

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mona Caird, and Thomas Hardy's *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1892)

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The Well-Beloved, originally published in serial form under the title of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, occupies rather a unique position among the whole range of Thomas Hardy's novelistic *oeuvre*, deviating from his hitherto realistic style and tone. J. Hillis Miller calls it "an odd novel, one which so openly flies in the face of the 'realistic' conventions [Hardy] for the most part obeys" (158).

Contentwise also, while the other novels published during the last years of Hardy's career as a novelist, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891-92) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), addressed complex and controversial social and moral issues including the Victorian double-standard as to premarital sexual relationships and unequal opportunities in education, *The Well-Beloved* does not show any such ambition to aim at social criticism; as the subtitle given to its 1897 version, "A Sketch of a Temperament," suggests, its subject matter is restricted to being personal and emotional, and the scope of the work minimalist. As Yoshiko Takakuwa has noted, Hardy himself has called this work a "whimsical & slight performance" (quoted in Takakuwa 19).

The outline of the story goes thus. An island-born and London-

trained sculptor named Jocelyn Pearston (in 1892 serial version) or Jocelyn Pierston (1897), extremely susceptible to feminine beauty, keeps falling in love with various women in whom the spirit or essence of his ideal of beauty, called the "Well-Beloved," happens to reside. The problem is that this Well-Beloved remains incarnated only temporarily and flits from woman to woman, and then, accordingly, Jocelyn is compelled to constantly replace his old love-object with a new one. This, however, does not necessarily prove his inconstancy, he tries to believe, by justifying his conduct in this way:

To his intrinsic Well-Beloved he had always been faithful; but she had had many embodiments. Such individuality known as Lucy, Jane, Florence, Evangeline, or what-not, had been merely a transient condition of her. (16-7)

Such a state of affairs changes on the decease of his old playmate Avice Caro, an islander woman with whom Jocelyn has made an engagement which he fails to fulfill. Then the Well-Beloved is observed to linger in the image of this last Avice Caro, whose presence was not fully appreciated while alive but has come to assume an incomparable value now that she has become forever unattainable, "an [i]naccessible ghost" (56).

Then, when Jocelyn, now a forty-year old, successful artist based in London, comes back to his native island to immerse himself in the infatuation of regretful remorse, the impossible happens: "all of a sudden he seemed to see Avice Caro herself, standing beside her own grave in the light of the moon" (65). The reality has been that the daughter of the deceased Avice Caro has grown to possess an identical face and figure to her mother at the time of her last parting with Jocelyn. The Well-Beloved now slips into this Avice the Second, whom Jocelyn succeeds in bringing

back to London with him to live under the same roof for a while, but their relationship remains that of a master and a servant and does not develop into that of lovers, as Jocelyn desires; moreover, it turns out that this Avice the Second has been married to another man. Thus frustrated in his attempt to bring back the irretrievable past, Jocelyn distances himself from the island for another twenty years, at the end of which period he revisits there to encounter Avice the Third, who is the daughter of Avice the Second and the granddaughter of Avice the First, again with the same face and figure but with the best attainment and education of all three. Jocelyn now “[m]akes a [d]ash” for this “[l]ast [i]ncarnation” (130), on the plea that “[i]t would set right something in [his] mind that has been wrong for forty years” (125) by marrying the youngest Avice. Miller, maintaining that *The Well-Beloved* is “[c]ertainly” an “odd” novel (Miller 148-9), summarizes its plot as follows: “It tells the story of a sculptor who falls in love with a girl, his cousin Avice, then twenty years later with her daughter, the second Avice, and then, after another interval of twenty years, with the granddaughter of the first Avice, Avice the third” (149).

Regardless of the author’s insistence on “treating the work as something not worth serious thought” (Takakuwa 19), *The Well-Beloved* could be said to present some really conspicuous features both in its stylistic and thematic aspects. As the titles given to the three “Parts” constituting the volume; “A Young Man of Twenty”; “A Young Man of Forty”; and “A Young Man of Fifty-nine” (1892 version) or “A Young Man of Sixty” (1897) suggest, this fictional work is overtly artificial as well as self-consciously fictional and as such, it pursues a thought experiment rather than achieving verisimilitude or plausibility. The very same male protagonist making repeated attempts at courting the three women of identical appearance, while he himself undergoing only very slight development either mentally or physically, could today be associated with what would happen in parallel worlds, or said to foreshadow the

emergence of interactive movies with multiple endings such as *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018). One could also draw a parallel between *The Well-Beloved* and *Yojōhan Shinwa Taikei* (2005), by Tomihiko Morimi, a highly experimental contemporary Japanese novel in which each chapter constituting a distinct story of its own nevertheless commences with exactly the same opening with the same male university student as its protagonist placed in his small lodging room, but then divulges into different directions of development according to his choice of extracurricular activities. Only in the last version of the potential life courses juxtaposed, can the protagonist enjoy a loving relationship with the female student who has been the love-object he has coveted. Also in a similar line is Paul Auster's recent novel *4321* (2017).

