

# Thomas Hardy

Geoffrey Harvey

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**Geoffrey Harvey** is the author of *The Romantic Tradition in Modern English Poetry* (1986) and has contributed to *Critical Essays on Thomas Hardy's Poetry* (ed. G.K. Hall, 1995). He is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Reading.

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THOMAS HARDY

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*Geoffrey Harvey*

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## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

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*The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* is a ground-breaking collection of one-volume introductions to the work of the major writers in the English literary canon. Each volume in the series offers the reader a comprehensive account of the featured author's life, of his or her writing and of the ways in which his or her works have been interpreted by literary critics. The series is both explanatory and stimulating; it reflects the achievements of state-of-the-art literary-historical research and yet manages to be intellectually accessible for the reader who may be encountering a canonical author's work for the first time. It will be useful for students and teachers of literature at all levels, as well as for the general reader. Each book can be read through, or consulted in a companion-style fashion.

The aim of *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* is to adopt an approach that is as factual, objective and non-partisan as possible, in order to provide the 'full picture' for readers and allow them to form their own judgements. At the same time, however, the books engage the reader in a discussion of the most demanding questions involved in each author's life and work. Did Pope's physical condition affect his treatment of matters of gender and sexuality? Does a feminist reading of *Middlemarch* enlighten us regarding the book's presentation of nineteenth-century British society? Do we deconstruct Beckett's work, or does he do so himself? Contributors to this series address such crucial questions, offer potential solutions and recommend further reading for independent study. In doing so, they equip the reader for an informed and confident examination of the life and work of key canonical figures and of the critical controversies surrounding them.

The aims of the series are reflected in the structure of the books. Part I, 'Life and Contexts', offers a compact biography of the featured author against the background of his or her epoch. In Part II, 'Work', the focus is on the author's most important works, discussed from a non-partisan, literary-historical perspective; the section provides an account of the works, reflecting a consensus of critical opinion on them, and indicating, where appropriate, areas of controversy. These and other issues are taken up again in Part III, 'Criticism', which offers an account of the critical responses generated by the author's work. Contemporaneous reviews and debates are considered, along with opinions inspired by more recent theoretical approaches, such as New Criticism,

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

feminism, Marxism, psychoanalytic criticism, deconstruction and New Historicism.

The volumes in this series will together constitute a comprehensive reference work, offering an up-to-date, user-friendly and reliable account of the heritage of English literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. We hope that *The Complete Critical Guide to English Literature* will become for its readers, academic and non-academic alike, an indispensable source of information and inspiration.

RICHARD BRADFORD

JAN JEDRZEJEWSKI

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCING

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Since there are many editions of Hardy's texts available to the reader, reference is made to chapters. Where the novels are divided into parts, the part and chapter numbers are indicated. In the case of *The Dynasts*, the part, act and scene are given. The dates of composition of the poems, where this is known, is given, together with the title of the volume in which they were later published.

References to individual texts are abbreviated as follows:

AL	<i>A Laodicean</i>
D	<i>The Dynasts</i>
DR	<i>Desperate Remedies</i>
FFMC	<i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i>
HE	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i>
JO	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
MC	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
PBE	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i>
RN	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
TDU	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i>
TM	<i>The Trumpet-Major</i>
TT	<i>Two on a Tower</i>
UGT	<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i>
W	<i>The Woodlanders</i>
WB	<i>The Well-Beloved</i>

Other abbreviations are :

CP	<i>Collected Poems</i> (London: Macmillan, 1930)
L	<i>Letters. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy</i> , ed. R.L. Purdy and M. Millgate, 7 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88)
LN	<i>Literary Notebooks. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy</i> , ed. Lennart A. Björk, 2 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1985)
LW	<i>Life and Work. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy</i> , by Thomas Hardy, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1984)

Cross-referencing between sections is one of the features of this series. Such references are to relevant page numbers and appear in bold type and square brackets e.g. [37].

