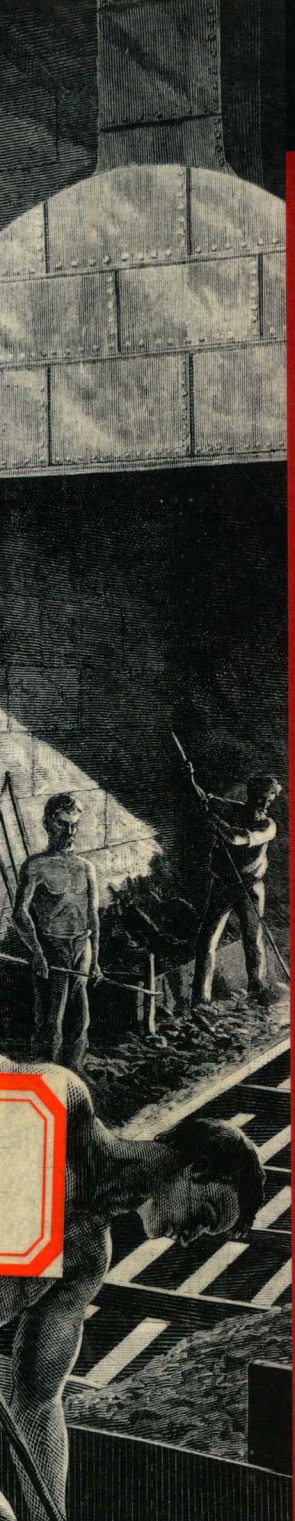
A Bedford Cultural Edition



# LIFE IN THE IRON-MILLS

Rebecca Harding Davis

Edited by Cecelia Tichi

Bedford Cultural Editions

# REBECCA HARDING DAVIS
# *Life in the Iron-Mills*

EDITED BY

**Cecelia Tichi**

Vanderbilt University

BEDFORD/ST. MARTIN'S BOSTON ♦ NEW YORK

**For Bedford/St. Martin's**
*President and Publisher:* Charles H. Christensen
*General Manager and Associate Publisher:* Joan E. Feinberg
*Managing Editor:* Elizabeth M. Schaaf
*Developmental Editor:* Katherine A. Retan
*Editorial Assistants:* Joanne Diaz and Aron Keesbury
*Production Editor:* Maureen Murray
*Production Assistant:* Deborah Baker
*Copyeditor:* Carolyn Ingalls
*Cover Design:* Terry Govan
*Cover Art:* Detail from *The Manufacture of Iron, Harper's Weekly,* November 1, 1873.
*Composition:* Pine Tree Composition, Inc.
*Printing and Binding:* Haddon Craftsmen, Inc.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96–86795

Copyright © 1998 by Bedford/St. Martin's

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except as may be expressly permitted by the applicable copyright statutes or in writing by the Publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

9 8
k j i

*For information, write:* Bedford/St. Martin's, 75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116 (617-399-4000)

ISBN-10: 0–312–13360–X (paperback); 0–312–16374–6 (hardcover)
ISBN-13: 978–0–312–13360–3 (paperback); 978–0–312–16374–7 (hardcover)

Published and distributed outside North America by:
MACMILLAN PRESS, LTD.
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS and London
Companies and representatives throughout the world.
ISBN: 0–333–69093–1

**Acknowledgments**

*Acknowledgments and copyrights are at the back of the book on page 435, which constitutes an extension of the copyright page. It is a violation of the law to reproduce these selections by any means whatsoever without the written permission of the copyright holder.*

# About the Series

The need to "historicize" literary texts — and even more to analyze the historical and cultural issues all texts embody — is now embraced by almost all teachers, scholars, critics, and theoreticians. But the question of how to teach such issues in the undergraduate classroom is still a difficult one. Teachers do not always have the historical information they need for a given text, and contextual documents and sources are not always readily available in the library — even if the teacher has the expertise (and students have the energy) to ferret them out. The Bedford Cultural Editions represent an effort to make available for the classroom the kinds of facts and documents that will enable teachers to use the latest historical approaches to textual analysis and cultural criticism. The best scholarly and theoretical work has for many years gone well beyond the "new critical" practices of formalist analysis and close reading, and we offer here a practical classroom model of the ways that many different kinds of issues can be engaged when texts are not thought of as islands unto themselves.

The impetus for the recent cultural and historical emphasis has come from many directions: the so-called new historicism of the late 1980s, the dominant historical versions of both feminism and Marxism, the cultural studies movement, and a sharply changed focus in older movements such as reader response, structuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalytic theory. Emphases differ, of course, among

schools and individuals, but what these movements and approaches have in common is a commitment to explore — and to have students in the classroom study interactively — texts in their full historical and cultural dimensions. The aim is to discover how older texts (and those from other traditions) differ from our own assumptions and expectations, and thus the focus in teaching falls on cultural and historical difference rather than on similarity or continuity.