The fantastic and fanciful vision unfolded in *The Well-Beloved* admittedly owes much to the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley, from which many quotations and motifs are taken: "*The Well-Beloved* is so much under the aegis of Shelley that it might be defined as a parody of him, or as an interpretation of his work, or as a subterranean battle to combat his influence" (Miller 148). At the same time, Miller points to the metatextual aspects of the work in the following terms: "In *The Well-Beloved* the somewhat covert structure and meaning of Hardy's earlier novels are brought more fully into the open. *The Well-Beloved* functions as an interpretation of the earlier novels or even as their parody" (151); "*The Well-Beloved* is clearly something that Hardy has written, not something copied directly from real life" (154). Nevertheless, *The Well-Beloved* is a text that also induces autobiographical readings of it. "After Raymond Williams and Gittings it is easy enough to see Hardy himself in this predicament of Pierston" (Takakuwa 22), Takakuwa argues, pointing to the "fact that Hardy himself was a man quite susceptible to feminine beauty" (22), and supporting the view of Michael Millgate who "sees Hardy as interpreting his own 'disease' as 'endemic' to the artistic

temperament in general" (23). Indeed, we could see correspondence between the uncontrollable "Well-Beloved" of Jocelyn's and what has been described as the author's actual experience in life. According to Claire Tomalin, young Hardy in his early twenties, while letting Eliza Nicholls, "a lady's maid working in Westbourne Park Villas" (Tomalin 17) who had come up from Dorset to London like Hardy himself, consider "herself engaged to Hardy until 1867" (71), was showing interest in "more than one girl" — a clear parallel could be drawn between such behavior of young Hardy and that of Jocelyn, who, while keeping Avice the First believing herself to be still engaged to him, quite impulsively makes another marriage proposal to Marcia whom he has just met, propelled by the workings of the Well-Beloved. The circulating stories about Hardy would suggest "he was a susceptible young man who found himself dealing with more than he could handle" (71), Tomalin concludes.

Could we not, however, find some part of the author's own self projected onto the characterization and roles played by the three Avices also and not solely on the male protagonist? Besides, there might still remain some room for speculating over some yet unrecognized sources of inspiration. Therefore, in the first section in the following pages I would explore the possible influence *The Well-Beloved* might have received from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, a work featuring the theme of hereditary physiognomy and shared fate, of which we might find some resonance in *The Well-Beloved*. Then the second section will be devoted to a comparative analysis between *The Well-Beloved* and *A Romance of the Moors* (1891) by Mona Caird, a "new woman" writer active at the turn of the twentieth century who is known to have been acquainted with Hardy, and to whom Hardy shows much literary affinity.

Though the 1897 version is deemed as the more finished and authentic of the two, it cannot be denied that this revised version has undergone considerable alteration, for the sake of artistic effects, from

Hardy's original concepts:

There is no doubt that the book version is an artistic improvement, technically finer, and structurally better. At the same time, there is a tendency toward more schematization and abstraction. The three stage progress is more tidily arranged, Pierston being made into sixty instead of fifty-nine of the serial version. (Takakuwa 24)

I would, therefore, base my arguments in the following pages on the original serial version published under the title of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* rather than this much revised and polished-up later version, unless otherwise stated, for their primary interest resides in approaching the formation process of the work, for which purpose the more crude and raw form would be more appropriately informative.

Heredity, Physiognomy and Identity

One of the most striking devices that constitute the uniqueness of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (hereafter, *The Pursuit*) and maintain its basic structure is that the three Avices over the three generations are given an identical name and appearance, while possessing quite distinct inward lives and tendencies of their own. And yet, Jocelyn Pearston, misled by their very similar, or identical, appearance, would regard and treat these three women as if they are one and the same, constituting only one identity: "Jocelyn loves the second and third Avices as repetitions of the first" (Miller 168).

The original Avice Caro, a quarry-owner's daughter, "refined and well-informed" (74), remains the only one among those three who has truly loved Jocelyn Pearston and yet whose love Jocelyn feels he has never duly requited, which imprints upon his mind an indelible sense of indebtedness and regret: "She's the only sweetheart I never loved....

Because she's the only one I ought to have loved" (59), Jocelyn confesses to Alfred Somers, his confidant.

