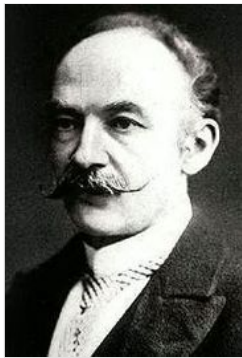


# Thomas Hardy

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**Thomas Hardy, OM**  
(2 June 1840  
– 11 January  
1928) was an  
English  
novelist,  
short story  
writer, and  
poet of the  
naturalist  
movement.  
The bulk of  
his work, set  
mainly in the  
semi-



imaginary county of Wessex, delineates  
characters struggling against their passions  
and circumstances. Hardy's poetry, first  
published in his fifties, has come to be as well

regarded as his novels, especially after the 1960s Movement.

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## Biography

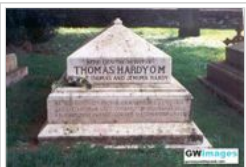
Thomas Hardy was born at Higher Bockhampton, a hamlet in the parish of Stinsford to the east of Dorchester in Dorset, England. His father worked as a stonemason and local builder. His mother was ambitious

and well-read, supplementing his formal education, which ended at the age of 16 when he became apprenticed to John Hicks, a local architect. Hardy trained as an architect in Dorchester before moving to London in 1862. There he enrolled as a student at King's College London. He won prizes from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architectural Association. He never truly felt at home in London and he returned five years later to Dorset and decided to dedicate himself to writing.

In 1870, while on an architectural mission to restore the parish church of St Juliot in Cornwall,<sup>[1]</sup> Hardy met and fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom he married in 1874.<sup>[2]</sup> Although he later became estranged from his wife, her death in 1912 had a traumatic effect on him. He made a trip to Cornwall to revisit places linked with their courtship; his *Poems 1912-13* explore his grief. In 1914, Hardy married his secretary Florence Dugdale, 40 years his junior, whom he had met in 1905. However, Hardy

remained preoccupied with Emma's sudden death, and tried to overcome his remorse by writing poetry.<sup>[3]</sup>

Hardy fell ill with pleurisy in December 1927 and died in January 1928, having dictated his final poem to his wife on his deathbed.



Burial site of Thomas Hardy's heart

His funeral, on 16 January at Westminster Abbey, proved a controversial occasion: Hardy, his family and friends had wished him to be buried at Stinsford in the same grave as his first wife, Emma. However, his executor, Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, insisted he be placed in the abbey's Poets' Corner. A compromise was reached whereby his heart was buried at Stinsford with Emma, and his ashes in Poets' Corner.

Shortly after Hardy's death, the executors of his estate burnt his letters and notebooks. Twelve records survived, one of them containing notes and extracts of newspaper stories from the 1820s. Research into these provided insight into how Hardy kept track of them and how he used them in his later work. [4]

Hardy's work was admired by many authors, amongst them D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. The writer Robert Graves, in his autobiography *Goodbye to All That*, recalls meeting Hardy in Dorset in the early 1920s. Hardy received Graves and his newly married wife warmly, and was encouraging about the younger author's work.

In 1910, Hardy was awarded the Order of Merit.

Hardy's cottage at Bockhampton and Max Gate in Dorchester are owned by the National Trust.

## Religious beliefs

Hardy's religious life seems to have mixed agnosticism and spiritism. Once, when asked in correspondence by a clergyman about the question of reconciling the horrors of pain with the goodness of a loving God, Hardy replied,

"Mr. Hardy regrets that he is unable to offer any hypothesis which would reconcile the existence of such evils as Dr. Grosart describes with the idea of omnipotent goodness. Perhaps Dr. Grosart might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published Life of Darwin, and the works of Herbert Spencer, and other agnostics."<sup>[5]</sup>

Nevertheless, Hardy frequently conceived of and wrote about supernatural forces that control the universe, more through indifference or caprice than any firm will.

Also, Hardy showed in his writing some degree of fascination with ghosts and spirits.

[6] Despite these sentiments, Hardy retained a strong emotional attachment to the Christian liturgy and church rituals, particularly as manifested in rural communities, that had been such a formative influence in his early years. Some attributed the bleak outlook of many of his novels as reflecting his view of the absence of God.

