilie Loriaux

- 1 In a letter to the publisher Alexander Macmillan of July 1868 written to accompany his early novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*, the young novelist explained how the work “took its shape”. He argued that strong “utterances” against upper-class characters might put off readers of the same class whereas “the very same feelings inserted edgewise so to say; half concealed” might “become the most attractive” aspects of the work (*Selected Letters* 10). This suggests that the literal surface of the text conceals strategic details or points of interest which are by definition not necessarily evident at first sight, concealment being defined, after OED, as either keeping secret, or hiding or not allowing to be seen.¹
- 2 Using similar phrasing in a work of fiction, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy described a dawn mist which meets Bathsheba as she awakes as “semi-opaque” (Hardy 2000, 265). Concealment and half-concealment, opaqueness and semi-opaqueness lie at the heart of Hardy's language. Is revelation, through “moments of vision”, possible or only half-possible? Indeed Hardy tends towards what actually lies beyond language, even though it may still be half-visible and therefore up to a point linguistically expressible. In short, Hardy works within an interstitial space half-way between visibility and invisibility, expressibility and ineffability.
- 3 This analysis concentrates on three of Thomas Hardy's major novels: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and studies aspects of language, phonetics and stylistics in these three texts, as regards their relationship to strategies of concealment or half-concealment. The modalities of such strategies vary according to the features of the particular narration. Hardy's novels are written in a combination of standard, if sometimes idiosyncratic, English, and elements of dialect for certain kinds of direct speech. A whole range of language registers is heard. Characters with a rural background try to cross the line which symbolically divides them from urban society, by modifying their ways of expressing themselves, be it orally or in

writing in order to adapt to the linguistic codes of the society from which they are otherwise excluded. The bilingualism of Tess comes to mind, complex as it is, for it consists not only in the home/school distinction but also in her ability to pick up Angel's broader vocabulary and turn of phrase, and integrate them into her own means of expression.

- 4 The way the heroine expresses herself is brought under particular narrative scrutiny; indeed language itself is as much the focus of attention as matters of plot and characterisation. After her engagement to Angel, Tess's "speeches" are "impulsive", "ecstasized to fragments"; there is a "spasmodic catch in her remarks, broken into syllables by the leapings of her heart" (Hardy 1994, 249). At the broader level of the plot, the broken, fragmentary nature of Tess's speech bodes ill for the heroine. Later in the novel, Tess and Alec meet by chance on an open road. At the end of the conversation, Alec wonders: "How is it that you speak so fluently now? Who has taught you such good English?" "I have learnt things in my troubles," Tess replies "evasively" (Hardy 1994, 396). What is the effect of "evasively"? It is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the "things" in question are concealed from Alec, though not, of course, from the reader. What's more, the exchange draws attention to the polysemic nature of the word "good" meaning both moral, and grammatically and phonetically correct according to criteria set by a highly educated, mainly metropolitan social grouping. "Good English" stands here in precise contradistinction to the so-called purity of the language, such purity usually referring to Standard English. Does Alec have the right to pass judgment on Tess's language? To dare tell her, by implication, that, if she speaks good English "now", she used to speak *bad* English?
- 5 In the article "La voix étranglée de Tess", Annie Ramel, within her Lacanian framework, states: "Le parler de Tess, dit fort justement Jean-Jacques Lecercle, n'est pas une forme corrompue de l'anglais 'pur', c'est lui qui est 'pur', en d'autres termes 'untinctured'" [referring to Hardy's fidelity to Tess as "a pure woman" and to the use of the narrator's description of her life as "untinctured" in Ch. 2] (Ramel 2007, 108).² "Good English" is of course something Alec knows nothing about: it means only "trouble", something of which Tess, in her reply to him, shows she is well aware. The moral connotation of "good" escapes him, but not Tess. Such considerations naturally emerge in phrases like "pure English" and "corrupt" ("une forme corrompue"). Tess, by speaking "good English", has somehow become linguistically contaminated, "corrupt". Has she therefore become morally corrupt, despite Hardy's self-proclaimed fidelity to her as a "pure woman"? No, she hasn't. But linguistic and moral corruption can so easily go hand in hand; and who decides what is linguistically (and morally) pure, and what is not?
- 6 The focus is not only on Tess's language but on her sensitivity to the language and "utterances" of others and the values of "purity" inherent in them. Once Alec and Tess have gone their different ways, she comes across "a girl and her lover without their observing her." The omniscient narrator goes on: "They were talking no secrets [...]. For a moment the voices cheered the heart of Tess, till she reasoned that this interview had its origin, on one side or the other, in the same attraction which had been the prelude to her own tribulation." (Hardy 1994, 398). Although Izz Huett and Amby Seedling – the lovers' names, as we learn just afterwards – are minor characters, Hardy places them here to highlight the *unconcealed* nature of their affair, in contrast to the tragic machinery of the Tess plot arising from "secrets". That secrecy is made clear from the expository dialogue in the first chapter of *Tess*: "'Twas said that my gr't-grandfer had secrets, and didn't care

