

**HARDY'S INTEGRATED VISION :
THE CONVERGENCE OF TIME IN HIS POETRY**

ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy described himself in one of his poems as a man who is:

... but a shape that stands here,
A pulse mould,
A pale past picture, screening
Ashes gone cold

[“Dead Man Walking” (166)¹]

The focus of this research has been on the study of his poetry in an attempt to understand not only the reason behind his intense interest in the past, but also to try to arrive at a more coherent pattern of his attitude to the past and his concept of time through a study of his poems of the past. Primarily, this has meant the reading and analysis of those of his poems that deal with time, past or memory.

For the sake of convenience, the research has been carried out in five segments or chapters and a Preface. The five segments constitute the varied perspectives that his vision of the past has been narrowed down to.

The Preface presents a brief account of some major philosophical concepts that was prevalent during Hardy’s time. The definition of time by Plato, Aristotle and St. Augustine are briefly

mentioned, more emphasis being laid on the definition and analysis by G.J. Whitrow.² His concepts of 'cyclical' and 'individual' time are mentioned with the view to refreshing the reader's mind with common familiar concepts of time.

Mention has next been specially made of Henri Bergson and Marcel Proust whose concepts of time and the past bear striking similarity with Hardy's ideas. Bergson's concept of *la durée* or duration, its apprehension through the what he called 'intuition' are explained. For Bergson, the past prolongs into the present, and Time, therefore, goes beyond any division into past, present and future. These are ideas that Hardy's poems too testify to again and again.

But it is with Marcel Proust that Hardy's ideas bear closer similarity. Proust's concept of 'extra-temporal' time where past, present and future blend in a moment out of time is mentioned. Hardy's theory of 'exhumed emotion' is shown to share common ground with some of Proust's comments.

The Preface has deliberately been kept brief so that it does not grow either too technical, or too philosophical lest it detract attention from the subject at hand, which is poetry.

Chapter-I is the Introduction where attempt has been made to lay the foundation for the arguments to follow in the subsequent

chapters. It begins with evidence, chiefly biographical, of the importance he gave to, and the seriousness with which he viewed, his career as a poet. This was necessary to show that his poems reflect some of the most important ideas and attitudes held by him. However, the main focus here is on the personal as well as socio-historical influences that are the underlying cause of Hardy's avid interest in the past. The time of his birth, formative years and young adulthood was also the time of rapid industrialization in England. The consequent socio-economic changes it brought at its wake was felt upto Dorchester, where Hardy worked as an apprentice to Sir John Hicks, the architect. But he continued to live at Bockhampton, where the winds of change were yet to reach. His moving, in the course of a single day between a world rapidly changing and another so deeply entrenched in its centuries-old seemingly changeless English market-town ethos must have influenced his ability to move with such ease from the present to the past in his poems.

Another important reason lies in the tendency of the age. The nineteenth century was a period of growing alienation from the traditional belief system. In a world of change and flux, memory proved to be the only abiding reality and writers of the period, in their search for an alternative, valid, enduring core of belief turned

increasingly to the world of time past. "To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable." (F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan, 1964, p.200). Introduction to the world of new ideas through his habit of self-study as well as new friends like Moule, brought about not just new ideas but a breaking away from the old chiefly religious beliefs. Hardy would never recant but would forever look back, as several poems testify, at a time of greater solace and less tentativeness. Hardy's aesthetic principle of 'exhumed' emotion was explained here in order to throw light on Hardy's impressive power of total recall.

Chapter-II is entitled The Past As Times Past. It deals with those poems where the attitude to the past is simple and nostalgic, although never sentimental. These are the poems whose origins lie in his early life at Bockhampton. Incidents of domestic bliss are recalled from great distance of time. Childhood memories ["The One We Knew" (227)] showed memory could prove a link between generations and keep local traditions and lores alive through time. Personal memory at times was seen to supercede communal memories ["The Roman Road" (218)] while shared memory not only bonded the group or pair closer still, but it also segregated this group

or pair from the others. Memory thus was seen to cohere and segregate at the same time [“A Church Romance”(211)].

Hardy’s belief in the role of memory in giving life and endurance to events and people of the past was highlighted here as also Hardy’s acceptance of the irreversibility of time:

– O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,
I cannot tell!
[“On the Departure Platform” (170)]

Chapter-III – The Past as Present begins with a mention of Samuel Hynes’s³ statement that the basic pattern of Hardy’s poetry is ‘antinomial’ above ‘dialectical’ is discussed and explained. Hardy’s basic pattern being ‘antinomial’ contradictory arguments or situations are set alongside each other to great ironical effect. Hardy refrains from showing any kind of bias. Several poems were closely studied to reveal how evolving within the antinomial framework, Hardy’s poems yield a consistent pattern of Now and then; a circumstance, situation or emotion from the present is placed in contrast to a similar circumstance in the past. Hardy refrains from passing any judgement or drawing any conclusion but leaves the irony to speak for itself. In fact, the very titles of several of Hardy’s poems declare the antinomial structure that reveals a pattern of Now and Then: “Boys Then and Now’ (875), “Before Life and After” (230), “The Old

Neighbour and the New (640) among others. At a more complex level of this structure were the poems like “Just the Same” (650) where the tension between Now and Then was manifested through the contrast between a changing internal world vis-à-vis an unchanging external world, or vice-versa.

Going to the past also means coming face to face with reality. It was revealed that the protagonists of the dramatic poems differed in their reactions – reality being preferred in “The Revisitation” (152), while illusion was the option chosen in “My Cicely” (31).

But is not always that the pattern of Now and Then is quite so simply structured. A more complex construct was apparent in poems like “At Castle Boterel” (292) and in what might easily Hardy’s best poem. “During Wind and Rain” (441). The complexity of Hardy’s poetic vision was revealed in his ability to fluidly cross time-barriers to present a single, comprehensive picture.

The several modes or portals used by Hardy in his travel to the past was next discussed. The situation triggering the journey ranged from physical sensation [“Under the Waterfall” (276)], music [“Rome On the Palatine” (68)] actual items associated with a loved one from the past [“To My Father’s Violin” (381), “Old Furniture” (482) “On a

Discovered Curl of Hair” (630)], journeys [“At Castle Boterel” (292)], as well as logs, trees, or leaf. Just about anything, however, slenderly reminiscent of a situation in the past, was the doorway leading Hardy to his journey to the past, which he then recalled with the graphic detail and immediacy of an ‘eidetic’ image. The term ‘eidetic’ is used by Tom Paulin in *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (London: Macmillan, 1975, p.121) to refer to these images from memory that are presented with the detail of actual vision.

In several poems there appeared a sense of confluence of the different times described.

The main focus of Chapter-IV – The Past Reviewed is summed up by Hardy’s declaration that ‘Experience Unteaches’ (F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan, 1964, p.176). By the comment Hardy was referring to the effect of time and life-experiences on human perspective. Memories of certain experiences of the past show that the understanding and reaction may stand altered when reviewed from a great distance of time.

Therefore, Time is not always inimical to man: he uses his life experiences to gain greater self-understanding.

When the past incidents are ‘exhumed’ after a long gap of time, Hardy is able to view them differently – more objectively, and often

more compassionately. The re-viewing of the past arouses reactions ranging from light-hearted regret at missed opportunity [“The Opportunity” (577), “Faint Heart in a Railway Train (516); “A Countenance” (847)] to a darker, more sombre awareness of misused opportunity in poems like [“We Sat at the Window” (355)].

The *Poems of 1912-13* dealing with Hardy’s deeply moving analysis of his tumultuous relationship with his wife that moved from love to indifference to rekindled love after her death, records regret of a more tragic nature. Her sudden death opened the floodgates of varied emotions as Hardy found himself remembering her and their long relationship of thirty-odd years. In this chapter, the gamut of this varied emotional reactions is analysed. They are seen to range from shock, sorrow, regret, guilt to acceptance and renewal of love.

For the first time perhaps, he is able to view the relationship, now that it is past, from her perspective – as in “The Upbraiding” (486) – recognizing the role his own indifference played in the breakdown of their marital life. In the same poem, Hardy displays his ability to objectively view even his present reaction: in the poem the ghost of his wife asks if this renewal love for her will survive his death, or if, when united after death, he will again return to his former

indifference. A similar capacity for dispassionate, objective self-analysis is the subject matter of yet another poem, "Survival" (662).

In poems like "The Oxen" (403) and "An Afternoon Service at Mellstock" (356), Hardy views his memories of past religious beliefs and practices in the light of his later rejection of them. What comes through from the study of these poems is that while Hardy rejected whole heartedly the validity of these religious beliefs, he could not reject the validity of their value at the individual and the communal level. He would always look back with yearning at a time of greater confidence and solace.

This chapter shows that it is not the distance of time alone that provides the hindsight necessary to truly appraise a situation. It may sometimes be even necessary to become a ghost to establish total understanding. For example, the persona of the dramatic poem "I Rose Up as My Custom Is" (311) though he was a caring, sensitive poet when alive, is yet surprised to learn how flawed his understanding had been of the true character, motives and thoughts of his ladylove. It is only as a ghost that he can establish true communication and begin to understand her desires and insecurities.

The concluding chapter is entitled Integrated Vision. Here the conclusions evolving out of the discussions of the previous chapters

are stated and finally an attempt made to see the pattern that has emerged.

The conclusion evolving out of chapter-I was that certain personal as well as socio-historical factors shaped Hardy's 'backward' looking attitude to the past. The poems studied in chapter-II – The Past As Time Past revealed that Hardy was aware of the flow of time and its irreversibility. He was content to see the past as time which is past and did not try to forge a link with the present. Memories of personal past, communal past and historical past were seen to sometimes blend and sometimes to diverge. The conclusion was that memory unites as well as segregates the group or individual.

Chapter-II – The Past as Present developed finally the conclusion that often the past did exist in a moment out of time through personal memory. Barriers between the past and present were ignored by memory in certain cases. The past and present were placed alongside each other to affect a confluence of time.

The Conclusion that the discussion of Chapter IV – The Past Reviewed evolved was that through the instrument of hindsight, memory could and did function as nemesis or a medium of justice. It was also capable of sowing grief and regret although its most

important function was as a medium of introspection leading to self-understanding, though not leading to a self-making.

The pattern that finally emerged was that time is an ally of man. Memory allows him to see the history of his evolving self-through a series of life-experiences. It is only through the agency of memory that he can view the entire process as a continuum. Human beings, being often different, disconnected selves, it is through the instrument of memory that he can perceive the underlying unity between his various selves. This saves him from a sense of living in fragments by leading finally to an integrated vision of the self.