## Novels

Hardy's first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, finished by 1867, failed to find a publisher and Hardy destroyed the manuscript so only parts of the novel remain. He was encouraged to try again by his mentor and friend, Victorian poet and novelist George Meredith. *Desperate Remedies* (1871) and *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) were published anonymously. In 1873 *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, a story drawing on Hardy's courtship of his first wife, was published

under his own name.

Hardy said that he first introduced Wessex in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), his next (and first important) novel. It was successful enough for Hardy to give up architectural work and pursue a literary career. Over the next twenty-five years Hardy produced ten more novels.

The Hardys moved from London to Yeovil and then to Sturminster Newton, where he wrote *The Return of the Native* (1878). In 1885, they moved for a last time, to Max Gate, a house outside Dorchester designed by Hardy and built by his brother. There he wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders* (1887) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the last of which attracted criticism for its sympathetic portrayal of a "fallen woman" and was initially refused publication. Its subtitle, *A Pure Woman: Faithfully Presented*, was intended to raise the eyebrows of the Victorian middle-classes.



*Jude the Obscure*, published in 1895, met with even stronger negative outcries from the Victorian public for its frank treatment of sex, and was often referred to as "Jude the Obscene". Heavily criticized for its apparent attack on the institution of marriage, the book caused further strain on Hardy's already difficult marriage because Emma Hardy was concerned that *Jude the Obscure* would be read as being autobiographical. Some booksellers sold the novel in brown paper bags, and the Bishop of Wakefield is reputed to have burnt a copy.<sup>[4]</sup>

Despite this criticism, Hardy had become a celebrity in English literature by the 1900s, with several blockbuster novels under his belt, yet he felt disgust at the public reception of two of his greatest works and gave up writing novels altogether. Several critics have commented, however, that there was very little left for Hardy to write about, having creatively exhausted the increasingly fatalistic tone of his novels.

## **Literary Themes**

Although he wrote a lot of poetry, mostly unpublished until after 1898, Hardy is best remembered for the series of novels and short stories he wrote between 1871 and 1895. His novels are set in the imaginary world of Wessex, a large area of south and south-west England, using the name of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom that covered the area. Hardy was part of two worlds; on the one hand he had a deep emotional bond with the rural way of life which he had known as a child, but on the other he was aware of the changes which were under way, and the current social problems from the innovations in agriculture - he captured the epoch just before the railways and the industrial revolution changed the English countryside - to the unfairness and hypocrisy of Victorian sexual behaviour.

He paints a vivid picture of rural life in the nineteenth century, with all its joys and suffering, a fatalistic world full of superstition

and injustice. His heroes and heroines are often alienated from society and rarely become readmitted into it. He tends to emphasize the impersonal and, generally, negative powers of fate over the mainly working class people he represented in his novels. Hardy exhibits in his books elemental passion, deep instinct, the human will struggling against fatal and ill-comprehended laws, a victim also of unforeseeable change. *Tess*, for example, ends with some of the most poignant lines in British Literature on this theme:

“ Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely

motionless: the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on. ”

In particular, Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* is full of the sense of crisis of the later Victorian period (as witnessed in Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach'). It describes the tragedy of two new social types, Jude Fawley, a working man who attempts to educate himself, and his wife, Sue Bridehead, who represents the 'new woman' of the 1890s.<sup>[7]</sup>

His mastery, as both an author and poet, lies in the creation of natural surroundings making discoveries through close observation and acute sensitiveness. He notices the smallest and most delicate details, yet he can also paint vast landscapes of his own Wessex in melancholy or noble moods<sup>[8]</sup> (his eye for poignant detail - such as the spreading bloodstain on the ceiling at the end of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and little Jude's suicide note

- often came from clippings from newspaper reports of real events).

## Poetry

*For the full text of several poems, see the External links section*

In 1898 Hardy published his first volume of poetry, *Wessex Poems*, a collection of poems written over 30 years. Hardy claimed poetry as his first love, and published collections until his death in 1928. Although not as well received by his contemporaries as his novels, Hardy's poetry has been applauded considerably in recent years, in part because of the influence on Philip Larkin. However, critically it is still not regarded as highly as his prose.