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# INTRODUCTION

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This book describes the literary career, writings and critical reception of a singular writer, Thomas Hardy (1840–1928), who achieved the status of both major novelist and major poet. His long life, beginning when Victoria was still a young queen and ending a decade after the First World War, saw many revolutionary social and intellectual changes that are refracted in complex ways in his writing. Hardy rose from rural obscurity in Dorset to scale the social heights, declining a knighthood but accepting the Order of Merit, and being accorded the honour of burial in Westminster Abbey.

Part I, 'Life and Contexts', provides a straightforward biographical foundation for the subsequent account of Hardy's writings and commentary on the vast body of criticism, which reveal the extraordinarily complex relation between his life and his work. Hardy's career is given detailed exposition, from his early years in the village of Higher Bockhampton, through his apprenticeship to a Dorchester architect, a profession that took him to London and later Cornwall where he met his wife, Emma Gifford, fame with *Far from the Madding Crowd* and his subsequent development as a novelist. Hardy's poetic career is also charted. He had produced a body of poetry in the 1860s, and he took up poetry again in the 1890s, after he had stopped writing fiction, following savage reviews of *Jude the Obscure*. This virtually new career as a poet is described, together with his growing stature as a public figure, and the vicissitudes of his private life, including Emma's death and his marriage to Florence Dugdale. Part II, 'Work', offers close readings of his major and lesser novels, his poetry, his verse epic, *The Dynasts*, his short stories, and his ghosted autobiography. Recent trends in Hardy studies are reflected in the more extensive treatment given to the lesser fiction and to the poetry. In Part III, 'Criticism', major contributions are selected from the vast output of writing on Hardy, for detailed commentary within a framework of clearly identified theoretical and other approaches, which are contextualised and explained. Areas of controversy, such as the nature of Hardy's tragedy, his treatment of women, Wessex and regionalism, and his philosophy of life, are fully discussed.

*The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* permits the reader to consult the text on individual texts or topics, pursue connections between them, or read the book as a comprehensive account of his life, work and the current state of Hardy studies.



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PART I

LIFE AND CONTEXTS

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Thomas Hardy was born when the young Queen Victoria had been on the throne only three years, and he died when the 1920s were drawing to a close. He rose from lower-class rural obscurity to rank as the foremost writer of the age. His funeral drew large crowds, the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, led the nation's mourning, and his ashes were laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. Since Hardy's death, his reputation both as a novelist and as a major poet has grown; his short stories and his minor novels are being revalued, while developments in literary theory and criticism continue to reveal fresh aspects of a writer whose modernity continually surprises.

Intensely private, evasive and ironic, Hardy has proved an elusive subject for biographers. His public life and career were relatively uneventful, and his personal life was marked by the absence of drama. Much of Hardy's life, as he observed, is present in his novels, poems and short stories, and the complex strands of relationship between his life and his writings. These encompass, uniquely, his adoption of the topography of Dorset, where he was born and grew up, for his fictional county of Wessex, and his exploration of its society and history. Further contexts are intellectual and social. In his writing Hardy engages with the ideas and trends of his age: developments in science, new philosophies that sought to fill the vacuum left by the loss of religious faith, the growth of a radical politics that gave expression to the striving of the working class for social equality and democracy, the struggle for a new status for women, and the effects of the First World War. Another important context is the literary market place in which his work was published, especially since the majority of his novels and some of his short stories first appeared as serials in the popular magazines of the day. The Victorian writer's relationship with editors and publishers was difficult. Hardy in particular, the scourge of established values, had to run the gauntlet of Mrs Grundy, the mythical prudish censor who scrutinised magazines and books for their immoral content. (Mrs Grundy, a character in Thomas Morton's comedy, *Speed the Plough*, 1798, was a neighbour who represented convention, propriety and prudery. Grundyism came to signify a narrow and rigid morality.)