END NOTES

1. The number in the parenthesis refers to the number at which the poem appears in *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy* edited by James Gibson (London: Macmillan, New Wessex edition, 1976).
2. Whitrow, G.J. *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961).
3. Hynes, S. *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

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**HARDY'S INTEGRATED VISION :
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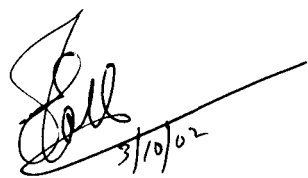
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I, *Ms. Utpala Sewa*, hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis is the record of the work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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(Utpala Sewa)

PREFACE

The bulk of Thomas Hardy's poetry is biographical in nature. Though not strictly confessional and marked often times by deliberate reticence, his poetry is deeply personal. Hardy's remark quoted in his biography by his wife, Florence Hardy that there is more biography in a hundred lines of his poetry than in all his novels, has declared the personal quality of his poetry (*The Life of Thomas Hardy*, 1962, p.392).¹ As a poet writing unto the very end of his long life – Hardy's poetry tends to be retrospective in nature. Thus, the essential pattern of his poetry is of Now and Then and Time the subject that runs through the greater part of his nine hundred-plus poems.

Time, however, is a subject, basically so fraught with abstractions, that it becomes necessary to look into some of the major philosophical opinions. However, the concept of time yields varied and diverse meaning to the philosopher, the scientist, the naturalist and yet another to the experiencing individual. To the layman, time is so event-based a consciousness that life and time are often understood synonymously. In fact, in any attempt at exploration or explication of the one, the other becomes the logical premise or reference point.

Amongst the postulates of the major philosophers on time, the seminal concept must surely be that of Plato. Plato spoke of time as a 'moving image of eternity' while Aristotle brought his definition closer to life as human beings experience it, when he defined time as 'the Life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of Act or experience to another'. This is what man ordinarily understands of the concept. To him time projects itself through his experiences and it is always in a state of movement forward. He is the connecting link between these episodes – hence time – past, present and future, stand connected through the experiencing self or 'soul'. Time to him is an empirical concept.

The philosopher may speak of time as 'a priori', i.e. independent of all experiences, but the experiencing individual would perhaps more readily identify their beliefs with the definition by St. Augustine (rather than the Kantian 'a priori'), and not solely because of the mystical poetry of the words that time is 'a present of things past, memory, a present of things present, sight and the present of things future, expectation.' Time as projected through human consciousness and perception, shapes as memory, sight or expectation, i.e past, present or future.

Sometimes, as with Hardy, the dividing lines between the past, present and future may not exist. G.J. Whitrow in *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (London, 1961) offers the following explanation as to the origins of the concept of time:

The psychological origin of the concept of time is therefore to be found in the conscious realization of the distinction between desire and satisfaction. The sense and purpose of associated effort is the ultimate source of the ideas of cause and effect; but it was only by a series of scientific abstractions that men eventually arrived at the concepts of a uniform temporal sequence and a definite causal process.²

Thus time-awareness is awakened as a result of yearning which demands satisfaction so that man resolves and moves towards this goal. He marks the period of effort by a series 'scientific abstractions' – time, as ordinarily understood.

The most commonly experienced form of this abstraction is 'clock-time' which Whitrow also describes in his book as time-continuum. It is the visually continuous, infinitely divisible time generally measured by clocks and timepieces. This is the time that dictates the life and movement especially of the urban, industrial man. This is not the time of human experience.

'Cyclic time' is the abstract division of time into periodic cycles giving us years, months, seasons, days and nights, and hours.

Cyclic time is pivotal to man: this is the aspect of time he is most familiar with. Interestingly, however, with reference to human experience, cyclic and clock time are experiential concepts as they gain meaning only at the level of personal experience. The division of time cannot be experienced, save what happens in it. Thus, modern man's daily routine has to be explained in terms of this division of time that consequently leads him to the hypothetical division of time into past, present and future, thereby imposing a time-logic on the flow of life.

Whitrow also speaks of Human time as a period in cyclic time that lingers long in the collective unconscious (e.g. "October Revolution" – lingers on much beyond the actual period of cyclic time "October"). A personally significant moment in human life (of love, despair, etc.) becomes an unforgettable experience. Human consciousness alone defines time, which otherwise, is meaningless and unrelated to human life. An aspect of Human time is Individual time. Here man's past which is burdened with unfulfilled potentialities, vague urgings, undetermined fancies become the basis of measuring time.

That time is irreversible is a concept that all philosophers have stressed. Each moment, each fraction of time differs from the predecessors as it does from its successors. Thus, ‘No two leaves are alike’ declared Leibniz propounding his theory of ‘Les Indiscernible’.

Albert Einstein spoke of the time-space phenomenon – the past, present and the future, as relative to position both in time and space. The location of the observer in relation to the observed would determine what constitutes time past, present or future.

In sleep and dreams, past, present and future blend into a moment out of time, *extra-temporal* as Marcel Proust terms it in *Temps Retrouvé (The Past Recaptured)*.³ He believed that memory was the mode of awakening our ‘being’ in the past experience; when recalled, this being from the past experience blends the now and the then and to-be-present, past and future – into a moment out of time.

Henri Bergson spoke of *external* and *internal* time or *La durée* or duration. He spoke of it as ‘The shape taken by the succession of our states of consciousness when our inner *I* lets itself live, that is to say, when it refrains from establishing a separation between its present state and the preceding states’ (*Oeuvres*, p.67).⁴ He speaks of intuition as the mode of perceiving *La durée*, by intuition meaning

something more akin to imagination. The empirical experience of time thus is not mechanistic or mathematical but biological or *anthromorphic*, where consciousness, which is described as based on memory, becomes the only instrument of apprehending time. True time thus becomes beyond any measurement or divisions into past, present or future.

Thomas Hardy's attitude to Bergson's philosophy of time was dismissive. Hardy dismissed Bergson's theory of time considering it a restatement of earlier well-known philosophy (dualism). Hardy in a letter to Dr. C.W. Sleebly says about Bergson's theory '... you may be rather shocked at some views I hold about his teaching ... his is rather an imaginative and poetical mind than a reasoner's, and that for his charming and attractive assertions he does not adduce any proofs whatever ... I fear his theory is, in the bulk, only our old friend. Dualism in a new suit of clothes – an ingenious fancy without real foundation, and more complicated than the fancies he endeavours to overthrow'. (*Life*, p.369) However, just as Hardy's poetry reveals his belief that the man transcends time through memory, similarly does Bergson's belief in the inner time or duration of memory (*la durée interviewe*) that exists apart from chronological time. In "The Clock

of the Years” (481) he speaks of the memory of his beloved having survived her death – ‘The Memory of her/Had lived in me’; while numerous poems of memory testify to his belief in the transcendence of time by memory. Bergson’s belief is of internal time – duration or *durée*, the term given to the succession of states of consciousness when it does not make any separation between its present and past states. The apprehension by the inner states of consciousness of time is not clock time but true time which is beyond measurement or division into past, present or future. The apprehension is in timeless moments where past and present are unified in a mental representation. Memory plays a crucial role in this. In Bergson’s own words, *la durée* is dependant on memory: “There is no mood, however, no matter how simple which does not change at every instant, since there is no consciousness without memory, no continuation of a state without the addition, to the present feeling of the memory of past moments. That is what duration consists of. Inner duration is the continuous life of memory which prolongs the past into the present, whether the present distinctly contains the ever-growing image of the past, or whether, by its continual changing of quality, it attests rather the increasingly heavy burden dragged along

behind one the older one grows. Without the survival of the past in the present there would be no duration only instantaneity” (“The Creative Mind”, 1946).⁵

Hardy’s creative imagination prolongs the past into the present in his poems, memory being apprehended through imagination. Bergson’s *la durée* is apprehended through ‘intuition’ which is defined as the faculty that apprehends the wholeness and the true reality of thing. It is very similar to creative imagination.

Bergson’s *la durée* ignores the reality of past and present – just as Hardy’s memories move between the past and present ignoring time barriers.

Bergson’s internal duration held, that there is a continuous life of memory that prolongs the past into the present, whether the present contains a clear, ceaselessly growing image of the past or whether it rather testifies, through its continuous change of quality to the ever increasing load as we grow older. Without the survival of the past into the present, there would be no duration, only instantaneity. This internal duration is thus Bergson’s interpretation of memory.

Bergson’s argument that the only time that truly exists is the past, finds an interesting echo in Hardy’s poetry. Bergson’s

explanation is the future is yet to be and hence lacks reality, while the present is just a fleeting instant that moves into the past at the very point of perception. Thus, with Hardy as with Bergson, sometimes the dividing lines between the past, present and future cease to exist: the consciousness of the experiencing self may coalesce them into one whole. Hardy views not only his past and present as a continuum but, in instances of discovering the linking consciousness of others, separated by years, he can now even generations dovetail into a comprehensive whole: 'It bridges over the years to think that Gray might have seen Wordsworth in his cradle, and Wordsworth might have seen me in mine'. (*Life*, p.386)

But it is with Marcel Proust that Hardy's concept of time and memory shares greater similarity. Proust declares in *The Past Recaptured* (1970)⁶ his inability to live in the present basically because he can rue or savour that present only when it is past. In "Self-Unconscious" (270)⁷ Hardy says similarly:

Along the way
 He walked that day,
 Watching shapes that reveries limn
 And seldom he
 Had eyes to see
 The moment that encompassed him.

Again in "The Rambler" (221) he admits:

The tones around me that I hear,
 The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
 Are those far back ones missed when near,
 And now perceived too late for me.

Proust's statement in the same work mentioned earlier, that 'past times to me is present space' stands again paralleled by the quoted lines from Hardy, although a sizable number of Hardy's other poems also echo the same declaration.

In Hardy's journal dated 4th December 1890 (*Life*, p.230) is his realization "I am more than convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances". This almost reads like a corollary to Proust's assertion that 'each man is a swift, uninterrupted succession of selves. Sometimes they are disconnected. It is only in the retina of the mind, memory, that we can hope to recover and recognize previous selves, even discover a thread of unity'.⁸ The importance of memory in recognizing the 'various persons' within one person is established in Hardy's remembrance of his late estranged wife in her various 'person' – a child ("Places"), daring horsewoman, sweetheart, stranger and after death, the ghostly symbol of lost love. It is the action of memory alone that 'unites' these 'various persons' into the composite character of Emma Hardy.

Even Hardy's famous theory of 'exhumed emotion' finds a parallel in Proust. Hardy declared in *Life* (p.378): 'I have a faculty (possibly not uncommon) for burying an emotion in my heart or brain for forty year and exhuming it at the end of that time as fresh as when interred'.⁹ He gave as an illustration, the poem "In the Time of the Breaking of Nations" (500). It was based on an emotion experienced in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War and exhumed nearly forty-five years later, in 1914 during the war with Germany. Innumerable poems of childhood and youthful incidents were recalled in poems when he was past eighty years old.