to talk of where he came from..." [Hardy 1994, 4-5] (Durbeyfield is still living "in old times" because he is all too eager to believe that he actually is a knight although the parson only says he "would be Sir John now"). As far as Amby Seedling and Izz Huet are concerned, there is no suggestion of upward mobility. One might compare this with John Kucich's view of the combination of desire and class in Hardy: in *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction*, he asserts that "Hardy seeks to dramatize the realities of class conflict by foregrounding the social barriers his lovers must overcome; rather, he stigmatizes all desire by invoking the inevitable duplicities of social mobility which it generates." (Kucich 223). Hardy seems to stigmatize Tess's sexual desire (if "stigmatize" is the right verb) – what she calls, in indirect speech ("she reasoned"), in a barely-veiled euphemism, "attraction" – because it has got caught up in class distinctions, whereas Izz Huett's and Amby Seedling's have not; hence, Kucich's formula ("all desire") requires some small qualification. Izz and Amby have "no secrets" while "duplicities" – deceit, secrets – are what Tess is an unwitting victim of.

- 7 Beyond the various "secrets" held by the characters, Hardy's writing touches on an aspect of language which may be more abstract than it probably appears at first sight, yet is quite meaningful. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, for instance, Fanny Robin, the maid at the Everdene household, is grateful to the shepherd Gabriel Oak for helping her while she is alone by the wayside. She addresses a letter to him written in a formal register:

I do not know your name, but I think these few lines will reach you, which I write to thank you for your kindness to me the night I left Weatherbury in a reckless way. I also return the money I owe you, which you will excuse my not keeping as a gift. All has ended well, and I am happy to say I am going to be married to the young man who has courted me for some time – Sergeant Troy, of the IIth Dragon Guards, now quartered in Melchester. He would I know object to my having received anything except as a loan, being a man of great respectability and high honour" (Hardy 2000, 99).

- 8 The tone and phrasing of this letter signal the female character's gratitude towards her rescuer. More important, it shows Fanny's faith in Sergeant Troy – a faith which, unbeknownst to her, is shortly to be betrayed. However, it is perhaps easy to miss the fact that a country maid would not necessarily write or know how to write in such a formal register. At one level, Fanny first adapts her language to the addressee and situation at hand. But perhaps she also wants to be perceived as more educated or socially adept than she is. Is she aiming at some kind of upward mobility as revealed in her use of language in the letter that the circumstances of the plot will reduce to nought? Fanny makes an effort to give a favourable image of herself to Gabriel. Language here acts as a mirror; it acts as a kind of wishful thinking, not dissimilar to that of John Durbeyfield in the example mentioned above – both being examples of Hardy's dramatic irony, always a literary trope indicating concealment at one level or another. Her use of a formal linguistic register apparently suggests she has reached or wants to reach a higher social status. She is unaware that there is an ironic discrepancy between her elaborate linguistic register and the potentially downgrading reality of her situation. This unawareness might become even more obvious when one considers the first edition of the novel published by the *Cornhill* magazine in 1874. There, it was specified about Troy that he was a man of great respectability "indeed, a nobleman by blood" (Hardy 2000, 367); as the note in this edition points out the reference to Troy's aristocratic lineage "upgrad[es] his class". Fanny's remark confirms her aspiration to a higher social class than hers and makes the false situation with which the girl will be confronted later on even more dramatic. She