The most striking feature of the Bedford Cultural Editions — and the one most likely to promote creative classroom discussion — is the inclusion of a generous selection of historical documents that contextualize the main text in a variety of ways. Each volume contains works (or passages from works) that are contemporary with the main text: legal and social documents, journalistic and autobiographical accounts, histories, sections from conduct books, travel books, poems, novels, and other historical sources. These materials have several uses. Often they provide information beyond what the main text offers. They provide, too, different perspectives on a particular theme, issue, or event central to the text, suggesting the range of opinions contemporary readers would have brought to their reading and allowing students to experience for themselves the details of cultural disagreement and debate. The documents are organized in thematic units — each with an introduction by the volume editor that historicizes a particular issue and suggests the ways in which individual selections work to contextualize the main text.

Each volume also contains a general introduction that provides students with information concerning the political, social, and intellectual context for the work as well as information concerning the material aspects of the text's creation, production, and distribution. There are also relevant illustrations, a chronology of important events, and, when helpful, an account of the reception history of the text. Finally, both the main work and its accompanying documents are carefully annotated in order to enable students to grasp the significance of historical references, literary allusions, and unfamiliar terms. Everywhere we have tried to keep the special needs of the modern student — especially the culturally conscious student of the turn of the millennium — in mind.

For each title, the volume editor has chosen the best teaching text of the main work and explained his or her choice. Old spellings and capitalizations have been preserved (except that the long "s" has been regularized to the modern "s") — the overwhelming preference of the two hundred teacher-scholars we surveyed in preparing the series.

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.com

Original habits of punctuation have also been kept, except for occasional places where the unusual usage would obscure the syntax for modern readers. Whenever possible, the supplementary texts and documents are reprinted from the first edition or the one most relevant to the issue at hand. We have thus meant to preserve — rather than counter — for modern students the sense of "strangeness" in older texts, expecting that the oddness will help students to see where older texts are *not* like modern ones, and expecting too that today's historically informed teachers will find their own creative ways to make something of such historical and cultural differences.

In developing this series, our goal has been to foreground the kinds of issues that typically engage teachers and students of literature and history now. We have not tried to move readers toward a particular ideological, political, or social position or to be exhaustive in our choice of contextual materials. Rather, our aim has been to be provocative — to enable teachers and students of literature to raise the most pressing political, economic, social, religious, intellectual, and artistic issues on a larger field than any single text can offer.

J. Paul Hunter, University of Chicago
William E. Cain, Wellesley College
Series Editors

# About This Volume

*Life in the Iron-Mills* entered the canon of American literature in the later twentieth century as a direct result of the 1960s' women's movement in the United States. In particular, Rebecca Harding Davis's novella came to light through the efforts of the Feminist Press and Tillie Olsen, who rescued the text from decades of oblivion with their 1972 edition. In her introduction to the Feminist Press edition, Olsen provides a wide-ranging biographical profile of Davis, inviting readers to grasp the extent to which the fictional Hugh Wolfe and his sculpture of the korl woman can be seen as representations of the suppressed and thwarted nineteenth-century woman writer desperately trying to speak publicly through her art. Olsen draws on many of Davis's novels and stories to construct a moving psychological portrait of the author. An entire generation of readers, including this editor, have read and taught *Life in the Iron-Mills* as presented through Olsen's sympathetic and subtle interpretation.

This cultural edition of *Life in the Iron-Mills* moves outward from the reading of the novella as a parable of the difficult life of a woman writer to include a variety of historical and cultural documents that open up the text to the consideration of a range of social and cultural issues vital to Rebecca Harding Davis's nineteenth century. At a time when such scholarly areas as new historicism and cultural studies have refocused literary study, making race, class, and gender central concerns of classroom work, it is appropriate that *Life in the*

*Iron-Mills* should be made available in a format that enables the consideration of these matters. The documents included in this edition are intended to encourage students to read Davis's text in relation to nineteenth-century American discussions of work and social class, moral and social reform, the conditions of women writers, and the development of American art. It is my hope that this edition of *Life in the Iron-Mills* will widen the parameters of the discussion that has been so vigorously conducted in classrooms, in scholarship, and in professional meetings over the past quarter of a century.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Everyone involved in this project has been extraordinarily helpful. I am very thankful to Chuck Christensen and Joan Feinberg of Bedford Books for suggesting this project and encouraging my interest in it. Kathy Retan has been a first-rate editor all along — encouraging, tactful, careful, scrupulous. Maureen Murray expertly guided the book through production, and Aron Keesbury and Joanne Diaz assisted with numerous details. In addition, I appreciate the focused and imaginative attention I have received from an excellent group of scholarly advisors, including Dale Bauer, Nancy Bentley, John Kasson, Joy Kasson, William Vance, and Bill Cain, who is the series editor for American titles in the Bedford Cultural Editions series. These advisors made invaluable suggestions for the documents included in Part Two of this edition and guided revisions of the introductory material. Their collective knowledge has gone very far to shape this project.