In the earlier quoted work of Proust, he too reveals a similar thought:

A moment can endure in the consciousness, unimpaired, simply because it has lain forgotten, untouched by habits, change, reflection. Intrinsically, it is the same moment, or rather, the nearest approach to identity possible in the human context. It is too, a moment which has been outside time for some time.
(p.8)

Hardy, Bergson and Proust all believe in the importance of involuntary imagination the action of which can take one out of chronological time where past and present are often inextricably integrated into a moment 'out of time' or 'extra-temporal'.

Again, Hardy and Proust echo Bergson in their recognition of the inevitable issue of self-analysis in a succession of juxtaposed states.

END NOTES

1. Hardy, F.E. *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1962, p.392). (This book is henceforth referred to in this research as *Life*).
2. Whitrow, G.J. *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1980, p.61).
3. Proust, M. *The Past Recaptured* – original title: *Le Temps Retrouve*, tr. from French by Morgan, Andreas, New York: Random House, 1970).
4. Bergson, H. *The Creative Mind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946).
5. *Ibid.*
6. Proust, M. *Op. cit.*, p.142.
7. The number in parenthesis refers to the poem number in *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy* edited by James Gibson (London, Macmillan, New Wessex edition, 1976).
8. Proust, M. *Op. cit.* p.142.
9. Hardy, F.E. *Life*, p.378.

Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's reputation as a novelist has been, from the start, so overwhelming that his achievement as a poet has, until recent times, been quite overshadowed by it. This is ironic in view of the fact that Hardy himself held quite a different attitude to his two vocations. Samuel Hynes, in his seminal work *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (1962)¹ mentions Hardy's having declared to Sir Sydney Cockerell, his friend of long standing and his executor after his death, that he would never have written a line of prose if he could have earned his living at poetry. In *Life*, he speaks of his novels, his 'prose contributions to literature' as having 'ever been secondary to his interest in verse'.²

It was verse, he believed, that 'contained the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature'.³ Moreover, the adverse critical reception of *Jude the Obscure* made him realize the freedom of thought that poetry actually allowed: "... perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – hard as rock – which the vast body of men have

vested interest in supporting ...”⁴ Again, in the same context we have him making this wry observation: “... If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone.”⁵ The most complete confirmation of Hardy’s high regard for poetry and his practice of the genre lies in his declaring in 1927, at the age of eighty-seven, that “the only ambition as far as he could remember, was to have some poem or poems in a good anthology like the Golden Treasury.”⁶

All though his long creative period Hardy wrote poetry: from his early twenties till his death at the age of eighty-eight. When, after *Jude the Obscure*, he tuned away from prose, Hardy had published only a few poems, although the poetic output of years lay unpublished with him. A selection of fifty-one poems from his poetic creation of over thirty years produced his first volume *Wessex Poems* (1898) when he was fifty-eight years old. After that, at regular intervals, Hardy published seven more volumes: *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902); *Time’s Laughingstocks* (1914); *Moments of Vision* (1917); *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922); *Human Shows* (1925) and *Winter Words* (posthumously in 1928). He incorporated into each volume the

poems written earlier during the thirty-odd years of unpublished poetic career.

Although, by his own admission, he believed that his poetry only reflected passing ‘impressions’ and not firm convictions, yet in the light of Hardy’s belief that the genre allowed greater freedom of expression of thought, it is not to his novels but to his poetry that we must turn our attention to glimpse into the mind of Thomas Hardy. His poetry contains a series of regularly recurring ‘impressions’ that easily shape into a complex of beliefs. He may have believed that ‘... the mission of poetry is to record impressions not convictions’⁷ but he was also the poet who advocated the formulation of personal philosophy on the basis of individual experience: “After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his experience ... his own views as given him by his surrounding.”⁸

T.S. Eliot in *After Strange Gods* (1934), sees Hardy as an outstanding example of a poet who failed to meet the norms of ‘impersonal’ creative endeavour. Eliot’s tone is impatient but his insight into Hardy’s mind and work is incisive as he makes his famous observation:

The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by an institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs; unhampered by any ideas, or even by what acts as a partial restraint upon inferior writers, the desire to please a large public ... He seems to me to have written nearly for the sake of self-expression as well as man can."⁹

The bulk of Hardy's poetry more than justifies this comment on his subjectivity: Hardy is a subjective poet. He is avidly interested in the human heart and the human condition. The mode of understanding these that Hardy adopts is through a close study of his own emotions and life experiences – a study that he undertakes with an almost scientific objectivity, never lapsing into sentiment. It is this interest in his own life as a subject of study (authenticated by his claim: 'there is more biography in my poems than in all my novels')¹⁰ that makes Hardy essentially a poet of a personal past. Consequently, time and transience are subjects he returns to repeatedly and the awareness of the passage of time exists like a groundswell through his poetry. T.N.R. Creighton has this comment to offer on Hardy's interest in the flow of time:

Memory, nostalgia, the presentness of the past to those who lived awarely in the present, the pastness of the past, the tragedy of its pastness, its irreplaceableness and sanctity, are among his leading themes.¹¹

Samuel Hynes, in *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* recognizes this basic pattern in Hardy's poetry and asserts that his going back in time to the past really symbolizes man's efforts to reverse the movement of time and to assert "the present existence of the past".¹²

While Hardy was aware that to do so is but a natural human instinct, yet he was at all times keenly aware of the futility of the effort to reverse time: he saw time as 'a one-directional, non-reversible process, implying mutability and mortality'¹³ and thus defeating man's struggle for permanence and order. Thus in Hynes's interpretation, Hardy's time is inimical to man, working against him always, a destructive not a curative force.

However, the vitality suffusing those several poems recapturing Hardy's past ["Under the Waterfall" (276)] is one outstanding example of many more belies Hynes's statement. Hardy might realize the irreversibility of time, but by weaving the past into his present through the mode of personal memory, Hardy creates personal time and is able to see the essential continuity of this personal time.

Hardy continued writing well into his old age and a good portion of it tends to be retrospective in attitude. However, his approach is never sentimental. He avoids turning his ruminations into

mere nostalgia. He examines his past with certain objectivity, oftentimes the undercurrent of irony helping to achieve that objective distance. Yet, the basic pattern of Hardy's poetry of personal time is of then and now, the present nearly always acting as a gateway, a means of access to the past. This suggests Hardy's unwillingness to see the events of a human life as merely a sequence of unconnected moments. Hence, time is not always a distancing feature for Hardy – it is more often a living presence in his consciousness. It is because of this that we find Hardy viewing the past and the present, the flow of time, in one instant of time, displaying an integrated vision of time where there is a confluence or convergence not only of the past and the present, but tacitly through his acceptance of the flow of time, also of the future.

It stands to reason that certain circumstantial and environmental influences have played their part in the formation and shaping of such a perspective. Chief amongst such an influence would be the fact that the world of Hardy's youth was an earlier England – rural, traditional, and secure in its country ways and rituals. Alongside it, however, was the rest of England – in the grip of a cataclysmic Industrial Revolution. Already reform movements like Chartism were

bringing rapid, dramatic changes into the lifestyles and attitudes that were carried over from centuries past. But the Dorset countryside in the south-western corner of the land proved a veritable backwater and the winds of change were slow to sweep over it. The Dorset countryside continued in the style of centuries, taking note of the changes (London newspapers were eagerly awaited and read, although a day late, in Dorchester) but not affected by them in any significant way for a long while. In 1847, when Hardy was barely seven years old, the railroad had already arrived at Dorchester. All through the years on his boyhood and young adulthood, Hardy witnessed the arrival of the new methods, new machines and new men into seemingly changeless society of the land of his birth. The threats that they would gradually grow to pose to the ways and attitudes matured into a major theme in Hardy's writings, namely his fiction. The often dramatic parting of ways between the ways of the old world of his youth and those of the turn-of the century modernized world was thus experienced by Hardy in the most personal way, giving rise to the need to recall the secure, changeless, familiar world of the past. In fact, Hardy's most powerful memories vividly preserved into old age, were memories of customs, events and pleasures of this rural (country) world. Poems like "The Oxen" (403),

“In the Ewelease” are rooted in experiences of the lifestyle of the past.

Irving Howe, in his book *Thomas Hardy*¹⁴ has an interesting observation to make about the nostalgia that pervades Hardy’s works.

He sees a close parallel between the ways of Hardy’s land of birth and the ways of Wessex described in his novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Wessex is a place where:

... three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less a century set a mark on its face or tone. Five decades hardly modified the cut of a gaiter or the embroidery of a smock-frock by the breadth of a hair. Ten generations failed to alter the turn of a single phrase.¹⁵

This provincial rootedness or attachment to the soil of one’s birth for generations together, in any other poet might not have risen above a mere nostalgia that is in effect no more than a mere romanticisation of the past. But, says, Howe, it becomes a “starting point for that stringent and self-conscious nostalgia which animates the works of Hardy, George Eliot and Faulkner, thereby making possible an interesting interplay between the past and present in which each becomes a premise for the criticism for the other”.¹⁶ As his imagination recalls the lost but remembered homeland of the times

past, Howe discovers that “the writer releases his nostalgia through a fabled reconstruction, a balked piety which then sets off against the ruthlessness of historical change. His possession of a slowly fading world, remembered with pathos and unrivalled knowledge is for the writer an advantage comparable only to an unhappy childhood: it makes for tension, memory and a brief monopoly of legend.”¹⁷

It is in such a memory that Hardy’s poetry originates, only out of such tension that poems like “The Oxen” (403) and “The Impercipient” (44) evolved where he recognizes the extent of his losses whereas his skepticism has refused him the solace of simple faith. Hardy’s strongest ties, surviving the eight decades of his life, were his ties of affection, pride and even some estrangement from the past, from the world of his youth. In his years of boyhood, Hardy identified himself closely with traditional Dorset culture. He gradually grew away from it as youth and a certain ‘class’ consciousness arrived. He realized that socially too his family stood on the precarious borderline between the peasants and the gentry. His father was a master mason with several workers under him, and was a life-holder of his house. These facts placed them well above the peasants though not quite with the gentry, although the family was

conscious of a lineage that had in the past stood higher in the social scale. These were ample reasons for Hardy's mother, Jemima Hand, to relentlessly channelise the young Thomas Hardy's efforts to areas that were significantly associated with the upper class. Hardy was encouraged to study and develop those tasks and habits that allowed an easy passage to the educated society. At Isaac Last's school, Hardy began his acquaintance with Latin and finally with Virgil, a writer he would love throughout his life. Hardy proved a diligent student, winning prizes, and began his life-long habit of self-education. At sixteen he left school to be apprenticed to a Dorchester architect, John Hicks. This was to be the beginning of another life-long interest – Gothic architecture. This period was marked by introduction to new ideas and philosophies through association with his genial and well-read employer and fellow-workers. Thus, Hardy's first steps into the real world were marked by a peculiar bi-polarity. As he continued to live at Lower Bockhampton, he lived in a world of shepherds and ploughmen in a hamlet where modern improvements were still regarded as wonders. Yet, he worked during the day in a world fast changing under the impact of modernization – a world that had already advanced to railways, telegraphs and daily papers from London. Thus, in the course of a single day, Hardy experienced the

timeless unchanging world of rural England, and, during work, the rapidly changing modern one that not only challenged the older world, but also some of the beliefs that sustained it. Hardy's special ability to cross the barriers of time, his fluid passage through past and present in his poems of the past, owes definitely to this experience at juggling between two time zones as it were.