might reveal nobility in her words – as Tess, too, invariably does – or her mastery of formal language but she will not be able to change the reality of facts and her unstable situation. Hardy seems, as it were, to be playing with the letter. Words do not define reality: they are just high-standard English words, which might be regarded as decent and proper ones but which hide the catastrophic nature of Fanny's reality: by twisting language register and wishing to cross the social barrier through language, Fanny is making a fool of herself and eventually ends up as no lady but rather a fallen woman abandoned to a wretched destiny. Kucich's point about the tragic interference of desire and social mobility is therefore again applicable in the present instance.

- 9 Nevertheless, written communication is not just words made up of letters of the alphabet strung together. Words combine with punctuation to convey information or unveil the characters' moods, and to say something about society. Tess writes a letter to her husband Angel Clare:

MY OWN HUSBAND, — Let me call you so — I must — even if it makes you angry to think of such an unworthy wife as I. I must cry to you in my trouble — I have no one else! [...] The punishment you have measured out to me is deserved — I do know that — well deserved — and you are right and just to be angry with me. But, Angel, please, please, not to be just — only a little kind to me, even if I do not deserve it, and come to me! (Hardy 1994, 428).

- 10 Dashes frequently interrupt her flow, and even if dashes might be common or minor elements for a reader, they progressively become more and more abundant in the letter: seventeen of them in all. Tess goes on to insist on the fact that she never changed despite appearances. She emphasizes this idea, claiming:

I am the same woman, Angel, as you fell in love with; yes, the very same! — not the one you disliked but never saw. [...] How silly I was in my happiness when I thought I could trust you always to love me! I ought to have known that such as that was not for poor me. But I am sick at heart, not only for old times, but for the present. Think — think how it do hurt my heart not to see you ever — ever! (Hardy 1994, 429).

- 11 The broken syntax here generated by the dashes and the insistent repetitions in these sentences might suggest something different from what Tess herself intends. Tess clearly intends the word "husband" as a term of endearment; but it is also a mark of a legally and socially binding relationship. And at one level, dashes and repeated words such as "deserved", "same", "think" or "ever" clearly mark Tess's emotional agitation – her style again "spasmodic" (Hardy 1994, 249). Dashes are visible breaks in the letter, and the writing tends towards the impalpable, the inexpressible. But at another level, through the punctuation and nervous repetition here Hardy is perhaps suggesting that a social institution like marriage, or perhaps even society itself, are collapsing or in danger of doing so. Is there here as it were a silent or second voice suggesting the breakdown of society?
- 12 To turn from examples of written communication in the novels to the possibilities of direct speech, Hardy at times exploits the – apparently – slenderest of opportunities afforded by non-linguistic vocal sounds and onomatopoeia. In *The Return of the Native*, for instance, Diggory Venn replies to Wildeve's question as to whether he knows the contents of a letter from Eustacia he (Venn) has just delivered to Wildeve, in an onomatopoeic manner, thus avoiding – or concealing – a straight answer: "Ru-um-tum-tum" (Hardy 1999, 152). Wildeve at once gets his revenge by repeating Venn's "Ru-um-tum-tum" back to him in answer to Venn's question as to what Wildeve knows of Venn's marriage plans.

The vocal sound is like that of a drum roll. It both heralds and avoids or conceals the forthcoming disastrous marriage between Wildeva and Thomasin. And the levity of the two men's onomatopoeic elusiveness masks the eventual tragedy into which the plot will lead Eustacia, at least.