Her daughter, Avice the Second, due to the penury her family was obliged to suffer, has been deprived of any opportunity to expose herself to culture to educate herself, so that Jocelyn's rational self can clearly recognize her mental and spiritual inferiority to her mother (70). Nevertheless, he has difficulty freeing himself from the illusion that an identical physical appearance should guarantee the existence of identical mental qualities inside:

When she glanced up her lineaments seemed to have all the soul and heart that had characterized her mother's, and had been with her a true index of the spirit within. Could it be possible that in this case the manifestation was fictitious? (72)

He could not read her individual character, owing to the confusing effect of her likeness to a woman whom he had valued too late. He could not help seeing in her all that he knew of another, and veiling in her all that did not harmonize with his sense of metempsychosis. (73)

Jocelyn's inability to admit the presence of a distinct personality of her own in this second Avice drives him to the folly of compelling her to get married to and love him, on the ground that her mother was able to love him, as if that fact ensured that her daughter naturally should become her successor as his fiancée:

"Say yes, my pretty Avice. We'll then go out and be married at once, and nobody be any the wiser."

She shook her head. "I couldn't, Sir."

“It would be well for you. You don’t like me, perhaps?”

“Yes I do. But not in that sort of way — quite. Still, I ought have got to do it in time, if” —

“Well, then, try,” he said warmly. “Your mother did!” (133)

This careless remark of Jocelyn immediately produces an opposite effect to his intention: the revelation of the fact that he is none other than the very person who cruelly deserted and distressed her mother decisively antagonizes Avice the Second’s feelings against him.

Avice the Third, thanks to the loveless marriage of her mother which nevertheless brought material comfort, has been enabled to have access to lady-like attainments including fluency in the French language and playing the piano. She first appears to Jocelyn Pearston as a revived form of the original Avice the First: “It was the very girl, in all essential particulars, and without the absence of a single charm, who had kissed him forty years before” (120). Jocelyn, deluded by this sameness of appearance, arrogantly believes himself to be qualified for judging the suitability of his marriage to this youngest Avice, even without properly considering the latter’s sentiments, surmising they should be easily deduced from the results of his studies upon her predecessors, saying thus to Avice the Second:

Virtually I have known your daughter any number of years. When I talk to her I can anticipate every turn of her thought, every sentiment, every act, so long did I study those things in your mother and in you. Therefore I do not require to learn her; she was learnt by me in her previous existences. Now, don’t be shocked: I am willing to marry her. (125)

He further justifies his motivation for obtaining her in terms of atonement:

“It would set right something in mind that has been wrong for forty years” (125). Would it be possible, however, to compensate for a broken engagement by the defaulter getting married to a descendant of the non-defaulting counterparty? Jocelyn willingly deludes himself into believing it is, but the text proves that is too optimistic an assumption.

Even after the third Avice turns out to possess an unfathomably complex individuality clearly distinct from that of her grandmother, Pearston still is not shaken in his optimistic and opportunistic belief in his claim upon her:

[T]hough in outward semblance her grandame’s self, she had not the first Avice’s candor of heart, but rather her mother’s closeness. He never knew exactly what she was thinking and feeling. Yet he seemed to have such prescriptive rights in women of her blood that her occasional want of confidence did not deeply trouble him. (139)

This third Avice, placed under strong pressure from her dying mother, reluctantly marries Jocelyn, though her heart has already been given to another man, her former French tutor. This latter’s unexpected visit to their peninsula critically upsets her emotional equilibrium, leading Jocelyn to admit the failure of their marriage, regret his self-righteous conduct and rectify his error by bringing the young couple together.

Patricia Ingham, from a feminist perspective, points out Jocelyn’s refusal to pay attention to the content and meaning of the Second Avice’s speech constitutes “an account of the entrapment of women in the web of men’s language, which is a metonymy for the erasure of women’s individual identity” (Ingham, “Introduction” xxii). True, we have also observed that Pearston quite neglects to respect Avice the Third’s individual identity, or even to consider the possibility of her possessing such identity. I would, however, like to question if Pearston’s negligence, or

arrogance, can be totally attributed to his sexism, or peculiar temperament, or Avices' being female. Pearston's misreading of, or failure to read, their individual characters could also be traced back to the common belief that one's facial features are the faithful representation of that person's inward characters.