The winds of change sweeping Dorchester also brought a more important effect on Hardy's ideas and beliefs. At Dorchester, his friendship with a Horace Moule, the son of a local clergyman, acquainted Hardy with the possibilities of modern thought, particularly of the more radical kind. Hardy was initiated to Darwin's *The Origin of Species* by Moule. It was again Moule who brought to Hardy's notice *Essays and Reviews*, a powerful and influential collection of polemical studies published in 1860 by a group of dissident clergymen and radical dons which questioned the very fundamental dogmas of the Church of England. Thus, this juncture, Hardy's youthful pieties faced a struggle, a losing struggle in some areas. The boy who had taught Sunday school and had once entertained ideas of entering the church now lay abandoned by the maturer Hardy. Although Hardy never revised his ideas again on the

subject, he was throughout to feel keenly the loss of the consolation and solace that his youthful beliefs could have brought him. Mid-nineteen century was a period witnessing the flourishing of the Higher Criticism which had begun to undermine Christian beliefs by demanding the same use of reason and evidence to judge sacred history as were used to study secular history.

Tossed and torn by the new beliefs that Hardy took, given his characteristic earnestness, with complete sincerity and seriousness, Hardy would often look back to a time more placid and to beliefs of the past that were comforting [“The Oxen” (403), “The Impercipient” (44)]. Hence, these early years of Hardy, with their rich and complex experiences, in a sense, carried the germ of that special perspective where we discern the confluence of the modern and the traditional, where, on the one hand he is fully with the new, yet he is loathe to part with the old. His habit of looking at the past while not ignoring the present, owes much to this. From this very attitude apparently developed that special perspective where Hardy views a man’s life in its entirety with its complex historical connection intact – he can look far back into his past and see it as a part of the present. This was especially true with regard to himself and his personal history. Noorul

Hasan says in his book, *Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination* (1982, p.178):

In Hardy nostalgia is a major source of discovery and creation ... It is an answer to the inexorable mutability of life of which Hardy is all too aware. In a world where nothing abides, memory is the only instrument of integrity and continuity.¹⁸

Thus, to sum up, Hardy's overwhelming interest in time and its steady recurrence in his poetry often as a major theme or as a suggestive undercurrent stems from certain circumstantial influences around him. Hence certain biographical facts require consideration in order to understand Hardy's strong links with the past. Most importantly, the fact that Hardy's strongest links were with the people from his youth – his family and his wife, Emma, with whom he shared a tumultuous relationship that grew from passion to indifference to a renewal of love after her death – a relationship spanning over thirty years of his life. Secondly, Dorset was remote as far as keeping pace with the changes taking place in much of England was concerned. Dorset culture remained unchanged while the world around rapidly changed chiefly due to industrializations and the consequent social changes. Ironically, yet another important factor for Hardy's characteristic yearning for the past, were the changes that he himself underwent. That is to say, Hardy's exposure to the 'modern'

philosophies of his time and to the new world of ideas through his habit of self-education brought about certain revision of ideas and perspective. While Hardy never changed his new formed ideas, yet he would always yearn for the solace he could not allow himself and look back in time for the solace brought by the old beliefs and ideas that stood forever rejected by him. The ways of an earlier world were to always charm him with its absence of tentativeness and doubt over and above the other drawbacks of the period that he vocally voiced. Lastly, the fact that during the period of his apprenticeship with Hicks, which also was the period of the budding of his literary ambitions (strengthened by his friendship with a local poet, William Barnes) was a period where he commuted daily between Dorchester and Bockhampton – between a world coming alive, though very slowly, and one that had frozen time. This experience must surely have helped develop the ease with which he traveled back in personal time without losing awareness of the present.

G.M. Young's comments (*Victorian Essays*, 1962) that Hardy's poetic voice in the poems of the past is the voice of an old man looking back passively with nostalgia. These poems, he feels, reflect 'the tone of an aging man watching the fire die down, and thinking of

old tunes, old memories and moments remembered at railway stations and lodging-houses; sunsets at the end of London streets, water coming over the weir, the rain on the downs. But what we hear is the voice of an age, of a generation carried beyond sight of its old landmarks, and glazing doubtfully down an illimitable vision, of cosmic changes endlessly proceeding, and ephemeral suffering endlessly to be renewed. Twilight was coming on: 'an evening chill was in the air'.¹⁹

Young's characterization of the voice of the age is an oft repeated, popular description of the obsession of several of the writers' preoccupation with the past. A rapidly changing scenario created an atmosphere of uncertainty: old ways, old customs, old beliefs stood challenged by their world of cataclysmic change. And many of them gave way and died quietly, disappearing forever from the fabric of English ethos. The only safe, certain 'landmarks' were those of the old ways, which now existed only in memory of the old and the not so young. Hardy's rural England as we have seen, is the English countryside of his youth, which when he began to recall in his poems, had already begun to disappear. His revisiting the earlier England, then is like a visit to a fabled land which as he moves ahead

in time, appear increasingly more wholesome, attractive and pleasant. Much of the belief could quite as easily be the direct outcome of pure nostalgia.

Noorul Hasan in his *Thomas Hardy and the Sociological Imagination* (London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1982) emphasizes this very aspect of the nineteenth century imagination: '... There can be little doubt, however, that for better or worse, the English countryside had entered a new phase of civilization in the nineteenth century, and consequently, there came about in this century an increasingly nostalgic quest for a lost rural identity ... it is so central a consciousness in much of the most remarkable literature and social thinking of the century that it assumes the pervasiveness and force of a vital tradition. Nineteenth century literature is, therefore, not a pastoral tradition but a correlate of contemporary structures of feeling ... in many such communities, for instance, the past persisted in the most irrational, historically unaccountable manner'. (p.201)

But Hardy had another, more cogent impetus that set him off so often on a journey to the past. His personal crisis arising out of his rejection of religion left him even more vulnerable to the onset of the 'evening chill in the air'. He considered himself basically as

'churchy', meaning by that perhaps that he was deeply aware of an responsive to, all the other aspects of the church's role within the community, save the theological beliefs it preached. The truth and validity of the religious tenets were rejected for all times by him, but he always respected the value of these beliefs at the individual and community level. The value which he, however, now denied himself; although, paradoxically, his memory of the days of more assurance and solace, did not allow him to forget. Hence, his frequent journeys to his past, to a time of greater assurance, and less tentativeness.

Philip Davis in *Memory and Writing* (Liverpool, 1982) is alluding to the same feature that other writers of the 19th century too showed in their writing, when he says that the repudiation of the ethics and values supported by Christianity gave rise to a certain vacuum to which the century responded by an overwhelming concern with personal memory: 'I have been arguing that the nineteenth century concern with personal memory is an aspect of an a response to, secularization. The continuing need for a witness; the need for something abiding and returning that will not let life become a matter of mere drifting or forsaking; an internal voice reminding one of the weight and seriousness of a life which otherwise one takes too easily

as simply one's own affair – there are some of the post religious functions of human memory by means of which the individual cannot escape considering his own life at some distance from himself' (p.337)

Hence, the relevance of the past to Hardy lies in the fact that it helped him feel that life was, after all, not without importance – it was more than just 'a matter of mere drifting'.

Coupled with this was Hardy's belief that every man should make a philosophy of life from his experiences: 'After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: *let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience.* He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given him by his surroundings.' (*Life*, p.310) Such an attitude must necessarily take with tremendous seriousness the smallest of his experiences as well as what he sees and hears around him. Thus, his own life, his past, the community and environment around him can never sink to the level of the incidental

in importance. They are relevant and reinforce the importance of the past to him.

As Philip Davies continues, 'where certain beliefs were no longer possible and where society replaced those beliefs only with so much cant and lip service, it was the duty of every man to make as honest and coherent account as he could of what his memory told him of the life he at least, had led and known. This manifest individualism was not a mark of pride so much as a confession of near despairing loneliness and uncertainty. (p.351)

Of course, the apparent self-absorption was sometimes misunderstood as T.S. Eliot did in his famous stricture against Hardy for his poems of 'self expression' in his essay "Thomas Hardy" in *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936). Eliot's remark is characteristically insightful but he was perhaps temperamentally unsuited to comprehend a mind like Hardy's which, even in its most personal of utterances, could maintain an objective, scientific distance. His every memory of past vulnerability became and opportunity productive of wisdom, although the wisdom came far too long after the event.

Quoting Robert A. Nisbet [*The Sociological Tradition* (London, Heinemann, 1973)] Noorul Hasan in his *Thomas Hardy and*

the Sociological Imagination says 'A degree of nostalgia is built into the very structure of nineteenth century sociology'. Hasan further explains, 'In Hardy nostalgia is a major source of discovery and creation. ... It is an answer to the inexorable mutability of life of which Hardy is all too aware. In a world where nothing abides memory is the only instrument of integrity and continuity'. (p.201)

The nostalgia pervading Hardy's poems, however, is not sentimental, nor undertaken for the mere pleasure of 'self-expression'. Hasan finds Hardy's nostalgia 'genuine and health' as opposed to the 'self-defeating, sentimental yearning'. 'Hardy's nostalgia is genuine and healthy nostalgia, not a self-defeating sentimental yearning. It is an involuntary memory which can call up significant images, not romantic memorializing, which issues in dead pictures. As such it is a corrective to purely rational perception' (p.201). In fact Hardy's capacity for involuntary memory is so impressive in its focus and clarity of vision, that Tom Paulin (*Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception, 1975*)²⁰ actually uses a specific term 'eidetic' for it. By it Paulin refers to the special ability of Hardy of allowing the past to overtake him so absolutely that the visions seem to actually, physically rise in front of him so that he can 'see' it as one

would a photograph. Explaining the term Paulin refers to a poem 'After a Romantic Day' as containing a description of how the eidetic image is formed:

The Railway bore him through
 An earthen cutting out from a city:
 There was no scope for view,
 Through the frail light shed by a slim young moon
 Fell like a friendly tune.
 Fell like a liquid ditty,
 And the blank lack of any charm
 Of landscape did no harm.
 The bald sleep cutting, rigid, rough
 And moon-lit, was enough
 For poetry of place: its weathered face
 Formed a convenient sheet whereon
 The visions of his mind were drawn.