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### (a) RURAL CHILDHOOD

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In 1918, ten years before his death, Hardy observed, in his ghosted autobiography, first published in two volumes, in 1928 and 1930: 'It bridges over the years to think that Gray might have seen Wordsworth in his cradle, and Wordsworth might have seen me in mine' (*LW*, 417).

Hardy's cradle was filled, but only by chance, on 2 June 1840, because the midwife had noticed signs of life in the baby that had been pronounced dead. His had been a difficult birth, he was not a robust child, and his anxious parents did not expect him to reach maturity.

The first child of Jemima and Thomas Hardy, he was born in the family cottage, situated on the edge of heath land, up a lane in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton in the parish of Stinsford, some two miles east of Dorchester. His powerfully influential mother Jemima, *née* Hand, from Melbury Osmond in the north of Dorset, had endured early hardship, gone into service, and attained the position of cook to the vicar of Stinsford. Her husband was an easy-going, handsome and courteous man, popular with women, and it is likely that his marriage to Jemima was precipitated by her pregnancy. The early courtship of Hardy's parents is recorded in the poem, 'A Church Romance' (prompted by the death of his mother in 1904), while Hardy employed his father's journey to Melbury Osmond for his wedding in the story, 'Interlopers at the Knap' (1884). The marriage produced further children. Hardy was very close to his sister Mary, who was born in 1841; he maintained a warm relationship with his brother Henry, born when Hardy was ten; and a second sister Katherine was born when Hardy was sixteen. The sisters entered the teaching profession, and Henry followed his father into the building trade.

The passionate interests of his parents profoundly influenced a child of acute sensibility. Jemima was a determined reader, with a fund of stories embodying local lore, while her husband loved nature and music. As Hardy's biographer, Robert Gittings has said: 'His father's enjoyment of nature was matched by his mother's extraordinary store of local legend and story. Together they filled Hardy's world with landscape and human dealing, the special blend that was to mark his poems and novels' (Gittings 1975:17). By the time Hardy was ten, his mother had introduced him to John Dryden's *Works of Virgil* (1697), Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), and a translation of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), while his father had imbued in him a love of music. Like his own father and grandfather, Thomas Hardy senior played the violin, and taught his son to accompany him when he was engaged at local parties and social events. Young Hardy was extraordinarily sensitive to melody, and the effects of this are evoked superbly in the poem, 'The Self-Unseeing', which captures a memory of dancing enraptured to the music of his father's violin.

Hardy also assimilated something of his parents' fatalism. From his father it was a straightforward acceptance of what life offered, but from his mother came a strong vein of pessimism. An entry in Hardy's

Notebook for 30 October 1870 reads: ‘Mother’s notion, & also mine: That a figure stands in our van with arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable’ (Taylor 1978: 6–7). Hardy fondly describes his father, in his *Life*, as cheerful and energetic; but it was his mother who fashioned his character. His poem, ‘In Tenebris III’ reveals his dependence on her. Hardy was reserved, and not physically strong, and it was Jemima’s combination of stern rectitude and social ambition that inculcated in him his steely determination to achieve. A further strong influence was Hardy’s paternal grandmother, Mary Hardy, celebrated in the poem, ‘One We Knew’, who lived in the family home. To the family’s stock of folk tales, she added anecdotes about the period in 1804 particularly, when coastal Dorset was on alert for Napoleon’s invasion, her husband’s enrollment in the Puddletown Volunteer Light Infantry, and the maintenance of a warning beacon on nearby Rainbarrow. These stories aroused Hardy’s lifelong interest in the Napoleonic era that later was to find expression in his writing [28, 101, 115, 136]. And his grandmother’s youthful memories of the cottage at Higher Bockhampton awakened in him an awareness of its extreme solitude, and a profound love of nature, as his first poem, ‘Domicilium’ reveals, written when he was eighteen or so.