Most of his poems deal with themes of disappointment in love and life, and mankind's long struggle against indifference to human suffering. Some, like *The Darkling Thrush* and *An August Midnight*, appear as poems

about writing poetry, because the nature mentioned in them gives Hardy the inspiration to write those. A vein of regret tinges his often seemingly banal themes. His compositions range in style from the three-volume epic closet drama *The Dynasts* to smaller, and often hopeful or even cheerful ballads of the moment such as the little-known *The Children and Sir Nameless*, a comic poem inspired by the tombs of the Martyns, builders of Athelhampton.

A few of Hardy's poems, such as *The Blinded Bird* (a melancholy polemic against the sport of vinkenzetting), display his love of the natural world and his firm stance against animal cruelty, exhibited in his antivivisectionist views and his membership in the RSPCA.<sup>[9]</sup>

Composer Lee Hoiby's setting of "The Darkling Thrush" became the basis of the multimedia opera *Darkling*. Other composers who set Hardy's text to music include Gerald Finzi, who produced six song-cycles for

poems by Hardy, and Benjamin Britten, who based his song-cycle *Winter Words* on Hardy's poetry. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst also set texts by Hardy; Holst also based one of his last orchestral works, *Egdon Heath*, on Hardy's work. It is said to be Holst's masterpiece. The poem was also set to music by Timothy Takach for a capella choir in 2005.

## Works

### Prose

Hardy divided his novels and collected short stories into three classes:

#### Novels of Character and Environment

- *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867, unpublished and lost)
- *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872)
- *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)
- *The Return of the Native* (1878)
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)

- *The Woodlanders* (1887)
- *Wessex Tales* (1888, a collection of short stories)
- *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891)
- *Life's Little Ironies* (1894, a collection of short stories)
- *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

### **Romances and Fantasies**

- *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)
- *The Trumpet-Major* (1880)
- *Two on a Tower* (1882)
- *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891, a collection of short stories)
- *The Well-Beloved* (1897) (first published as a serial from 1892).

### **Novels of Ingenuity**

- *Desperate Remedies* (1871)
- *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876)
- *A Laodicean* (1881)

Hardy also produced a number of minor tales and a collaborative novel, *The Spectre of the*



*Real* (1894). An additional short-story collection, beyond the ones mentioned above, is *A Changed Man and Other Tales* (1913). His works have been collected as the 24-volume Wessex Edition (1912-1913) and the 37-volume Mellstock Edition (1919-1920). His largely self-written biography appears under his second wife's name in two volumes from 1928-1930, as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*, now published in a critical one-volume edition as *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Michael Millgate (1984).

### **Poetry** (not a comprehensive list)

- *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898)
- *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901)
- *The Dynasts, Part 1* (1904)
- *The Dynasts, Part 2* (1906)
- *The Dynasts, Part 3* (1908)
- *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* (1909)
- *Satires of Circumstance* (1914)
- *Moments of Vision* (1919)

- *Collected Poems* (1919, part of the Mellstock Edition of his novels and poems)
- *Late Lyrics and Earlier with Many Other Verses* (1922)
- *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles* (1925)
- *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* (1928, published posthumously)

## **Drama**

- *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (1923)

## **Locations in novels**

Berkshire is *North Wessex*, Devon is *Lower Wessex*, Dorset is *South Wessex*, Somerset is *Outer* or *Nether Wessex*, Wiltshire is *Mid-Wessex*,

Bere Regis is *King's-Bere* of *Tess*, Bincombe Down cross roads is the scene of the military execution in *A Melancholy Hussar*. It is a true

story, the deserters from the German Legion were shot in 1801 and are recorded in the parish register. Bindon Abbey is where Clare carried her. Bournemouth is *Sandbourne* of *Hand of Ethelberta* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Bridport is *Port Bredy*, Charborough House and its folly tower at 50°46'38.75"N, 2°6'7.09"W is the model for *Welland House* in the novel *Two on a Tower*. Corfe Castle is the *Corvsgate-Castle* of *Hand of Ethelberta*. Cranborne Chase is *The Chase* scene of Tess's seduction. (Note - Bowerchalke on Cranborne Chase at 51°0'30.75"N, 1°59'18.30"W was the film location for the great fire in John Schlesinger's 1967 film *Far from the Madding Crowd*.)