- 13 This onomatopoeic technique is equally apparent at various stages in *The Return of the Native*: "heu-heu-heu!", "Hoi-i-i!", "Hallow-o-o-o!" (Hardy 1999, 34), or "Haw-haw-haw!" (Hardy 1999, 219). Likewise, the farming community in *Far from the Madding Crowd* are frequently shown as expressing themselves in onomatopoeias such as "Whoo-who-who!" (Hardy 2000, 52), "heh-heh-heh!" (Hardy 2000, 38, 71), "hok-hok-hok!" (Hardy 2000, 100), "Hoy-a-hoy!" (Hardy 2000, 187) or "ahok-hok!" (Hardy 2000, 191). Onomatopoeias are at first glance almost ornamental touches like the *appoggiatura* sound effects one can find in music. But behind the surface of such transcriptions of human sounds, strange and comic as they may look on the page or sound to the ear, lies Hardy's sympathy with the lives of country folk and their routines – routines threatened by extinction and lived-out in harsh conditions. His use of language is both playful and purposive: Hardy's art and genius lie partly in his ability to arouse and keep the reader's sympathy, so that the author's sensitivity to the hardships and forms of oppression to which peasants are subjected is never mawkish or overbearing. In contrast, Sir Walter Scott, another novelist who might be described as regionalist, has, incidentally, been described by one contemporary critic as "elegising and sentimentalizing" his rustic subject matter (Draper 76).
- 14 Moreover, Hardy's onomatopoeic transcriptions need not be viewed as literal: rather, they can be taken as coinings of the novelist's which by a stylistic sleight of hand he passes off as transcriptions. Unlike words, in Standard English at least, onomatopoeic expression is personal to an author, as no one dictates what is correct or incorrect spelling. The combination of letters on the page, by appearing to reproduce peasant speech, in fact conceals / reveals the novelist's art of invention, and his artistic freedom.
- 15 It is in this broad context that we can also view Tess's wordless cries in the murder passage (Hardy 1994, 486; also commented upon by A. Ramel [106]): "'O – O – O!' Then a silence, then a heavy sigh, and again – 'O – O – O!'" In addition, these two triple O's are matched by what the narrator depicts as an onomatopoeia, the "regular beat" of "Drip, drip, drip." (Hardy 1994, 488): half-concealed, half-revealed, Alec's blood trickles to the floor. In fact, the whole scene is half-concealed, half-revealed, by the blend of Tess's single repeated vowel and the onomatopoeic narration. Indeed, Hardy's narrative technique often tends to such concealment at climactic points in the text, such as Eustacia's drowning, in which Clym (like the reader) hears a splash but sees nothing (Hardy 1999, 360), so that the question as to whether she dies or commits suicide remains forever unanswered (though clues planted in the text enable the reader to take an informed guess in this respect). In *Tess*, it is "half-concealed", then, since the scene as transmitted through the one-eyed gaze of Mrs Brooks, the householder at The Herons, viewing it through the keyhole, has a correlative in the manner in which Hardy at this crucial point pares Tess's "good English" back to its most basic phoneme: "o", a universal sound which, like Hardy's characters attempting to cross class boundaries (but either failing to do so, or doing so with tragic consequences), crosses language barriers, and is less linguistic than prelinguistic or extralinguistic. Interestingly, OED describes it as both Middle English and as a *natural* sound – natural meaning untutored and also pure as Tess herself is pure. The narrative compounds this extralinguistic dimension of Tess's speech

by the use of the word “unspeakable”: “It was from her lips that came the murmur of unspeakable despair.” (Hardy 1994, 486). The unsayable – and therefore the unsaid – paradoxically comes through Tess’s cries and murmurs. The use of the word “unspeakable” flows into Hardy’s approach to language in the later novels, in the broadest possible terms. The novelist will pick this idea up again in relation to *Jude the Obscure*’s Sue, who is described as “puzzling and unstateable” (Hardy 1998, 444). Rosemary Sumner argues that Hardy’s use of the word “unstateable” here – which she points out is a 1903 revision from the first edition, which had “unpredictable” (Hardy 1998, 224) – is his way of making explicit the “problem of exploring the unconscious” (Sumner 41). The revision here also has linguistic and literary implications, however. If Sue is “unstateable”, she somehow remains concealed or “half-concealed” in novelistic terms because who or what she is eludes expression (as opposed to her behaviour being merely “unpredictable” or difficult to surmise).