Social class was an extremely significant influence on Hardy. In the Victorian period, gradations of social class were rigid, and to Hardy it mattered intensely that his family was a degree above its neighbours in the social scale. His father was a master mason, who employed a few men, and although in the 1851 census he had been described as a ‘bricklayer’, this was altered to ‘mason’ when in later life Hardy constructed his family tree. The business prospered when his competent brother Henry took it over, but during Hardy’s childhood income was uncertain, and they relied on the produce from their smallholding. His father had occasional work from the Kingston Maurward estate, and a strong emotional attachment developed between Julia Augusta Martin, the wife of its owner, who was childless, and young Hardy. This relationship afforded a glimpse of a sphere of elegance that provided the class theme for his first attempt at fiction, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, and it became a subject to which he returned obsessively.

Although at Higher Bockhampton Hardy did not encounter directly the lives of the farm labourers, or ‘workfolk’ as he called them, he was acutely aware that they lived on the verge of dire poverty, in overcrowded, unsanitary cottages, and at the mercy of the farmers who hired them. Hardy remembered that the post-mortem on a shepherd-boy, who had died of want, discovered only the remnants of raw turnip

in his stomach. And he later testified to Rider Haggard, the public servant, former colonial administrator, and author of *King Solomon's Mines*, who was investigating rural poverty, that in the period up to 1850–5, the condition of the agricultural labourer in Dorset was one of considerable hardship. This darker side of rural life is recorded with scrupulous fidelity in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and embraces the agricultural depression of the 1880s, as well as the social disruption brought about by more general economic and social change [153, 178].

The Church also played a central role in Hardy's early life. His grandfather and father had been involved with the Stinsford choir, until in about 1841 the vicar, Arthur Shirley, a High Churchman, secured its removal and replacement by an organ, an event that provided the kernel of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, set in fictional Mellstock, which was based on Stinsford. The Mellstock choir also features in several poems, including 'A Choirmaster's Burial'. Hardy loved the church music, attended services regularly, and taught for a while in the Sunday school. His nostalgia for those days is recorded in the poem, 'Afternoon Service at Mellstock', and he reveals his distress at his subsequent loss of religious faith in another much-anthologised poem, 'The Oxen'.

In 1850 Jemima's removal of her son from the village National School in Lower Bockhampton, built at Mrs Martin's expense, to the British School in Dorchester led to the withdrawal of estate business from her husband. In the interval between schools, Hardy accompanied his mother on a visit to Hatfield to her younger sister Martha Sharpe, elements of whose character inform Bathsheba Everdene in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, while her husband John, an agricultural bailiff and former soldier, suggested the figure of Sergeant Troy. On Hardy's return, in September 1850, he found himself walking the three miles each way to a new school in Dorchester.

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**(b) ARCHITECT AND AUTODIDACT**

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Until the Education Act of 1870 made the provision of elementary education the state's responsibility, this had been the task of the National Schools, created earlier in the century for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the established Church. The Church also supervised the Teacher Training Colleges, from which the first trained teachers emerged in 1853, products of a strenuous process of examination, who inculcated in their pupils the rote learning of

facts that Dickens satirised in his novel *Hard Times*. The dominant influence of the Church in education also extended to the universities.

While education in the nineteenth century responded to rapid social and economic change, aiming in 1870 for universal literacy, it also perpetuated social divisions, and for Hardy was inevitably bound up with class issues. He was ambivalent and defensive about his self-education, and was bitter about his exclusion from the universities, which were for the financially secure middle class. In the nineteenth century, university admission depended on competence in classical languages, and residence in a college required considerable independent means, so undergraduates came mainly from the public schools. Education is a significant preoccupation in Hardy's fiction. School teaching is seen as the focus of idealism, and for women a route to independence, but Hardy also examines how increased social mobility may blight individual lives by educating people out of their class, and how on the other hand exclusion from education may result in tragically wasted lives.