These last two lines contain the essence of Hardy's memory manifesting through eidetic images. Just about any occasion or event can initiate the involuntary memory. The past vision then overtakes the present, flooding the scene totally so that Hardy can see it even as a participant all over again. The past then projects itself like a clear vision onto a search and for the moment be transformed to the present. Fusing of the past the present Hardy can then project it as a complex experience out of time. "Logs on the Hearth" (433), "Rome: On the Palatine" (68), "In Front of a Landscape" (246), are some of the poems where memory issues forth in the form of such 'eidetic'

images. There is immediacy in these vibrant recollections which are indeed a far cry from the 'dead pictures' of the 'memorialisings' of the nostalgic memory of most other writers.

However, Young's contention that Hardy is like an old man passively remembering happier, youthful days is not very accurate. Hardy's remembering is never passive "... Remember,/I begin again, as if it were new,/A day of like date I once lived through', he declares in "The Joys of Memory" (367). He actively participates all over again in the experience remembered; and he remains a participant rather than a passive observer.

Moreover, Hardy takes on a variety of guises. Although often he is able to remember the past with calmness, recognizing the 'old landmarks' serenely, there are numerous other occasions where the recalling is undertaken by him or his dramatic persona, in a mood of guilt ["The Revisitation" (152), "The Upbraiding" (486)], remorse ["The Trampwoman's Tragedy" (153), "The Sacrilege" (331)] or self-discovery ["Survival" (662)]. He presents himself as an active seeker in his "Poems of Pilgrimage". His stance there is of one not only discovering newer geographical boundaries, but also of a workaday philosopher using his imagination creatively to push back the

boundaries of common perception and re-order the old facts into a new meaning. Thus he refashions the earlier understanding into a fresh, new perception [“Shelley’s Skylark”(66), “Rome: At the Pyramid of Ciestus near the grave of Shelly and Keats”(71)]. In fact, Paul Zietlow says Hardy ‘... presents himself not only as one who sits by the fire meditating but also as a lonely wanderer across the landscape, haunting pathetically, futilely, the old environs, while haunted himself by pursuing, inescapable ghosts from the past. He frequently appears not merely as an observer but as a victim – a victim of time and change, of natural forces beyond his control, or of human understandings. Sometimes he appears as a victim of himself, in poems expressing both explicitly and implicitly his sense of guilt of past sufferings of himself and others. He is often not merely an old man gazing and remembering, but an old man burnt out, wrung dry by suffering, eager for death, haunted by memories he cannot keep down, struggling quietly to hold sorrow at a distance. And finally he sometimes sees himself as one whose life history evidence a clear structure of ineffaceable positive meaning’. (p.169)²¹

Towards the gradual disintegration of a sustaining community, Hardy’s attitude is one of regret, but typically counter-balanced by his

awareness of its unavailability. The prospect of a social change seemed to stir in Hardy a threat of personal displacement leading finally to a presence in his works of a mixture of approval and anxiety towards this awesome reality. As Hardy grew older and was confronted with more concrete evidence of social change, he seemed to feel the need to hold on to the unchanging world of Dorset, the unchanging world of his youth. Hence, he reached back into his memories of the past. But Hardy's reaching back into the past – his past as well as the past of the community and the place – was never an attempt to escape the present. As a countryman he was certainly familiar with the rhythms of life and the passage of time that constitute it. At the same time he was surrounded by evidence that taught him that Nature replenishes and renews through the cyclical rhythm of time where seasons, flowers all die only to give way to a repeat which was like a return. The past, in effect, continually renewed itself into the present. Hardy's reaching into the past is thus an attempt to hold time without freezing it – to continually weld the present to the past and forge a single whole of it.

Thus, during a visit to the ancient Roman ruins, he feels the past has come alive. It confirms his belief that there are no barriers in

time. Standing in the midst of the Roman ruins, he feels this visit has
 "... blended pulsing life with lives long done,/Till time seemed
 fiction, past and present one." ["Rome: On the Palatine"(68)]

END NOTES

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4. *Ibid.*, p.285.
5. *Ibid.*, p.285.
6. *Ibid.*, p.444.
7. *Ibid.*, p.377.
8. *Ibid.*, p.310.
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11. Creighton, T.R.M. (ed.). *Poems of Thomas Hardy: New Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1974, Introduction, p.ix).
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13. *Ibid.*
14. Howe, Irving. *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Collier Books, 1973).
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16. *Ibid.*, p.163.
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18. Hasan, N. *Thomas Hardy: The Sociological Imagination* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1982, p.178).
19. Young, G.M. *Victorian Essays*, ed. W.D. Handcock (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).
20. Paulin, T. *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (London: Macmillan, 1975, p.121).
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CHAPTER-II

THE PAST AS TIME PAST

The dominant theme of Hardy's poetry is of 'exhumed experience', or memory of experience. Hardy possessed a remarkable memory and power of total recall that enabled him to draw on his early experiences again and again for the subject of his poems. About this unusual gift Hardy has this to say: "I have a faculty (possibly not uncommon) for burying my emotions in my heart or brain for forty years and exhuming it at that end of time as fresh as when interred."¹

Thus, on several occasions during a poetic career of nearly six decades, Hardy was to write poems whose origins lay in real life, in actual experiences of early life. One such remarkable example is "He Never Expected Much" (1873) written in his eighty-sixth birthday, where a childhood experience is 'exhumed' after a period of nearly eighty years and presented with the vividness of an immediate experience.

However, it is seldom that Hardy is able to view these past experiences in an attitude of pure nostalgia without making the past the base from which to critically appraise the present. As mentioned

in the introductory chapter, the basic pattern of Hardy's poetry of personal time is of 'Then and Now'. This is very much of a piece with what Hynes² calls the basic 'antinomial' nature of Hardy's poetry whereby special aspects are highlighted by the presence of a contrasting situation placed alongside it. The remembrances of the past stand out against the contrast provided by a 'now' or a 'later' period.

However, although a modest number, there are poems where he does suspend, however briefly, this objective, analytical and ironical approach. These few poems are important because they indicate that in Hardy's attitude to the past there does exist a mode of perception where he is content to see the past purely as time that is past. He makes remarkably little or no attempt to place the remembered experience alongside his present for the sake of ironical contrast. In them he appears content to accept the linear progress of Time. He remembers them simply because at the time of their occurrence they had so impressed him so as to be 'interred' in his 'heart or brain' and their exhumation many years later helps him go back in time with fond nostalgia.

In Hardy the perceptions of Time and Space are both closely linked as well as quite divergent. Hence, while on the one hand Time stretches out beyond the bounds of historical past, Space is mostly limited to the cramped, precisely defined boundaries of his homeland, Dorset. Yet, the two are linked and interwoven through the experiences and recollections of the poet and the other local inhabitants.

In "The One We Knew" (227), it is Hardy's grandmother Head, a local woman, whose memory of events of long ago, narrated to the eager, raptly attentive young minds around her, not only brings alive the past, but keeps it so.

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers –
 We seated around her knees –
 She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one who remembers,
 But rather as one who sees.

She seemed one left behind of a band gone distant
 So far that no tongue could hail:
 Past things retold were to her as things existent,
 Things present but as a tale.

Her remembrance of the past goes beyond nostalgia, beyond mere recollection, to become a perception a seeing, for she is 'not ... one who remembers/But one who sees' the past. Thus, while not in denial of the passage of time, she can look behind her to a time in the past

and still be able to distinctly view that event from where she is now, as though the event had remained frozen in time while she moved on in time. Thus while she recounts those events from the past to the children gathered around her, investing them with endurance and life of current happenings. Her listeners sense this: her recollections, gradually begin to feel a part of their experiences too – as if they too had shared the actual, original events. This legacy of memories passed unto the children serves to bridge the generations and events both important and trivial, as well as manners, customs, mores are kept alive and transmitted to the future through the mode of memory.

The history of the specific space, i.e., place and its people, become an inheritance that is both deeply influential as well as a controlling and restricting factor in so far as such shared, common memories serve to separate the group from the rest, knit them into a oneness by making them distinct from the rest. It makes for the peculiar rootedness and loyalty to the place of one's birth, to the people of one's youth, it creates the unquestioning and unchanging attachment to the soil of one's past and finally that is the cause of that attachment to the past that we see in Hardy.

Hardy remembers that “her gaze, as she spoke of things gone distant/So far that no tongue could hair”, were fixed on the ‘embers’, remnants of a roaring bright fire, yet with warmth and glow enough to draw close and warm those ‘seated round her knees’. She, as well, is described as ‘one left behind’ by earlier times and mates. Yet, it is through the medium of her memory that the ‘dead themes’ come alive to become more than just a recounting fact. They gain sufficient vigour to actually intrude into the present and undermine its impact: “Past things retold were to her as things existent/Things present but a tale.” This memory from Hardy’s childhood ‘exhumed’ after a great passage of time, recounted with the clarity and detail of scenes still visible, forms a point of confluence of the past and present for Hardy.

Interestingly, now through his personal memories of his childhood, he revives the ghosts of what were themselves memories of even earlier unseen times. They now became part of Hardy’s memories and thus give life and length to what were themselves originally the girlhood memories of his dead grandmother. Thus, his present encapsules in it the times gone by – past that crosses the bounds of personal past and does go far beyond that to assume the shape of a legacy or inheritance for the community. His present

moves forward carrying the sum of memories of times even before the start of his personal history.

A poem that touches upon a similar theme is "Places" (293).

NOBODY says: Ah, that is the place
 Where chanced, in the hollow of years ago,
 What none of the Three Towns care to know –
 The birth of a little girl of grace –
 The sweetest the house saw, first or last;
 Yet it was so
 On that day long past.

Nobody thinks: There, there she lay
 In a room by the Hoe, like the bud of a flower,
 And listened, just after the bedtime hour,
 To the stammering chimes that used to play
 The quaint Old Hundred-and-Thirteenth tune
 In Saint Andrew's tower
 Night, morn, and noon.

Nobody calls to mind that here
 Upon Boterel Hill, where the waggoners skid,
 With cheeks whose airy flush outbid
 Fresh fruit in bloom, and free of fear,
 She cantered down, as if she must fall
 (Though she never did),
 To the charm of all.

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
 That nobody else's mind calls back,
 Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
 And a presence more than the actual brings;
 To whom to-day is beneaped and stale,
 And its urgent clack
 But vapid tale.

