

*Librería*  
***Bonilla y Asociados***  
*desde 1950*



**Título:** Cambridge Companion To Thomas Hardy

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**Precio:** \$478.50

**Editorial:**

**Año:** 2005

**Tema:**

**Edición:** 3ª

**Sinopsis**

**ISBN:** 9780521566926

Thomas Hardy's fiction has had a remarkably strong appeal for general readers for decades, and his poetry has been acclaimed as among the most influential of the twentieth century. His work still creates passionate advocacy and opposition. The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy is an essential introduction to this most enigmatic of writers. These commissioned essays from an international team of contributors comprises a general overview of all Hardy's work and specific demonstrations of Hardy's ideas and literary skills. Individual essays explore Hardy's biography, aesthetics, his famous attachment to Wessex, and the impact on his work of developments in science, religion and philosophy in the late nineteenth century. Hardy's writing is also analysed against developments in contemporary critical theory and issues such as sexuality and gender. The volume also contains a detailed chronology of Hardy's life and publications, and a guide to further reading.