

Rosemarie Morgan, ed.
The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy
Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010

The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy includes contributions from some of the most prominent Hardy specialists today including Gillian Beer, Timothy Hands, Dale Kramer, Phillipp Mallett, J. Hillis Miller and Rosemarie Morgan. It offers an overview of Hardy scholarship at the same time as it suggests new directions in Hardy studies. The volume, especially designed for scholars and advanced graduate students, is an important critical basis for Hardy studies in the twenty-first century.

Divided into nine parts, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy* incorporates a wide range of Hardy-related topics, including bibliographical studies, historical and cultural context, Shakespeare's influence on Hardy, bodies of knowledge and belief as they influence Hardy's poetry and prose, new critical approaches, genre and case studies, illustrators and biographers, and Hardy and the millennium. Each part is discrete, following logical steps in what the editor describes as "the researcher's trail" (13). The aim is to encourage a new generation of scholars "to chart hitherto unmapped fields of Hardy's world" (19), creating a sense of exploration and discovery that will lay the foundations for further research.

The volume is flanked by two bibliographical studies that provide a comprehensive and up-to-date listing of Hardy-related titles, including manuscripts, books, ephemera and artefacts, with an emphasis on manuscript material and significant collections of printed books as well as secondary materials. The comprehensive index enables easy orientation in the wide range of Hardy scholarship covered in the volume.

Part II, "Historical and Cultural Context", discusses "Hardy and popular Victorian culture", "Hardy in a Time of Transition" and "Hardy and the Law". William Davis's chapter on Hardy's lengthy career as a magistrate and his research into the law is particularly interesting as it illuminates two important but all-too-often neglected influences upon Hardy's writing career.

Part III examines one of the earliest and most profound literary influences on Hardy's work – William Shakespeare. In "From Stratford to Casterbridge: The Influence of Shakespeare", Dennis Taylor stresses that no major work connecting the two authors has as yet been published. Taylor methodically traces the steps by which Shakespeare influenced Hardy's sense of himself as a writer, from childhood through to the writing of *Desperate Remedies*, focusing on the passages Hardy annotated in his copy of Shakespeare that he bought in 1863.

In the chapter following Taylor's, Rosemarie Morgan and Scott Rode demonstrate that rural Dorsetshire, the Wessex of Hardy's prose and verse, equipped him with a bountiful education in imagination. Wessex constitutes a parallel universe to the landscape of Hardy's childhood, its folkloric traditions and oral histories.

Part IV, "Bodies of Knowledge and Belief", is a particularly interesting section, covering Hardy's metaphysics, Christian faith, evolution, astronomy, scientific humanism and music in poetry. Of special interest is Kevin Padian's chapter on "Evolution and Deep Time in Selected Works of Hardy", which treats the concept of "deep time" and "evolutionary legacy", demonstrating how these interact with some of the populational processes

that include natural selection in the context of Hardy's works, particularly *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Padian argues that Hardy internalised and used these concepts more than any other Victorian novelist in order to draw out the contrast between the events that involve his characters' lives and the spatial and temporal background against which they are set.

Focusing on psychology, gender and the cinema, Part V, "Critical Approaches", illustrates the need to update research in each of these areas. Film productions based on Thomas Hardy's work have increased in recent years, stimulating interest among scholars and indicating a significant shift in scholarship. From being only a marginal area in the 1990s, film productions in the twenty-first century have given rise to a large number of books, articles, web-based resources and university courses on Hardy.

Part VI, "Genre and Case Studies", features a particularly interesting chapter by Phillip Mallett, "Hardy and Masculinity: *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Jude the Obscure*". In exploring the nature of Victorian manliness and speculating on new forms of male and female sexual identity, Mallett examines the processes of becoming a "man", calling into question received notions of masculine identity.

The neglected area of "Illustrating Hardy's Novels" is examined by Ian Rogerson in Part VII. Rogerson presents a comprehensive survey of the history of illustrated magazines, artists' techniques, and Hardy's periodical publications that were illustrated, including a generous selection of the illustrations themselves. Rogerson concludes that the world of periodicals helped to establish Hardy's reputation and formed the foundation of his developing literary success. Part VII concludes with Phillip Mallett's "Hardy and the Biographers", which discusses a range of Hardy's biographers, from his contemporaries to the present. As Rosemarie Morgan notes, "none emerges unscathed" (19). Mallett argues for a new reflexivity and a willingness to permit different interpretative possibilities. While the last two decades have witnessed many attempts to theorise life writing as a complex field, no postmodern "Life of Thomas Hardy" has as yet been written.

Part VIII features contributions from some of the leading Hardy scholars today, ranging from Tom Paulin, who contemplates the feel, sound and sense of three of Hardy's best-known poems ("In Time of 'The Breaking of the Nations'", "The Self-Unseeing" and "Proud Songsters") to J. Hillis Miller, who discusses how Hardy uses the word "hand" in his "Hands in Hardy".

The "Thomas Hardy Bibliography" with which the volume ends comprises no less than seventy pages, covering collected works by Hardy, Hardy's novels, short stories, poems, drama, criticism of his books, short stories, poetry and drama, Hardy's non-fictional works, biographies (books and articles), musical settings (including CDs), audio and electronic works, film studies, video performances and journals dedicated to Hardy. What is missing from this section, which is otherwise very comprehensive, is a separate section listing doctoral theses on Hardy and Hardy-related areas, indicating the range of subjects addressed and Hardy's considerable popularity internationally. A few important and very recent titles are also, and perhaps inevitably so, missing, including Eithne Henson, *Landscape and Gender in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy* (2011), Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism and the Melodramatic Mode* (2011), and Andrew Norman's *Thomas Hardy: Behind the Mask* (2011).

The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy is nonetheless one of the most important critical publications on Thomas Hardy to appear in the last couple of years and a fine tribute to the sensitivity and extraordinary insights into form and content of one of Britain's most important authors. It is as such a worthy successor to the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy* (ed. Norman Page, 2000).

Jane Mattisson
Kristianstad University
Sweden