Plymouth, March 1913

One of the poems in a series of twenty one poems, "Poems of 1912-1913" – written after the sudden death of his wife, Emma, this poem too speaks of a past and a memory that though not experienced by him personally, has become a part of his past and his memory. Emma's birth, her listening in childhood to the clock in her room, her bold and carefree cantering on horseback down the steep 'Boterel Hill' in her youth (at this stage of her life, Hardy had entered her life and the memory is surely also his own of her daring horsemanship) are events that have been so often narrated, that they have now become his memories. Thus, these 'places' are dear to him, he says in the poem, because of their association with the person who meant so much to him for so long. While they may be significant to nobody else, these events from Emma's past are so vivid in his memory that they appear to him to have a 'savour' that his present lacks, and have a life and 'presence' more than his actual present. His mind relives the times that he never experienced personally, but which have become such a vital part of his memories, that he confesses that by comparison 'today is beneaped and stale/And its urgent clack but a vapid tale'. Hence, like "One We Know" (227), this poem too emphasizes the important role communicating and sharing play.

Memories cross the barriers of individuals and time within the context of a close relationship.

Similarly, in “Old Furniture” (428) Hardy uses the mode of memory to travel back in time to a period much before his personal history. He uses the ‘relics of householdry’ – heirlooms that ‘date from their mother’s mother’ to imagine and so relive times that he could not possibly have known personally. He sees the ‘hands of the generations/That owned each shiny familiar thing’ and in a fantastic imagery has visions of the earlier and even earlier owners of those relics handling them: ‘Hands behind hands, growing paler and paler’. He sees the former owner’s ‘foggy fingers’ move to ‘set the minutes right’ on the ‘clock’s dull dial’; he sees fingers ‘dancing’ on the old violin ‘just over the strings by the nut’ and the bows receding and advancing as it produces a melody in ‘airy quivers’; above all, he clearly sees a face lit up and gradually melt into darkness as he imagines the tinder box picked up, a match struck, lit, and blown off.

Memory is the mode used to converge time, to hold the past in the present. “One We Know” (227), “Places” (293) and “Old Furniture” (428) show the poet’s ability to evoke memories of times he has not personally experienced. His imagination enabled him to

forge a link with the past through the memories of others which he has made his own. The past therefore is not his past but that of others and the time he goes back to are well before his lifetime, sometimes, generations before him. Therefore, his memory and imagination together help him to break the barriers of time and individuality. He 'exhumes' the memories of the lives other than his, of lives before him, and succeeds in converging the past and present as so much of his past is interwoven in his present.

Yet another poem that displays a presence of a similar past, though in a perception that is chiefly romantic, where Hardy speaks of a time before his own is "A Church Romance" (211). It deals with the oft-repeated, much-loved subject of the Hardy parents' first meeting and falling in love. The poet retells, with the graphic detail of a present happening, bringing to it an immediacy, the romance of the first meeting – she at the pew and he at the musician's gallery, and the instant attraction between the two. The details, lovingly narrated years later by her, are treasured and kept alive in the memories of the children so that several decades later Hardy recalls in his poems those very details of time and atmosphere, as if they were part of his personal experience. The poem then moves on to recount the events

subsequent to that period of the story that occupies within the poet's own living memory: he recalls their times much later, when after 'long years thence Age had scared Romance', i.e., when age and custom had dulled the fire though not the affection. Then, "... at some attitude of his or glance/That gallery scene would break upon her" – the past would replace the present and she would see him again, with the clarity and detail of a vision, as he was then – "... as a minstrel, ardent, young and trim,/Bowling 'New Sabbath' over 'Mount Ephraim'." At an instant of time, the past could be recalled at will to replace the present.

The poem throws light on an interesting aspect of a relationship: its moments in the present are buttressed by its own special past. In effect, Hardy attempts to show here that a personal relationship of some depth, does carry its own history so that its moments are complexes of now and then. For all times to come, Jemima Hardy's view of her husband will carry the legacy of her first sight of him. Memory will ensure that her perspective will be a complex of the present and the past "And long years thence, when Age had scared Romance,/At some old attitude of his or glance/That gallery-scene would break upon her mind/With him as minstrel,

ardent, young and trim". Hence, her perspective in the present must necessarily be different from those of others. Thus, if common, shared memory unites a group, a couple, a community, by the same token, it also segregates them from the others.

"The Roman Road" (218) examines the poet's personal past in relation to the general past or the memory of the group, the society or the place. If in "The One We Knew" (227) Hardy's stance was that individual memory is a mode of keeping alive through time the legacy of a historical past, then in "The Roman Road", he uses childhood memory to demonstrate that a personal memory may even exist which may have little to do with the historical past. This basic contrast is the motif of the poem; his own, very personal memory is so vastly different, in fact, in complete contrast to what other "thoughtful men" share.

The Roman road running 'straight and across the heath' evokes in the more sensitive and imaginative of the locals, the 'thoughtful men' of the poem, thoughts of the past that lead them to 'delve and measure and compare' the days of 'Now and Then'. Such intent and conjoint memory raises 'visionings on the vacant air' of 'helmed legionaries, who proudly rear/The Eagle as they pace again/The

Roman Road'. The historical past of the road, handed down from the distant past through folk legends and beliefs is today so much a part of the local ethos that they can visualize the 'helmed legionaries', see clearly the eagle-embled pinion fluttering as they proudly 'pace again/The Roman Road' – a shared memory of incidents and personages from beyond their actual personal experience. Memory is handed down through time to become a part of the local ethos and through it, of individual memories.

But the poet's personal memory cuts across this historical past so that for him, the sight of this Roman Road evokes a totally different vision – 'But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire/Haunts it for me'. It is his 'mother's form ...guiding his infant steps' that rises in front of him as he remembers vividly the childhood experience of accompanying his mother through that 'ancient thoroughfare'.

The Roman road, like the memory associated with it, persists through time and change, imbuing the local consciousness with its particular history. Only, occasionally, in a context such as Hardy's here, does a personal experience create a memory of its own. Then, the two, the private and the communal memory, however divergent,

succeed in a co-existence of sorts, though it is clear from his poem that the personal memory retains the foreground.

The association that Hardy has nurtured through life between the road and that particular childhood experience, however, does not deny or nullify the common memory; all it does is add yet another dimension, a personal and particular one, for a specific individual. The poet can understand, and anticipate even, the historical association of others, he is not oblivious of it, but he chooses to dwell on the specific, personal association. To the received tradition, as it were, the poet has added a personal facet.

Hardy travels back years to 'exhume' an experience and present it with the freshness and detail of an immediate event. A childhood experience remembered years later is graphic with details that would belie the passage of years. In "Childhood Among the Ferns" (846) he recalls (though the poem carries no internal evidence, apart from the sophistication of expression and imagery, that this is a poem of recollection) a time in childhood when he had taken shelter from drizzling rain under 'tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly'. At first the rains, falling on his canopy of ferns dripped down the fronds leaving him dry. But as the rain beat harder on his shelter of

ferns, he got a sprinkling yet took delight in pretending to ignore the wet on him. When the rain ceased and the sun came up, he was loath to leave that shelter of the now steamily drying, limp fronds. He experienced then a complete harmony with his surroundings and such a total sense of well-being that he felt he 'could live on here till death' confident about his conclusion that the years ahead could not reveal a better world than his present then. He experiences at that point of time, so early in life, the poem seems to suggest, that fulfillment and contentment in search of which a man might spend his entire life. Hence, he questions, as a man having reached his destination might justly do, the very relevance of the future experience and years: 'Why should I have to grow to a man's estate/And this afar-noised world perambulate?'

The significant feature of this poem, written after an impressive gap of time between the childhood experience and its exhumation in this poem, is the assurance of having reached the final goal at the start of his journey of life. The irony is clear: the fulfillment and contentment he had hoped to use his life to strive for were already reached, however briefly, when merely a child. The man of mature years, with a life rich with experience, reflection and success behind

him, remembers this childhood experience not as mere nostalgia, or as an example of childish naiveté, but as ephiphany, a moment of unequivocal truth. Even while so young, Hardy's aims and goals were apparently very clearly defined, and he did not waver from it through life, the poem's tone of something like smugness seems to suggest. It is with a sense of wonder, if anything, that he recalls not just the sense of contentment but also the sagacity of the child.

The really noteworthy aspect of "A Childhood Among the Ferns" (846) is this that this is poem of the memory of sensations and feelings. A very ordinary childhood incident which is externally almost a non-event dealing with a child sheltering from the rain under the ferns, is transformed by the focus on the sensations and deep contentment experienced by him then. The vivid, graphic visual details of the incident (e.g. the damp steam rising out of the drying fronds) by showing the contrast between the wet world outside and snugly ensconced child under the canopy of huge ferns serves to emphasize the contentment experienced. Years later, Hardy is able to remember vividly that contentment and sense of satisfaction.

Memory of sensation again, this time the sensation of taste, is the subject of a simple lyric, "The Pat of Butter" (786):

We tasted – all so yellow –
 Those butter pats, cool and mellow!
 Each taste I still remember, though
 It was so long ago.

From the above two poems it becomes clear that it is not exclusively the visual aspect of an experience that remains in the memory: sensory, tactile impressions as well can remain deeply buried in the mind to resurface many years after the event.

Despite the nostalgia pervading most of the poems occasioned by personal experiences at Upper Bockhampton, a few of the poems have an underlying grimness that cannot be ignored. A poem popular with anthologists, “The Self Unseeing” (135) is one such poem. It recounts with vivid detail the old house and a specific occasion of domestic happiness. The man, probably Hardy’s father, is at the violin, the dancing child is probably Hardy himself. The mother is by the fireside, gazing contentedly – her very contentment warming them up, like the warm glow of the fire by her side, and wordlessly urging them to excel, so that ‘he’ bows his strings ‘higher and higher’ and the child’s passionate dancing reaches almost a frenzy where he feels he ‘danced in a dream’. This memory of the scene of domestic bliss is undercut by Hardy’s awareness that though ‘Blessings emblazoned that day’ they were truly unaware of the greatness of the moment –

'But we were looking away'. With the same grim nostalgia he remembers vividly too those occasions where he has come face to face with harsher realities, although he has shown towards them the remarkable calmness and acceptance of the countrymen that he basically was. "Seen by the Waits" (325) is a recollection of an event during what apparently is caroling at Christmas ('Through snowy woods and shady/We went to play a tune ... By the light of the Christmas moon;). The lady of the house is described as a 'lonely manor-lady'. In the midst of their singing, they look up to see the reflection of the lady in the mirror 'airy dancing' in her nightdress alone in the room, thinking herself unobserved. His attention is caught by this unusual, almost unreal sight – he finds it a 'strange phantasmal sight'. Only later they learn that the lady's joy was a private, secret response to the news of the death of her errant husband. Hardy must have been struck by the difference between appearance and reality, between the public and private faces of people. Experiences like these, providing vital glimpse into the human condition, must surely have been the shaping force behind the non-judgemental, compassionate yet sharp, keen perception so characteristic of him.