Dorchester, Dorset is *Casterbridge*, the scene of *Mayor of Casterbridge*. Dunster Castle in Somerset is *Castle De Stancy* of *A Laodicean*. Fordington moor is *Durnover moor* and *fields*. Greenhill Fair near Bere Regis is *Woodbury Hill Fair*, Lulworth Cove is *Lulstead Cove*, Marnhull is *Marlott* of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Melbury House near Evershot

is *Great Hintock Court* in *A Group of Noble Dames*. Minterne is *Little Hintock*, Owermoigne is *Nether Moynton* in *Wessex Tales*.

Piddlehinton and Piddle Trenthide are the *Longpuddle* of *A Few Crusted Characters*. Puddletown Heath, Moreton Heath, Tincleton Heath and Bere Heath are *Egdon Heath*. Poole is *Havenpool* in *Life's Little Ironies*. Portland is the scene of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*. Puddletown is *Weatherbury* in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, River Frome valley is the scene of *Talbothays dairy* in *Tess*. Salisbury is *Melchester* in *On the Western Circuit*, *Life's Little Ironies* and *Jude the Obscure* etc. Shaftesbury is *Shaston* in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Sherborne is *Sher-ton-Abbas*, Sherborne Castle is home of *Lady Baxby* in *A Group of Noble Dames*. Stonehenge is the scene of Tess's apprehension. Sutton Poyntz is *Overcombe*. Swanage is the *Knollsea* of *Hand of Ethelberta*. Wantage is *Alfredston*, of *Jude the Obscure*. Fawley, Berkshire is *Marygreen* of

*Jude the Obscure*. Weyhill is *Weydon Priors*, Weymouth is *Budmouth Regis*, the scene of *Trumpet Major* & portions of other novels; Winchester is *Wintoncester* where Tess was executed. Wimborne is *Warborne* of *Two on a Tower*. Wolfeton House, near Dorchester is the scene of *The Lady Penelope in a Group of Noble Dames*. Woolbridge old Manor House, close to Wool station, is the scene of Tess's confession and

## **In Other Literature**

Hardy provides the springboard for D H Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1936). Though this work became a platform for Lawrence's own developing philosophy rather than a more standard literary study, the influence of Hardy's treatment of character and Lawrence's own response to the central metaphysic behind many of Hardy's novels helped significantly in the development of *The Rainbow* (suppressed 1915) and *Women in Love* (private publication 1920).

## Notes

1. ^ Chosen Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Gibson, Macmillan Education Ltd, 1975, p. 9.
2. ^ "Thomas Hardy - the Time-Torn Man", BBC Radio 4, 23 October 2006 (a reading of Claire Tomalin's book of the same name).
3. ^ [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) (accessed August 12, 2006)
4. ^ *a b* [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), (accessed August 12, 2006)
5. ^ Ellman, Richard & O'Clair, Robert (eds.) 1988. "Thomas Hardy" in The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Norton, New York.
6. ^ Ellman, Richard & O'Clair, Robert (eds.) 1988. "Thomas Hardy" in The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Norton, New York.
7. ^ *Words Words Words*, La Spiga Languages, 2003 p.482
8. ^ A Short History of English Literature, Emile Legouis, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1934

9. ^ [[1]] Waking Giants: The Presence of the Past in Modernism, Herbert N. Schneidau - on Google Books

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- Letter from Hardy to Bertram Windle, transcribed by Birgit Plietzsch, from CL, vol 2, pp 131-133

## External links

- Poems by Thomas Hardy at PoetryFoundation.org
- Selected Poems by Thomas Hardy at Inspired Poetry
- Works by Thomas Hardy at Project

Gutenberg

- Thomas Hardy's Wessex Research site, including maps, by Dr Birgit Plietzsch
- Essay on Hardy's *Afterwards*
- The Thomas Hardy Society
- The Thomas Hardy Association
- Works by Thomas Hardy in e-book version
- Thomas Hardy's ashes at Westminster Abbey
- Pictures of Thomas Hardy visiting Marie Stopes at her lighthouse home on Portland, Dorset
- Letter from Hardy to Bertram Windle, transcribed by Birgit Plietzsch, from CL, vol 2, pp 131-133
- The Life and Death of Thomas Hardy @ *Ward's Book of Days*

## **Individual poems**

- The Dead Man Walking
- At Castle Boterel
- Afterwards
- On the Departure Platform
- The Robin

- The Oxen

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