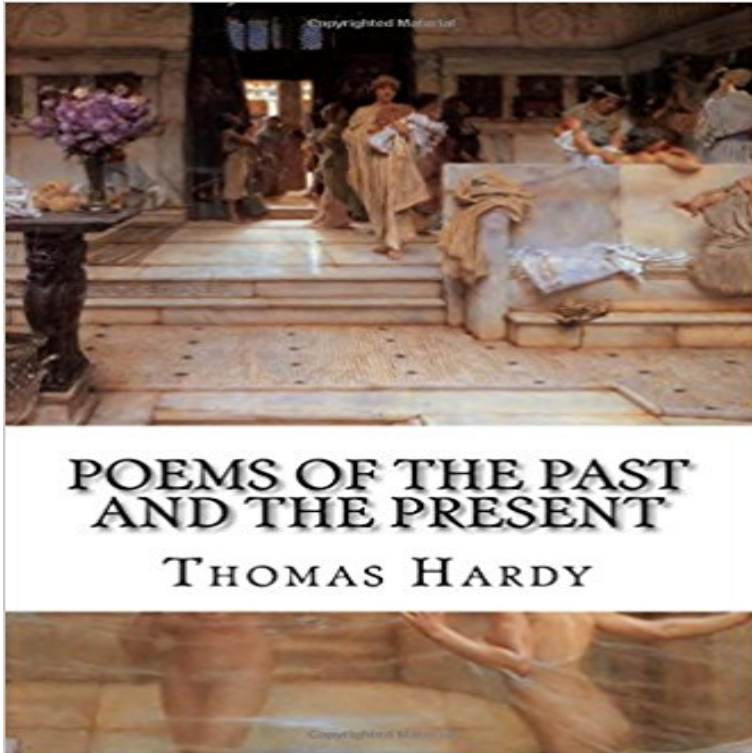


Poems of the Past and the Present



Thomas Hardy, OM (1840–1928) was an English novelist and poet. A Victorian realist in the tradition of George Eliot, he was influenced both in his novels and in his poetry by Romanticism, especially William Wordsworth. Charles Dickens was another important influence. Like Dickens, he was highly critical of much in Victorian society, though Hardy focused more on a declining rural society. While Hardy wrote poetry throughout his life and regarded himself primarily as a poet, his first collection was not published until 1898. Initially, therefore, he gained fame as the author of novels, including *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Hardy's poetry, though prolific, was not as well received during his lifetime. It was rediscovered in the 1950s, when Hardy's poetry had a significant influence on the Movement poets of the 1950s and 1960s, including Philip Larkin. Most of his fictional works initially published as serials in magazines were set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex. They explored tragic characters struggling against their passions and social circumstances. Hardy's Wessex is based on the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom and eventually came to include the counties of Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire and much of Berkshire, in southwest and south central England.

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