A darker memory of the past forms the theme of “At the Wicket Gate” (375). The ‘church-chiming’ indicates that the general populace is congregated for service and all is quiet and deserted outside – ‘no one was nigh’, till this ‘loneness’ is broken by the arrival of the three: ‘Her father, she and I’. He then narrates, with remarkable reticence, yet in an evocative, pensive style, the story of a major emotional crisis of near tragic proportions. Their secret and tragic meeting stands in contrast to the sheer mundaneness of the sudden flow of people from the church. ‘Amid them/We parted for good’, he says, mixing and merging with the crowd to go their separate ways. Looking back at that occasion of sadness, Hardy is struck by the irony emerging from the difference between appearance and reality: amidst the humdrum routine existence, posing as one of the crowd, were the three who had come to a momentous and tragic decision that would change the course of their lives – as also by the fact that:

Of the churchgoers
 No single one knew
 What a play was played under their eyes there
 As thence we withdrew.

The grimness of these recollections are replaced by a lighter touch as he wistfully, even playfully, remembers certain other times of his boyhood and youth. In “To Louisa in the Lane” (822) Hardy travels

back scores of years to his boyhood to remember a young classmate, 'Louisa', whom he had met out of class one evening in the street but had been too shy to speak to. Years later, as an old man, he remembers the occasion and bids her meet him in the same lane:

Meet me again as at that time
In the hallow of the lane;
I will not pass as in my prime.

His attitude to the past is a little complex here. While he makes no attempt to deny the reality of passing time ('I will not pass as in my prime'), yet his travel back to his early youth is undertaken as if everything else is frozen in time. The scene of the episode is as if still as it was then, the lane exactly the same so that if he could only go back there physically, they could continue from where they left of. This is the same attitude to the past that is more clearly stated in the deeply moving poem about the tragic couple in "Beyond the Last Lamp" (257). Hardy remembers a certain wet evening when he lived in London. During one of his regular evening walks beyond Tooting Commons, beyond the last street lamp, he comes across a loitering couple. He knows nothing of them, yet their body language speak of immeasurable sadness:

'Two linked loiterers, wan, downcast'.

He wonders who they are and what their great sorrow might be. Hours later, as he returns, he finds them still lingering, still downcast and still totally oblivious of the rain. Their deep despair is so evident that Hardy is unable to forget them, the evening or their sorrow. Thirty years later he recalls that scene with tender compassion. For him the street, the lovers are as if frozen in time: as long as his memory remains, the street, the couple, the rain will forever exist together: 'Without those comrades there at tryst/Creeping slowly, creeping sadly/That lone lane does not exist'.

Hardy's memory works by strong association. Thus the incident described above of the 'mysterious tragic pair' had made such a deep impression on him that the whole incident – the landscape, the time, the rain and the pair – are fused together to make one complete experience. However, amongst his more light-hearted recollections like "Louisa in the Lane" (822), is a poem from his early youth "To Lizbie Brown" (94). He remembers a young woman who had caught his romantic fancy and he recounts with great pleasure his still-fresh memory of her physical charms: her smiles, her singing, her arch look, her 'bay-red' hair. Wistfully, he remembers her marrying

and moving away from his life. There is mild regret that he did not carry his infatuation to its logical conclusion:

But Lizbie Brown,
I let you slip;
Shaped not a sign;
Touched never your lip
With lip of mine,
Lost Lizbie Brown!

But the entire recollection is one where the regret, though genuine, is not dark or passionate as it generally is with Hardy, but just lightly touched upon. Both “Louisa in the Lane” (822) and “To Lizbie Brown” (94) show Hardy looking back with pleasure at a time of youthful infatuations with only just a mock-serious hint of regret at missed opportunity. “Faint Heart at a Railway Train” (516) carries the same wistful, but basically pleasurable recollection.

The poem “Days to Recollect” (792) presents two contrasting occasions from the past – the first ‘that day in Fall’, and the second ‘that sad November’ in a manner so characteristic of Hardy’s ironic perspective that though the remembrance of ‘that sad November’ is evidently painful, yet the joy of the earlier recollection of a day of togetherness of ‘that day in Fall’ serves to off-set or minimize the tragic undertone of the later memory.

Similarly, despite the concluding lines of each stanza's hint of the subsequent dark, sad days, the exuberant joy pervading the poem "A Bygone Occasion" (557) makes this a poem of joyful remembrance. The grimness of the lines concluding each stanza – two lines that indicate a less happy present from which the bygone occasion is recalled – only serves to heighten, by ironic contrast, the joy of a memory of a time of youth, love and happiness. A similar attitude can be seen in "Logs on the Hearth" (433). The poem is dedicated to the memory of a beloved sister, Mary Hardy, who, the poem tells, had been a friend more than a sibling. The poem is in 'memory of a sister', the sub-title declares, but it is as much in the memory of the apple tree of their youth which now lies cut in logs, burning in the hearth. Each fork, bole and bark of this, erstwhile tree is familiar as it lies burning now. However, it is not the regret at the time that is past that pervades the poem, but the sense of pleasure at the memory of the joyful camaraderie between the siblings.

These poems of his youth, dealing with subjects that are dear to him primarily because they are viewed from such a distance of time, show Hardy's basic acceptance of the irreversibility of time. He does, however, understand the importance of memory in giving life and

length to events and people from his past. The poems discussed earlier, viz. “One we Knew” (227), “The Roman Road” (218), “A Church Romance” (211) bear testimony to the fact that events and people even from the dim past are kept alive through the mode of memory: ‘The memory of you lived in me’, he says in “The Clock of the Years” (481). It is a source of much of life’s pleasures, as the poems discussed have shown, “Joys of Memory” (367) has Hardy admitting clearly that as each day dawns, he remembers ‘a day of like date’ from the past and spends ‘hour by hour’ relieving the remembered times – ‘old hours re-greeting’. Events, sensations and emotions are reawakened or ‘exhumed’ and he experiences them yet again with the same intensity:

‘... bring they must/Such throbs as at first’.

Hence, running through all his poems of the past is Hardy’s acknowledgement of the importance of memory. “Old Furniture” (428) demonstrates Hardy’s awareness that through imagination the past can be brought alive to become a part of the living present. The poem centers around the sense of connectedness with the past that Hardy experiences whenever he comes across ordinary household

items passed on to him from the earlier generation: 'relics of householdry/That date from the day of their mother's mothers'.

In each stanza he pictures other times, other hands handling the family heirlooms now in his possession. He visualizes the fingers caressing the knobs and curls of the old furniture, delicately adjusting the hands of the old clock, or lovingly fingering the strings of the viol, or a face quickly lit up by the momentary flash of the tinder box. The objects are items of daily use and their polished and time-worn appearance takes Hardy to the times past when they were part of his ancestors' lives. He pictures generation upon generation of them – 'hands behind hands growing paler and paler' – all members of the same family ('Its shape the same'). Through these items he goes back in time and forges a link with the past, seeing his own life as a continuity.

Just as he did in "One We Knew" (227) Hardy shows here too that memory can bond generations together and create tradition. Hardy also shows that memory need not always be of experiences personally undergone – his grandmother's stories ("One we Knew"), his parents' love story ["A Church Romance" (211)] and here in "Old Furniture" (428), his memories are of times he could never have

known. Thus, imagination creates memory that helps link other earlier lives, earlier times with the present and awakens an individual to the awareness that his life and his time are not in isolation. Each carries forward with them the past.

The majority of the poems of nostalgia show Hardy generally accepting the flow of time and making no effort to transcend or freeze time. The poems "Where they Lived" (392) and "Life Laughs Forward" (394) "The Tresses" (404) demonstrate this specially. In each of these poems, the poet or the dramatic persona ("The Tresses") looks back at a past with the awareness that the remembered perfection and happiness of that time cannot be found or even repeated in the present. There is no rancour or bitterness at this realization: just calm acceptance.

"Where they Lived" (392) describes, as the title suggests, the surrounding area of a former dwelling. Its 'dishevelled' and unkempt condition is described in detail while all the while he remembers its former look of elegance suggesting the health and happiness of the family within. Its companion piece, "Life Laughs Onward" (394) goes on to describe, in a similar vein, the changes the years have brought upon 'an old abode' – a former home. His observation of the changes leads him to realize that Life has indeed 'laughed and moved

on unsubdued'. The only comment he offers at the very end is a terse "Twas well" signifying an acceptance of the passage of time. It signifies as well his recognition of change as an integral part of life and of natural law – so that his spontaneous and involuntary 'regretful mood' is no more: it has, as he says, 'died on my tongue'.

The persona in "The Tresses" (404) looks at her limp, grey hair and remembers how beautiful it was, both in damp as well as dry weather, when she was a girl. Here too there is a wistful look behind, but no denial of the changes wrought by time.

Hardy's basic antinomial perspective does make him consider also those events and situations that seem to throw a challenge to time (though, significantly, there are only a handful of such poems). In "Outside the Casement" (626) there is a mild attempt to deny time with the naïve query:

Should we counterfeit
No knowledge of it
And stay the stroke that would blanch and numb?

In a rather bizarre analysis, Hardy proves in "Hereditry" (363) that the hereditary characteristics passing from one generation to the next through time actually does defy time:

I am the family face
Flesh perishes, I live on.

“On a Discovered Curl of Hair” (630) speaks of a curl of hair cut and presented in youth to the love lore poet to ‘abate the misery/Of absentness’. While the rest of the hair succumbs to the ravages of time and turns grey, this one curl remains ‘untouched by time’ and still gleams ‘live brown as in its prime’. It has escaped the clutches of time; indeed it has defeated time.

Similarly, in the “Selfsame Song” (552) it is the song of the bird, like the ‘family face’ of the last poem, that has triumphed time. The bird and the listeners change but the ‘selfsame’ song goes on through generations of birds and hearers, apparently defying time.

“In a Museum” (358) carries the same thought to a more abstract, more philosophical conclusion: the songs of this ‘ancient bird’ are not truly over; somewhere in the ‘Universe unending’ they continue to exist so that time itself begins to appear unreal:

Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice I heard,
In the full-fugued song of the Universe.

Likewise with the kiss [“The Kiss” (401)]. Though an event of long ago, Hardy surmises that though where ‘the kiss is gone none can tell’, yet he believes that

It cannot have died; ...
 Somewhere it pursues its flight,
 One of a long procession of sounds
 Travelling ethereal rounds
 Far from earth's bounds
 In the Infinite.