Colleagues and staff at Vanderbilt University have been most generous. Nancy Walker suggested texts and from the outset encouraged this project in a most positive light. Peggy Earhart, the librarian at the University Library Annex, arranged for me to work there for several weeks in the summer of 1995, and Jamie Adams, a staff photographer for Vanderbilt's Learning Resource Center, responded with good cheer to my request to photograph numerous images.

Two graduate students in the doctoral program of the Department of English at Vanderbilt University have contributed tremendously to my work on this edition. It has moved along on schedule largely because of Rory Dicker, who helped with research and made crucial textual suggestions for the section on women writers. This project has also benefited from my numerous discussions with Rory of

Davis's work. In addition, Alison Piepmeier has worked tirelessly on the tasks of annotation and research, as well as handling textual permissions. The annotations and bibliography include a depth of information on nineteenth-century sources that is attributable to her efforts. It has been a pleasure to work with such competent young scholars-in-training, who instill confidence about the future of the profession.

Finally, I am grateful for the many informal conversations I have had over the years with Amy Schrager Lang. Those talks both frame and inform this project in its entirety. Any shortcomings herein are solely my responsibility.

Cecelia Tichi
Vanderbilt University

# Contents

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.c

# Part One

# *Life in the Iron-Mills*
# The Complete Text

# Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background

In December 1860, Miss Rebecca Harding of the western Virginia city of Wheeling summoned the courage to submit the manuscript of her new story to the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the prestigious Boston-based magazine of "Literature, Art, and Politics." The submission was at once sensible and bold. Miss Harding was a self-styled backwoods author audaciously bidding for publication in the nation's center of literary prestige, and yet her decision was sensible because of the *Atlantic*'s reputation for publishing fiction by women and its recent trend toward the new mode of fictional realism.

*Life in the Iron-Mills* — the tale of an artistic but chronically ill young immigrant iron worker, Hugh Wolfe, and his female cousin, both toiling in poverty in a hilly inland industrial river city bearing marked resemblance to the author's own Wheeling — certainly fit the category of realism. In addition, Harding's narrative developed themes of unrequited love and the aesthetic price of thwarted artistic talent in a new nation whose well-educated affluent class was eager to encourage the development of the arts. The author's bleak narrative worldview was relieved only in part by a concluding message of spiritual hopefulness — "the promise of the dawn" — which was doubtless somewhat reassuring to readers of sentimental fiction.

Mainly, however, *Life in the Iron-Mills* was meant to jolt its middle-class readers into a head-on recognition of the wretched conditions of immigrant laborers, who worked in obscurity to produce

the plentiful textiles and iron products that made comfortable middle-class living conditions possible. Harding's novella diverged from such positions as those of the nineteenth-century American travel writer Willard Glazier, who glorified the iron-mill city in terms of Greek mythology ("This is the domain of Vulcan"), and of the West Virginia promotional writers who boasted of Wheeling's large iron industry that was made possible by cheap fuel and rail or water access to markets (see Part Two, Chapter 1). Instead, Harding sought to make her readers aware that their material comfort was enabled neither by palliative classical gods nor by cheap coal and river barges but by real human beings, who ate, slept, and toiled in unspeakable conditions.

## REBECCA HARDING DAVIS IN CONTEXT

In some ways it seems odd that Rebecca Harding, herself a daughter of gentility and comfort, would write a novella such as *Life in the Iron-Mills* some ten years before her fellow American realist writers represented the lives of those laboring at a subsistence level in American industrial and agricultural production. In contrast, the British author Charles Dickens seems autobiographically compatible with his industrial novel *Hard Times* (1854) because he worked for a time in a blacking factory, while members of his family served time in debtors' prison.

Rebecca Harding Davis was, by her own description, born into an "easy-going generation" (*Bits* 6) of children treated to taffy and cakes, to outdoor fantasy in which garden hillocks became glacial Alps, and to visits to houses with family portraits on the walls, silver flatware on the table, and winter warmth from ample coal fires like those burning in her own family's parlor grates. There were also a few slaves in some households in this Mason-Dixon border town, possibly in her own. In her memoir, *Bits of Gossip* (1904), Davis notes the presence of slaves as if they existed only at the edge of her vision — which may be why, in *Life in the Iron-Mills,* she recognized and yet removed slaves by providing a mere passing glimpse of a mulatto and by turning a key term of slavery into one of geography in her image of a "negro-like river slavishly bearing its burden day after day." Late in life, she recalled the slaves of Wheeling as having been "too comfortable and satisfied to run away" (*Bits* 170); moreover, she recorded contempt for the firebrand abolitionists heedlessly ready

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.c