Physiognomy, elaborated by Swiss clergyman Johann Casper Lavater, claimed that people's intellectual and emotional states can be completely legible from the outward appearance, if only the observer is carefully perceptive enough: "The moral life of man, particularly, reveals itself in the lines, marks, and transitions of the countenance," Lavater confidently asserted (Lavater 8). In Victorian Britain, such physiognomic theories of correctly reading people's faces remained popular as an established branch of science, and we can see, for example, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, its titular heroine and Mr Rochester busily applying these theories to each other's facial features, in their attempts to reach mutual understanding. Art critic John Ruskin also contributed to the enrichment of physiognomic theories, putting particular emphases on the moral and ethical aspects, considering "the influence of mind upon the body"; "the mode of operation and conjunction of the moral feelings on and with the intellectual powers, and then their conjoint influence on the bodily form" (Ruskin 114) in *Modern Painters*. Among Hardy's contemporaries active around the *fin-de-siècle* period, George Gissing (1857-1903), a follower of Ruskin, seems to have unquestioningly retained such belief in the perfect correspondence between the inward and the outward, letting his characters undergo physical transformations that faithfully reflect their emotional vicissitudes. George Eliot (1819-1880), however, had problematized such simplistic association by introducing in *Romola* (1863) a male protagonist whose outstanding characteristic resides in the unlikely combination of perfectly beautiful appearance and internal moral decay. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) then further developed this motif of sinful good-

lookers in his self-consciously deconstructive text, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), exploiting and experimenting with the traditional belief that one's physical appearance should be a true index to that person's internal or spiritual essence. The titular protagonist, on coming to the full recognition of his own immaculate beauty represented in his portrait, prays that the portrayed image shall undergo the process of ageing instead of his own person, so that the model himself can forever retain his fresh beauty. On the level of the plot, it appears that his wish has been granted: the portrait starts to go through strange transformations, which seem to suggest the model's moral degradation more than physical decay — it is as if since the internal content has been prevented from manifesting itself upon the physical body of the person, by some strange physical law of conservation, that being sought its vent into the painted surface of the portrait. However, the following warning message that frames the central narrative subverts any attempt at fixing any one and definite interpretation upon the text:

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. (Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 17)

The above lines would open up the possibility that any naïve association between the inward and the outward, or the belief that one's appearance should be correctly read by a careful observer, is being derided, by undermining attempts to detect or establish some tangible causal relationships within the text.

Thomas Hardy is very likely to have read Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by the time of his writing *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*. Certain resonances could be heard between expressions such as “[t]his

course of heart not ageing while his frame moved naturally onward" (*The Pursuit* 106) and the basic conceptual tones weaving out the textual world of *Dorian Gray*. The following passage pointing to the disparity between the qualities denoted by the surface features and the true content underneath seems to indicate how Hardy also was concerned and even troubled with this enigmatic relationship between one's inward and outward self, having come to doubt their straightforward correspondence to each other:

When she [= Avice the Second] glanced up her lineaments seemed to have all the soul and heart that had characterized her mother, and had been with her a true index of the spirit within. Could it be possible that in this case the manifestation was fictitious? He had met with many such examples of hereditary persistence without the qualities signified by the traits. He unconsciously hoped that it was at least not entirely so here. (*The Pursuit* 72)

Jocelyn, then, is aware that there could be some "risk" involved in the act of pursuing his ideal while attempting to "go beneath the surface," trying to associate some desirable content to what appears without.

Hardy's own concern with the enigmatic, inscrutable and sometimes even seemingly arbitrary behaviour of the phenomenon of heredity also could be detected in the passage I quoted above. It is a well-known fact that when writing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* he ardently read August Weismann's *Essays upon Heredity* (Yoshida 324; Qi 830), which defines heredity as "the process which renders possible that persistence of organic beings throughout successive generations"; "not only are the characteristics of the species transmitted to the following generation, but even the individual peculiarities." At about the same period as the production of his later novels, Hardy drafted the poem "Heredity" (Scholz 42) which clearly

shows a motif very similar to what we have found in *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* and goes thus: "I am the family face; / Flesh perishes, I live on, / Projecting trait and trace/ Through time and times anon." Both the poem and the novel seem to indicate that Hardy, as well as his protagonist Jocelyn, admits that there obviously exists hereditary or family resemblance in the physiognomic and physical composition of humans. What remains at stake is how far heredity controls and determines the mental or behavioural habits and the fate of each individual. This concern has been the one shared by Hardy and a great American writer of his previous generation, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), a copy of whose *The House of the Seven Gables* is found in the catalogue of books kept in Hardy's library at Max Gate (Millgate).

Hawthorne was a writer deeply obsessed with the notions of ancestral sin and hereditary curse; in his work is deeply embedded the guilt he felt of his Puritan forefathers' involvement in witch trials. *The House of the Seven Gables*, in particular, reflects the author's obsession in a crudely evident form, directly dealing with the motif of the ancestral sin and the hereditary curse it incurs upon the progenitors. The Pyncheons, whose Puritan forefather Colonel Pyncheon executed and confiscated the property of a Matthew Maule suspected and convicted of witchcraft, are to be perpetually involved in a trans-generational reparation with the Maules. A conscientious Pyncheon member of a latter day suffers from the awareness that his family has wronged the Maules; "a century and a half seemed not so vast a period as to obviate the propriety of substituting right for wrong" (Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* 23), but his attempt at redemption is foiled by a relative who murders him. Holgrave, a chief character and a scion of the Maule blood, says to Phoebe Pyncheon: "Shall we never, never get rid of the Past! ... It lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body! ... Just think, a moment; and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to by-gone times" (182-3).

