BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Hardy was born June 2, 1840 in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, England. He was the eldest of four children. His father started a successful building and contracting business with an initial stake of only fourteen pounds. His mother was Jemima Hand, who worked as a maidservant and also received pauper relief, a sort of welfare program.

The young Thomas was a delicate child who learned to read at about three years of age. At sixteen, Hardy was apprenticed to a Dorchester architect, John Hicks. In 1862 he left Dorchester for London to work as assistant to the architect Arthur Blomfield. While in London, he developed his intellectual tastes by attending the opera, theatres, and museums, and by reading progressive and skeptical authors such as Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and T.H. Huxley, among others.

He never attended university, but was tutored during his apprenticeship by a Cambridge student named Horace Moule. Moule’s early death caused Hardy great sadness. Hardy’s lack of a degree always caused him some remorse, though it did not particularly limit his life. He was to meet some of the great intellectual figures of his day, including George Meredith, the novelist who would give him advice on publication.

In 1867 Hardy returned to Higher Bockhampton, and though his initial writing attempts were poems, his prolific writing career really began with The Poor Man and the Lady, now lost. The Poor Man and the Lady was rejected by publishers as being too satiric in tone. His second attempt at a novel, Desperate Remedies, was published in 1871 by William Tinsley to mixed reviews.

Hardy soon decided to concentrate in his novels on what he knew and loved best, the social life of rural southern England. After two moderately successful novels, Under the
Greenwood Tree (1872) and A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873), were published anonymously, Hardy scored a significant success in 1874 with Far from the Madding Crowd. After his triumph, he married Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom he had met several years earlier.

Hardy continued writing novels of “Wessex,” the historical, Anglo-Saxon name he gave in fiction to his native Dorset, from this time until 1895. Tess of the D’Urbervilles, published in 1891, was immediately popular with the reading public. But it also caused controversy: Victorian moralists and ecclesiastics were scandalized by the author’s contention that his heroine was, in the words of the novel’s subtitle, a morally pure woman. Some readers were outraged by the book’s pessimism, by the unrelieved picture of torment and misery Hardy presented. Orthodox believers in God were scandalized by his suggestions that the beneficent warm God of Christianity seemed absent from the world Hardy depicted.

Hardy had no children but his marriages were extremely significant factors in his life and can be seen as having a strong effect on his work. He was in love several times and engaged once to a maid named Eliza Nicholls before meeting his first wife. In 1870, he met Emma Gifford on a trip to Cornwall, and married her in 1874. Her family disapproved of the marriage and considered Hardy beneath Emma. Though Hardy loved Emma, the marriage became unhappy, but continued until her death in 1912. Later, Hardy looked back on her with affection.

In 1898, Thomas Hardy published Wessex Poems. On the whole, his poetry is not nearly so well regarded as his novels, but is still considered to have merit.

After the turn of the century, he worked on The Dynasts, an epic-drama in verse of the Napoleonic wars, published in three volumes from 1903 to 1908. In 1910 he was awarded the
Order of Merit and in 1912 he finished revising all his novels, rendering them exactly as he wanted them. In November of 1912, Emma Hardy died after a long illness, through which her husband did not give her very much aid.

Hardy’s last two novels, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, were his most controversial. *Jude the Obscure*, like many novels of the time, was published serially both in England and the United States. The American version was “cleaned up” so as to be suitable for all ages. References to extramarital relations were deleted, as were the gruesome deaths.

Hardy continued to receive honors and degrees in the first decades of the 1900s, including honorary degrees in literature from Cambridge University in 1913 and Oxford University in 1920. On January 11, 1928, Thomas Hardy died. His biography was published posthumously the same year. His ashes were placed in Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey. His heart was buried in his first wife’s grave at Stinsford next to the grave of his parents.
SUMMARY

Jude Fawley dreams of studying at the university in Christminster, but his background as an orphan raised by his working-class aunt leads him instead into a career as a stonemason. He is inspired by the ambitions of the town schoolmaster, Richard Phillotson, who left for Christminster when Jude was a child. However, Jude falls in love with a young woman named Arabella, is tricked into marrying her, and cannot leave his home village. When their marriage goes sour and Arabella moves to Australia, Jude resolves to go to Christminster at last. However, he finds that his attempts to enroll at the university are met with little enthusiasm.

Jude meets his cousin Sue Bridehead and tries not to fall in love with her. He arranges for her to work with Phillotson in order to keep her in Christminster, but is disappointed when he discovers that the two are engaged to be married. Once they marry, Jude is not surprised to find that Sue is not happy with her situation. She can no longer tolerate the relationship and leaves her husband to live with Jude.

Both Jude and Sue get divorced, but Sue does not want to remarry. Arabella reveals to Jude that they have a son in Australia, and Jude asks to take him in. Sue and Jude serve as parents to the little boy and have two children of their own. Jude falls ill, and when he recovers, he decides to return to Christminster with his family. They have trouble finding lodging because they are not married, and Jude stays in an inn separate from Sue and the children. At night Sue takes Jude's son out to look for a room and the little boy decides that they would be better off without so many children. In the morning, Sue goes to Jude's room and eats breakfast with him. They return to the lodging house to find that Jude's son has hanged the other two children and himself. Feeling she has been punished by God for her
relationship with Jude, Sue goes back to live with Phillotson, and Jude is tricked into living with Arabella again. Jude dies soon after.