Jemima Hardy's removal of her son from the National School was a sound educational decision. From Isaac Last, the headmaster of the British School, and from 1853 of his own 'commercial academy' in Dorchester, Hardy received grounding in French and Latin, and also mathematics and mechanics. Prompted by an acute sense of social and academic inferiority, Hardy began a life-long programme of intellectual self-improvement. He hoped for a university degree, followed by ordination and a mode of life in a country parish that included the writing of poetry. However, although the lack both of a classical education and financial support made this a forlorn dream, there remained a local route into the middle class through architecture. On 11 June 1856, shortly after his sixteenth birthday, prodded by his mother, Hardy was articled for three years to John Hicks, a Dorchester architect specialising in church restoration. The perceived enormity of the lower-class Hardys overreaching themselves resulted in the Reverend Arthur Shirley's denouncing the sin of social ambition from the pulpit of Stinsford Church, in the presence of Hardy and Jemima. This searing experience, unmitigated by time or success, fostered in Hardy a bitter anger at the tyranny of class that finds perhaps its most powerful expression in his final major novel, *Jude the Obscure*, when Jude, a 'working-man', is advised by the Master of Biblioll College to remain 'in your own sphere' (*JO*, 2: 6).

John Hicks was an educated man, who ran a congenial office in South Street, next door to the school kept by the poet William Barnes,

whose interest in the language and dialect of Dorset, and in poetic technique, was later to influence Hardy's own work. But a more immediate impact on Hardy's intellectual development was made by Henry Bastow. Bastow's strongly held Baptist beliefs challenged Hardy's somewhat relaxed Anglican faith, and many hours were devoted to strenuous debate about infant baptism. While Hardy was labouring at Latin and Greek, Bastow's interest in the Greek New Testament prompted Hardy to switch from Homeric to Biblical Greek. However, Hardy resisted his friend's efforts to convert him, and remained regular in his attendance at Anglican worship.

Hardy's emotional life was hampered by his shyness and evident immaturity. Like Jocelyn Pierston, the hero of his fantasy, *The Well-Beloved*, the adolescent Hardy pursued ideal beauty in girls, but in his case girls to whom he was too shy to speak, such as Elizabeth Bishop, a local gamekeeper's daughter and the subject of the poem, 'To Lizbie Browne', or Louisa Harding, a farmer's daughter to whom he never confessed his infatuation, but who is the subject of the poem, 'To Louisa in the Lane', written on her death in 1913 [38, 45, 52, 111, 118, 127]. Although he felt more at ease with his cousin Martha Sparks of Puddletown, who was six years his senior (and there seems to have been strong feeling on both sides), these infatuations established a life-long pattern of hesitant, idealised but sexually charged and problematic relationships with women.

By his own admission, Hardy had remained a child until he reached sixteen. Because of his continued lack of confidence and his relative immaturity, Jemima and John Hicks agreed to an extension of his articles for a further year. This enabled him to broaden his experience of life in Dorchester, a bustling county town that offered diverse entertainments for a young man, including lectures, concerts, hiring fairs and circuses. The equestrian troupe of Cooke's Circus, which presented battle scenes from the Crimean War when they visited Dorchester in 1856, was used for the circus performance of Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, while in the same year the celebration of the conclusion of the Crimean War, which was combined with the annual commemoration of Queen Victoria's coronation, provided street scenes later used in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Dorchester life also had its grimmer aspects. On 9 August 1856 the public execution took place of Martha Browne for the murder of her husband. Hardy was among the large crowd near the gallows outside the prison, and in later life he recalled the shape of the woman's figure in her black silk gown hanging against the sky, and the way that, when it began to rain, her features came through the cloth that had been put

over her face. Two years later, he observed from the heath near the cottage, through the family telescope, the hanging of a local man, James Seale. The effect of the telescope made it a disturbingly intimate experience. It was knowledge of this kind that Hardy drew upon in his story, 'The Withered Arm', and in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

In the *Life*, Hardy offers an insight into the complex routine that shaped his experience at this period:

To these externals may be added the peculiarities of his inner life, which might almost have been called academic – a triple existence unusual for a young man – what he used to call, in looking back, a life twisted of three strands – the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life, combined in the twenty-four hours of one day, as it was with him through these years. He would be reading the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, or the Greek Testament from six to eight in the morning, would work at Gothic architecture all day, and then in the evening rush off with his fiddle under his arm – sometimes in the company of his father as first violin and uncle as 'celloist – to play country-dances, reels, and hornpipes at an agriculturalist's wedding, christening, or Christmas party in a remote dwelling among the fallow fields, not returning sometimes until nearly dawn.