Indeed, the question as to whether one can ever exorcize the present of a hereditary curse from the past constitutes one of the chief concerns that runs throughout the novel; while the family feud between the Pyncheons and the Maules is to be resolved into an amorous matrimonial union between their representatives, Phoebe and Holgrave, it could seem as if the curses were inscribed in the hereditary compositions of the family members on the genetic level — even though the notion of “genes” did not yet exist when *The House of the Seven Gables* was published — in the form of the identical physiognomy shared among the ancestors and the descendants. Phoebe mistakes the figure represented in the daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon, the cousin and tormentor of Hepsibah and Clifford, for Colonel Pyncheon, her “Puritanical ancestor” (92) whom she has always seen and whose “stern eye has been following [her] about all day” (92). Indeed, Judge Pyncheon proves himself a possessor of the same kind of egotistic greed and cruelty as characterized his ancestor, which Hepsibah calls “this hard and grasping spirit” that “has run in [their] blood these two hundred years” (237), and moreover, dies an untimely death in an identical way, sitting upright with his bosom stained with blood. Though Holgrave makes attempts at a scientific explanation in terms of hereditary physical composition, the inevitable impression would be that the temperamental disposition of his Puritanical ancestor was inherently inscribed upon the descendant’s identical physiognomy, compelling him to follow the rut that would finally lead him to self-destruction.

Hardy, like Hawthorne, was deeply intrigued by the still relatively new technology of photography and the enigmatic relationship between physical appearance and inward spirituality¹; and the power of heredity and individual freedom. An episode in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* featuring the motif of ancestral portraits and the family physiognomy seems highly likely to be alluding to Hawthorne’s *Seven Gables*. After their wedding, the

protagonists Tess and Angel Clare move into the old family mansion previously owned by the former's ancestors, the d'Urbervilles, where they are greeted by two "life-size portraits" of Tess's ancestresses, "women of middle age" "whose lineaments once seen can never be forgotten": "The long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other, suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity, haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams" (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* 235). What is ominous as well as "unpleasant" is that Tess's own features are "unquestionably traceable in these exaggerated forms" (236), a fact which both the husband and wife detect on the spot. Later, the negative impression received from the portraits would exert a fatal effect upon the newly wedded couple, like a curse. Having heard from Tess an unexpected confession concerning her involuntary yet extra-marital sexual affair with Alec d'Urberville, Angel hesitates before the bridal bedroom undetermined whether to enter it or not, when the "sight of the d'Urberville dames whose portrait was immediately over the entrance to Tess's bedchamber" (254) leads him to the ultimate decision:

In the candlelight the painting was more than unpleasant. Sinister design lurked in the woman's features, a concentrated purpose of revenge on the other sex — so it seemed to him then. The Caroline bodice of the portrait was low — precisely as Tess's had been when he tucked it to show the necklace; and again he experienced the distressing sensation of a resemblance between them.

The check was sufficient. He resumed his retreat and descended. (254)

An obvious resemblance in behavioural patterns could be observed between Angel Clare in the above passage, who is repulsed by the sinister

association the ancestral portrait has cast upon the unfortunate heroine, and Hepsibah in *The House of the Seven Gables*, who, when seeking out some help from Holgrave, unexpectedly encounters the daguerreotype of Judge Pyncheon and is driven to desperation: "With an impulse of idle curiosity, that flickered among her heavy thoughts, she looked at one for the daguerreotypes, and beheld Judge Pyncheon frowning at her! Fate stared her in the face. She turned back from her fruitless quest, with a heart-sinking sense of disappointment" (*Seven Gables* 244).

One could thus hear a resonance of the Hawthornian in the Hardian text, but it should be also noted that in Hardy's fictional world, the connection between facial features and the mentality or personality suggested by them does not seem so simple or straightforward as in Hawthorne's work. As we have already seen, in *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, the protagonist shows his awareness that physiognomy might not always be a faithful reflection of what resides within: "When she [= Avice the Second] glanced up her lineaments seemed to have all the soul and heart that had characterized her mother's, and had been with her [= Avice the First] a true index of the spirit within" (*The Pursuit* 72). A very similar usage of the word "index" could be found in the narrator's comment upon Angel's wrong judgement of Tess's character based upon the inference from his physiognomic reading of her ancestral portrait: "He argued erroneously when he said to himself that her heart was not indexed in the honest freshness of her face" (*Tess* 254). What lurks in the minds of both Jocelyn and Angel is a doubt as to the readability of the human face, or direct correspondence between the within and the without. Though doubtful, they are yet compelled to attempt at readings and interpretations of the faces of their beloveds, while having fear of being betrayed by the surface.