- 16 It will be clear by now that the question of linguistic and fictional concealment and revelation goes beyond matters of class difference and conflict evoked earlier. To return briefly, in conclusion, then, to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the context in which we find the onomatopoeia “Hoy-a-hoy!” is the search for Bathsheba through the examination of her horse’s hoof-prints. These hoof-prints, drawn on the page, are depicted as “being difficult to describe in words” (Hardy 2000, 184), and shortly afterwards as “mystic charactery” (Hardy 2000, 186), “mystic” here meaning obscure. The shoe-prints are ciphers, hieroglyphics – a metaphor for Hardy’s art, in which concealment and revelation do not stand in antinomy, but rather are inextricably linked. His interest in peasant speech and attempt to broaden the expressive possibilities of “good” or Standard English, are inseparable from his reaching constantly towards unstateability. In this novelistic space, everything becomes “mystic charactery” – its underlying meaning or meanings, like its lettering, remaining to be deciphered.

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NOTES

1. In quite a different context, T. S. Eliot was to allude in an essay to the question of "concealed meanings" in poetry (Eliot 1972, 237-238); it would seem that this difficult aspect of literature has not been given all the attention it deserves.
2. 'Tess's speech, as Jean-Jacques Leclercle quite rightly says, is not a corrupt form of "pure English"; rather, it is itself "pure" – in other words, "untinctured"'.

ABSTRACTS

The focus of this analysis on three major novels of Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Return of the Native* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* will study aspects of language, phonetics and stylistics in these three books. Manipulating language effectively entails a certain level of education. In general, formal English, or at least "Standard" English, is used in narrative text, dialogues or poems. However, in Hardy's novels, the words are not only written, but they can be read orally and we find a gap, even a paradox between what is written and what is said. All through the novels, this ambiguity is strengthened by various language registers. Words are means of both written and oral communication. Fitted together, they create sounds and give to Hardy's sentences a second meaning. Indeed, Hardy's heroes and heroines fit into their rural landscape and try to cross the line which symbolically divides them from worldly, urban society, by correcting their pronunciation or code of language. A reel of words weaves its way through those outward cultures or language groups. Through both silent and audible forms of communication, words may reveal hidden links within this micro-society. Consequently, Hardy's words might be seen as a series of letters or literary missives, whose purpose is to convey a message to the reader. Some methods and techniques of assembling letters and sounds to represent specific dialectal forms of expression will provide the core of this article.

Cette étude, centrée sur trois œuvres majeures de Thomas Hardy : *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native* et *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, s'oriente vers les aspects linguistiques – phonétique et stylistique – de la langue anglaise à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Les « lettres » peuvent être tout d'abord comprises comme un ensemble des connaissances et des études littéraires et relèvent d'une certaine éducation. Elles reflètent donc un anglais soutenu, ou tout du moins « standard », que l'on retrouve dans les passages lettrés et narratifs, voire même dans les poèmes. Néanmoins, les lettres ne sont pas seulement écrites, mais peuvent être lues oralement, soulevant ainsi une ambiguïté entre l'écrit et l'oral et plus généralement sur le langage. Dans la société hardyenne, cette équivoque est renforcée par différents registres de langue. En effet, les héros et héroïnes de Hardy appartiennent au paysage pastoral et tentent de franchir la frontière qui les sépare de la société mondaine de la ville en modifiant leur code de langage. Une ronde des mots se profile au

travers de ces deux cultures langagières que pourtant tout oppose. Autour d'une communication audible ou silencieuse, la lettre ou les lettres sont révélatrices de liens sociaux qui se tissent dans cette microsociété. Subséquemment, chez Hardy, ces lettres peuvent être perçues comme un ensemble de missives littéraires destinées à véhiculer un message au lecteur. Par ailleurs, cet article vise à saisir quelques méthodes et techniques dont l'écrivain usa pour harmoniser lettres et sons et créer son propre graphisme dialectique.

INDEX

Mots-clés: roman, lettre, langage, phonétique, stylistique, registre, sociolinguistique, dissimulation

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