(*LW*, 36)

By far the most powerful source of intellectual stimulation for Hardy was Horace Moule [23, 96], the fourth son of the Reverend Henry Moule, the energetic vicar of Fordington, a village on the outskirts of Dorchester. Hardy greatly admired the remarkable Moule family, but he was particularly close to Horace, a brilliant classical scholar, whose interests encompassed music and poetry, and who also wrote philosophical and literary articles, published books on theology and Roman history, and contributed literary reviews to major national periodicals such as the *Saturday Review*, in which he was later to review Hardy. It is not known precisely when he and Hardy first met, but they developed a deep bond. Eight years Hardy's senior, Moule possessed a fine intellect, charm, social standing, and culture that won Hardy's admiration and love. Hardy had gained as his mentor a genuinely liberal thinker.

The mid-Victorian period (1840–70) was characterised by a battle between science and religion, which found its most potent symbol in the great debate at Oxford in 1860 between Bishop Wilberforce and Charles Darwin's disciple T.H. Huxley (who coined the term 'agnostic'). Up to then, the ancient concept of the Great Chain of Being, the idea

of a universe created and ordered by a loving God, had held sway. The eighteenth-century Catholic poet, Alexander Pope, in his philosophical poem, *An Essay on Man* (1733–4), describes how all living organisms have their fixed place in an immutable order. However, this view had not been unchallenged. Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather, at the turn of the century had mooted the possibility of the development of species, in *Zoonomia* (1794–6). But it was during the middle years of the nineteenth century that the scientific climate changed, with a series of discoveries and inventions in technology and medicine, such as electro-magnetism, chloroform, ether, the analytic engine (forerunner of the computer), photography, steel, reinforced concrete, and the establishment of science degrees at the University of London. The beginning of the scientific and technological age bred an open-mindedness, which permitted the serious consideration of new ideas. Some discoveries directly challenged religious beliefs, most significantly Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830), which posited a great antiquity for the earth and a very long period of gradual and regular change that called into question the literal truth of the Biblical account of Creation in Genesis. And in the field of biology, Robert Chambers, in his popular book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), maintained a theory of biological evolution through the operation of natural law. All this culminated in Charles Darwin's epoch-making book of evolutionary theory, *On the Origin of Species* (1859) [77, 81, 121, 201]. Orthodox Christian belief was devastated by Darwin's theory of natural selection, because its notion of randomness, wastefulness and cruelty could not be reconciled with faith in a divinely ordered creation. There can be little doubt that Hardy and Moule discussed Darwin's book, since according to Hardy, when it was published he was 'among the earliest acclaimers' (*LW*, 58). The evolutionary struggle for existence described by Darwin chimed with Hardy's fatalistic temperament, and undermined his religious faith, as it did that of so many Victorians. Hardy's notebooks record his lifelong interest in Darwin, and his fiction and poetry explore the tragic implications of humanity's diminished place in an empty and imperfect universe. Moule also loaned Hardy Gideon Algernon Mantell's *The Wonders of Geology* (1838), introduced him to other scientific works, including Jabez Hogg's *Elements of Experimental and Natural Philosophy* (1847), and brought to his notice the controversial *Essays and Reviews* of 1860, a collection of essays on religious subjects, which was denounced by a meeting of the bishops for its liberalism.

Apart from encouraging Hardy's immersion in the intellectual debate, Moule gave further impetus to Hardy's already intense pro-