Seen from another perspective, however, such doubts could open up some positive possibilities as well, liberating humans from stern

determinism. In *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, the three Avices wearing the identical masks develop distinct tendencies and personalities, the third one ending up the most perfected in manners and accomplishments. Here, it would be worth reminding ourselves that just as the three successive Avice Caros, there actually existed the lineage of “[t]hree Thomas Hardys in three generations” (Thomalin 3), the third and the last one of which being the poet and novelist Thomas Hardy. His mother Jemima, with her “experience of living in a learned household” (9), had a determination to educate him out of the class he was originally born into. Her son Thomas himself then proved himself a devoted scholar and a great reader, and by the time of his writing *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, had managed to establish himself as a writer of eminence. He had, nevertheless, undergone a bitter experience of being frustrated in his attempt at entering a university, receiving advice that he should “stick to architecture” (Thomalin 56) like his progenitors.

As well as for Hawthorne, for Hardy with his “ambition to become a different person” (Thomalin 63) from his father and grandfather, how to cope with the past that “lies upon the Present like a giant’s dead body” (*The House of the Seven Gables* 183) must have been an issue of serious concern. Upon Tess’s being deflowered by Alec, the narrator speculates on the possibility of this being retaliation for ancestral crimes in the distant past, while deeming any morality that might be there unacceptable to ordinary humans: “[T]hough to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature, and it therefore does not mend the matter” (*Tess* 82). The dominant paradigms defining the social and cultural contexts around these two authors were different, but whether under Calvinism or Darwinism, both Hawthorne and Hardy were trapped between determinism and free will, collectivism and individualism. Hardy should have been aware of their affinities as writers and then adopted a similar

conceptual framework in his own novel to the one employed by Hawthorne, but presenting more trust in the power of the individual will to conduct one's life course and future, and exorcize the curse from the past, than his predecessor. The next section, however, might indicate Hardy's doubt as to how far personal freedom could properly be pushed forward in pursuit of happiness.

From the Wellbeloveds to the Well-Beloved

In Mona Caird's prose fiction *A Romance of the Moors* (1891), there appears a family whose name presents intriguing resemblance to the "Well-Beloved": the Wellbeloveds. I would feel it worth exploring whether it indicates some direct influence between *A Romance of the Moors* and *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* and believe it is quite probable that Hardy has made a respectful allusion to Caird, a literary comrade of his, to whom he shows much literary affinity.

Caird and Hardy shared many of the political and ethical causes for which they fought, braving slanders and scandals. Since having made her sensational début with the article entitled "Marriage" in 1888, which, on being published in *The Westminster Review*, triggered heated debates and controversy, Caird perseveringly and consistently kept on subverting conventional notions of womanhood, attempting to empower the underprivileged, questioning what had hitherto been ascribed to women as their proper sphere and acutely pointing out that the notion of such propriety would be nothing more than artificial, arbitrary and illusive construction though it had tended to be justified in the name of "nature": "Caird appropriated the scientific rhetoric of the social purists and eugenists in order to rework their arguments, exposing the biases inherent in the new discourse of biology and reclaiming the importance of environment and culture in shaping individuals" (Richardson 182). Hardy, likewise, also under the strong influence of John Stuart Mill like Caird

(Fincham 199; Hookway 133), attempted to rectify the unequal relationships between the sexes, harshly attacking the Victorian double standards of sexuality, and questioning the validity of the existing form of institutionalized marriage. Both agnostics, Hardy and Caird seriously sought for ways humans could survive ethically, without inflicting pain on each other, even without any religious authority. Their concerns extended to the welfare of nonhuman animals and Caird published an anti-vivisectionist thesis entitled *Beyond the Pale* (1897), while Hardy contributed the pig-slaughter scene in *Jude the Obscure* to *The Animals' Friends*, the journal of the "Society of the Protection of Animals" (Morrison 67), aiming to "[teach] mercy in the Slaughtering of Animals."

Thus, that there has been much literary affinity between Hardy and Caird is obvious, but still, there also seem to have been some substantial differences between the two. One notable difference can be seen in their attitudes toward the idea of altruism. Whereas Hardy had a melioristic vision that if each human being learns to behave altruistically, ultimately a community of mutual loving-kindness would be realized (Keen 363), Caird, based on historical evidence, put a serious doubt as to the efficacy of the principle of altruism in the amelioration of the well-being of individuals as a whole. From her point of view, women have been preached self-sacrifice all life long, to hinder any chance of their self-realization; moreover, sacrifices have been made since the days of the ancient Druids as prehistoric stone monuments tell us, but seemingly those have not contributed effectually to the betterment of the human living conditions, Caird points out. If Hardy had intended his *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* to be a kind of response to, or rewrite of, *A Romance of the Moors* by Caird, it seems verily on this point concerning the propriety of altruistic motives in life.

In the works preceding *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* already, marks have been detected of Hardy's assimilation of, and allusion to, the novelistic world of Caird. Both Demelza Hookway and I myself separately published articles that point out the echoes of Caird's *The Wing of Azrael* (1889) in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) in 2010². It would, therefore, be not so preposterous to surmise Hardy again made an allusion in his new novel to another novel of Caird published just one year earlier. And indeed, there are some quite noteworthy similarities between the two.

A Romance of the Moors features as its male protagonist Dick Coverdale, a university graduate of artistic temperament, who impulsively courts his relative Bessie, an orphan girl living with the Wellbeloveds — a couple consisting of the husband who is also Bessie's deceased mother's brother, and his wife, who is Dick's mother's sister — to plunge into a state of quasi-engagement to her, only after which he starts to contemplate what restriction he has placed upon himself, regretting the lost chances of freely exploring the wide world to test his possibilities. We could find him comparable to Jocelyn Pearston who, later in the very same day on which he proposed marriage to Avice Caro, is already "full of misgiving": "What he said to her in a moment of impulse that morning rather appalled him in its consequences" (16).

As early as the evening of the same day when he has won Bessie's heart for sure, Dick begins to see her "as a hopeless obstacle to his career" (*A Romance of the Moors* 44) and at night, when his mother insinuates as to their marriage prospects, his feelings become those of despair: "Marry Bessie, settle down for life into a little circle of homely interests, narrow duties, small affections, each with its series of tethering claims! God in heaven! He would rather die" (86). Like Pearston and Hardy, Dick admits his susceptibility to feminine beauty; "a pretty face has always played the devil with me" (95), he confesses to Margaret Ellwood. And also, like the

other two, Dick's amorous fancy shows tendency toward fickleness rather than constancy. When asked by Margaret; "Do you care for the girl — or is it girls" (96):

"Oh! It's not the first time," Dick admitted shamefacedly: "but before, the girls meant no more than I did; but this time she expects church-bells, wedding-ring, silk gown an all the rest of it..." (96)

The trouble shared in common between Dick and Pearston is that they cannot feel confident of their own love which they believe they ought to feel. After becoming engaged to Avice, the question that troubles Pearston is: "But did he love Avice — see the Well-Beloved made manifest in Avice at all?" (*The Pursuit* 17); and Dick, on being told by Margaret that "[he] must not marry her unless he love[s] her" (*A Romance* 97), has his face brightened by "a ray of hope" (98).

In *A Romance of the Moors*, Caird, already known to be a powerful vindicator of women's rights, delineated this time the predicaments suffered by talented young males whose aspirations are being stifled in conventional and hostile environments. She gives a symbolical name "Dedborough" to the fictional town where Bessie lives with her aunt and uncle, of which Dick would come to feel "as if it typified all that was small and local, *dead* and prosaic" (194, emphasis mine). In the novel Margaret Ellwood, an outsider to this locality and herself an artist based in London, is presented as the wisest and most experienced among its characters and could be supposed to best represent the ideas and opinions of the author herself. When she suggests to Mr. Coverdale, Dick's father, that it might be meaningful for his son to see more of the people and the world before "settling down to married life" (114), he rejects the idea on the spot: "John Coverdale shook his head vigorously: he did not hold with seeing the world — it made a 'laad' discontented with his home and his duty"(114). "My

laad's got to bide where he be, and live and die as his fathers lived and died afore him these three hundred years and more" (115), he says. In this stagnated region, and for this bigoted father, then, there is one correct and authorized answer, one right life course to pursue, that is, to simply follow the rut one's forefathers have trodden. Miller reads "the [c]ompulsion to [s]top [r]epeating" (Miller 146) in *The Well-Beloved*, but in *A Romance of the Moors* also, whether Dick can escape the cycle of endless repetition is verily at stake. Margaret Ellwood is of the strong opinion that "human ties and human claims" (144) should not cripple the "impulses of the poet" (144) and that Dick, instead of marrying, ought to "leave [the] place and travel for a time" (152): "He ought not to marry. It would be the ruin of him" (148). The narrative also seems to support this judgement of hers as a sound one, and in the end, Dick launching onto a journey of self-pursuit, with a limitless number of possibilities and opportunities opening up before him, is presented as a desirable outcome and conclusion. Even when Dick returns, exhausted from his "wanderings" (191), there is no assurance he would choose to stay with either Bessie or Margaret, as the latter says to Bessie: "We can both be ready for him with open cages — nicely painted, elegant cages, with every comfort for a vagrant eagle disposed for a quiet life. And then he can enter which he likes — or neither" (190); but at any rate, "We must not imprison our eagle before he has even spread his wings" (190).

The mentality typified by Dick is quite similar to what characterizes Jocelyn, and moreover, it is indicated that Dick comes to clearly realize the nature of his hitherto only vaguely felt maladjustment to and dissatisfaction with the present way of life — that is, running the family farm with his father, confined within a very small local community — as nothing other than the manifestation of his artistic temperament, with the help of the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley he has encountered. It could be strongly suspected, then, that Hardy, while deriving some of his ideas for

The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved directly from Shelley, also drew inspiration from the concept shown in Caird's *Romance*, which is full of references to Shelley, responded to it both by assimilation and differentiation, and thus attempted a literary conversation with her work.

Both in *A Romance of the Moors* and *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, the scenes of main events are set in a close community in remote countryside. The male protagonists are "natives" who have returned to the place, acquainted with new values and ideas of the outside world. On finding her sobbing for his "slighting" (*Pursuit* 14) behavior on the occasion of their reunion, he impulsively courts his female relative, but soon after that comes to doubt the propriety of that behavior and feels reluctant to consummate their relationship. And then, a chance encounter with another female character of a completely different type (handsome and majestic, to be contrasted with the female relative who is sweetly elegant), with whom the male protagonist is to take shelter from heavy rain among the rocks, to rapidly increase their sense of intimacy, would detach his heart from his old beloved in a definite way. Thus, Hardy seems to have quite intentionally borrowed the fictional and thematic framework of *A Romance of the Moors* to be adopted in his experimental fiction, but then differentiated his own work by giving it nuances and emphases that are divergent from hers.

A strong message Caird's work tries to convey has been that unreasonable notions of "duty" and prejudices should not hinder the possibilities of anyone's self-realization, and above all, that of the artistically gifted. Jocelyn Pearston, then, could be said to have faithfully obeyed the doctrine prescribed by Caird to enjoy his irresponsible freedom once — but not with impunity; he would forever be haunted by the phantoms of "this-might-have-been"s and the sense of unfulfilled duty. Hardy, in a way, presents Pearston's predicament might as one that might be faced by modern people destined to be trapped and wander in the space of

uncertainty in a world no longer possessing an authority that provides one and the correct answer.

Conclusion

That Hardy called *The Well-Beloved* his “whimsical & slight performance” (quoted in Takakuwa 19) could have been his gesture of embarrassed self-belittlement, due to the fact that unlike the other novels produced around the same period that dealt with overtly social issues on a greater scale, this short piece, in a seemingly fairy-tale like format, quite freely explores the concerns that were more personally relevant to the author himself.

The three novels this article has mainly focused its attention upon; *The House of the Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Romance of the Moors* by Mona Caird, and *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* by Thomas Hardy, all seem to share notably similar stylistic as well as thematic concerns. In these works, the authors explored how individualities could be developed and realized against hostile social and biological circumstances or the law of inertia, in a prose form under the umbrella of “romances.”³ “Moonlight, in a familiar room falling so white upon the carpet” (Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 149) is an expression Hawthorne used to describe a romance-writer’s vision in his famous introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* entitled “The Custom-House.” Both Caird and Hardy must have found the employment of such “moonlight” appropriate for the revelation of their desired truths.

Caird’s adopting the title; “A Romance of the Moors” for her own novel and also the surname “Coverdale” for characters in it could point to an intriguing transatlantic literary connection, too, possibly indicating Caird’s homage to the author of *The Blithedale Romance*.

Notes

1 As to Hardy’s concerns with photography, see, for example, Arlene M. Jackson,

"Photography as Style and Metaphor in the Art of Thomas Hardy." *Thomas Hardy Annual* (1984) 91-104.

- 2 Demelza Hookway, "'Falling Over the Same Precipice': Thomas Hardy, Mona Caird and John Stuart Mill." *Thomas Hardy Journal* 31 (2010):132-150 ; and Akemi Yoshida, "A Comparative Reading of Mona Caird's *The Wing of Azrael* (1889) and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)" in Juli Parker ed. *Representations of Murderous Women in Literature, Theatre, Film, and Television* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 33-57.
- 3 Hardy categorized his own prose works into three types and *The Well-Beloved* falls into that of "Romances and Fantasies" (Ingham xix).

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