Thus, despite the far greater number of poems indicating Hardy's acceptance of the flow of time, he does revel, in his true antinomial way, in occupying a seat in the Treasury Bench, as it were, and examining his beliefs from the other, opposite side. Hardy generally does not demonstrate this denial of time evidenced in the above few poems, in his other writings. He is very aware, as a man with such close moorings in the rural way of life might most naturally be, of the flow of time as an integral feature of temporal existence: "The Missed Train" (759) most explicitly states the acceptance of the past as a period that is over as well as implicitly accepts time's forward movement when he says:

Dim wastes of dead years bar away
 The from Now.

The irrevocability of the past is perhaps the reason for Hardy's wistful look backward which he describes as 'That fond, sad retrospective sight' ["Conjecture" (418)]. This acceptance of time's relentless march forward ["Life Laughs Onward" (394)] coupled with

the knowledge of its irrevocability clearly is the foundation of the pensive and evocative poem "Silences" (849). The poet examines and portrays in detail the various grades, types and measures of silences – 'the silence hanging over a corpse or croft, the sudden silence of a ringing belfry after the last peal, the eerie silence of a lonely pond which has been the scene of a recent death by drowning, and last of all, the still silence of a deserted old house where one has been born and reared amide love, laughter and companionship. Describing the last type of silence as the most 'forlorn', he says, though the presence of the past is near palpable for him, yet

It seems no power on earth can waken it
Or rouse its rooms,
Or its past permit
The present to stir a torpor like a tomb.

The past is indeed the past and beyond recall. Overall, Hardy accepts that the flow of time is one directional and non-reversible. He firmly believes

'Nothing backward climbs' and 'twice over it cannot be!'
["A Second Attempt" (720)]

END NOTES

1. Hardy, F.E. *Life*, p.378.
2. Hynes, S. *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p.44).

CHAPTER-III

THE PAST AS PRESENT

An important earlier critic, Samuel Hynes, has attempted to discover a coherent “pattern” in the poetry of Hardy in *The Pattern of Hardy’s Poetry* (1961).¹ Hardy, he says, “saw experience as a configuration of opposites, every event contradicted or qualified by a succeeding event, an infinite sequence of destructive tensions”.² The term he has used to describe this structure is “antinomial” primarily because Hardy is able to see an issue, a circumstance or moment in time against a contrastive background.

Referring to the term best describing the pattern of Hardy’s poetry, Samuel Hynes says ‘I suggest the adopt ... *antinomial* rather than *dialectical*, for two reasons: first, because, although thesis and antithesis are always present in Hardy’s structural patterns, there is rarely anything that could be described as a synthesis; and second, because the term points in passing to an interesting resemblance between Yeats and Hardy in their characteristic structural strategy.’

(p.44)

While the second reason mentioned has little bearing with the subject at hand, the first reason, as mentioned earlier, clearly states the structural pattern as well as explains the superiority of the term 'antinomial' to the term 'dialectical'. Hynes further clarifies the structure: 'One might, generally speaking, say that the pattern is built on the relation of appearance and reality. In many of the poems this is true on a very simple level, as in "A Wife in London" (61) or "Architectural Masks" (130), which contrasts the exteriors of two houses with their occupants. But in more complicated poems the generalization is only valid if we recognize the appearance has its own kind of subjective truth – deluded love is still love – and it is not merely an illusion to be destroyed; or to put it another way, reality is not morally superior to appearance, though it is always more powerful and always destructive'. (p.45) Hynes goes on to give further evidence and explication of the antinomial structure of Hardy's poetry with reference to the several poems that are developed in two parts, each representing the antinomy of the other: 'On the most obvious level, Hardy's antinomial set of mind is evident in his habit of dividing his poems into two parts: in the first part, one term is set up, in the second, its opposite is set against it, and their mutual

antagonisms are ironically, but dispassionately remarked. Often Hardy made the pattern more obvious by using a two-stanza form, or two numbered sections, each devoted to one term of the antinomy, as in "A Merrymaking in Question" (398), "Before and After Summer" (230), "The Coquette and After" (103); the titles of the last two are further indications of the two-part structure, as well as the role time plays in it.

This duality of perspective, this ability to see two often time contrasting aspect of a situation simultaneously gives Hardy's poetry a strong ironic undertone. It is the presence of the antinomial structure and the consequent irony that saves his mainly personal poems from becoming mere "expression of the self".³ At the same time it ensures a non-judgemental attitude with both sides of the argument or situation equally seriously presented while Hardy refuses to develop a bias or to reach a conclusion. Samuel Hynes observes that Hardy offers no resolutions of the 'tensions'; he is instead satisfied to just juxtapose them ironically. It is precisely for this that Hynes suggests 'antinomial' as the term best describing the process. He explains his choice of the term 'antinomial' above the term 'dialectical' because the latter term implies the possibility of synthesis which does not

evolve in Hardy's poems. Hynes describes the antinomial pattern of Hardy's poetry as a composition of:

... thesis usually a circumstance commonly accepted as good (marriage, youth, young love, the reunion of husband and wife) that is set against antithesis (infidelity, age, death, separation) to form an ironic complex which is left unresolved.⁴

While much of Hardy's verse is a poetry of the past emerging out of "that fond, sad retrospective sight" ("Conjecture", 418), the essential antinomial character of his poetry imposes a pattern of Then and Now, whereby one becomes the premise for the explanation of the other. In innumerable poems, the titles themselves declare this pattern: "Boys Then and Now" (875), "Before Life and After" (230), "The Dawn after the Dance" (182), "Former Beauties" (195), "In a Former Resort after Many Years" (666), "The Old Neighbour and New" (640), "Before Marching and After" (502), "Expectation and Experience" (831), "First Sight of Her and After" (361), while yet more poems develop around this theme of contrast between the present and the past. Hardy's dual vision places the past alongside the present achieving through the tension thus created not just ironic contrast but an impressively fluid passage through time in his shuttle between Then and Now.

At the simplest levels of this ironical antinomial structure of Then and Now are the poems where Hardy is content just to place the past alongside the present. Besides an interesting undertone of irony often achieved through this structure, Hardy also achieves an impressively fluid passage through Time. "Boys Then and Now" (875) most clearly demonstrates the placing of an event from the past alongside that of the present to achieve ironic contrast and also demonstrate Hardy's ease at crossing the barriers of time. The poem explains the naïve belief of the protagonist as a child that the same single cuckoo returned at Spring every year with the express purpose of gladdening England and him ('On purpose to please/England and him'). Years later when he recounts this to his young son it elicits from him only a bored yawn and contemptuous comment – 'How foolish Boys were in those days!' Being a Boy of 'Now' he is mature in the ways of the world ('Old already/In life and its ways') in a way his father at his age could not have been. The contrast between the responses of the two boys separated in time by a generation speaks of a changed world. Hardy makes no comment; he allows the contrast between the past and the present to speak for itself.

“Logs on the Hearth” (433) again places the past alongside the present, at times superimposing the pictures of the past on to the moments in the present – a technique used often and with consummate skill by Hardy. The poem is subtitled “A Memory of a Sister”, and was written, along with its companion piece “Molly Gone”, at the death in November, 1915, of a much loved sister, Mary. In “Logs on the Hearth”, the poet is watching the logs of a well recognised apple tree burn at the fire place, and follows the progress of the flames as they gradually consume the logs. He recognises the now burning fork of the tree as that very spot which he would grasp with his hands and then heave his legs slowly unto, in his climb upward. He recognises too a burning bark in the tree by the marks where it had once been ‘pruned, and bled –/Then overgrew the wound’. Superimposed over this scene of the final hours of the tree are the scenes recalled from his childhood. His sister, Mary, is seen as his companion and ‘fellow climber’ who shared joyfully the rough and tumble of his boyish pastimes. He remembers her companionship, their carefree joy and the tree, with wistful fondness. The contrast is clearly structured – the vibrant, joy-filled past stands in stark contrast to the present scene of death and finality of the

burning logs of what was once an abundantly fruitful tree. Tree, sister and carefree joys of his youth are all now sadly dead.

Its companion piece “Molly Gone” (444) uses the same technique, on a similar subject, with similar effect. ‘Molly’ is Hardy’s dead sister, Mary. He remembers each little homely, familiar activity shared and enjoyed with her in the past – the planting of sweet williams and climbing rose in the garden, the singing of songs by her to him in candle-lit evenings when she was ‘in mood and in voice’, the companionable jaunts to places near and far. The departure of such a dear companion from his life brings the chill of perpetual winter to the poet: the message seems to be that the years will henceforth bring no summer for Molly or for him.

He presents a picture of the here and now – the snow laden branches, the ice hard drinking water for the birds and then stands it in apposition to the remembered summer dawns with his sister at the centre; the sight of the full-bloomed and gaily nodding climbing rose is placed alongside memories of the planting and training of the plant. The snow laden winter scene of the present stands in stark apposition to the sun-filled, joy-filled scenes of the past.

“Lodging House Fuchsias (835) uses flowers to explicate the theme of Then and Now. Mrs. Masters, the landlady of this Lodging House was partial to her fuchsias that hung over her narrow garden path. They were ‘higher and broader’ than any other and each ‘passer’ was given a ‘sprinkle bath’ of dews in the morning as they walked under them. She tolerated their ‘pushful ways’ letting them spread thick and lush everywhere, never cutting a pruning but insisting that her visitors ‘tenderly lift the sprays’ that came in their way. That was Then. Now, the morning following her death, the ‘flowering mass’ is mercilessly cut back to allow her coffin room to pass. The irony is quiet and understated; but the irony of the situation is what raises this otherwise mundane subject into a subject of poetry.

“Before Life and After” (230) as the title suggests, is woven around the theme again of Then and Now. The present situation is left unstated as it becomes amply clear that the poet does not need to state what now prevails is the situation contrary to that from the past. It describes what human life once was like – what it has become. Hardy leaves the readers to infer from their own life experiences. Life ‘before’ is described as idyllic:

None suffered sickness, love or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope or heart burnings.

None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

The situation of the 'Now' is totally different, as we all well know, because, as Hardy states 'the disease of feeling germed' and the 'primal rightness took the tinct of wrong'. Hardy's use of contrast and comparison heightens the impact of what he intends to convey as he moves fluidly between the past and the present.

"In an Eweleaze near Wetherbury" (47), the contrast between the past and the present is seen in the changes brought by time in the circumstances around the past. As a young boy he 'danced upon this leaze'. However, the 'the years have gathered grayly' since then and the 'never-happening Time' has succeeded in 'defacing wan and grizzle/The blazon of my prime'. Physical changes are all that time has managed to achieve he says, but these are not what are held up in contrast to the past – They are mere superficial changes while his self has remained unchanged. "I remain what I was then". He is today shaped and guided by the same impulses of his boyhood –

Still I'd go to the world with Beauty
I would laugh with her and sing
I would shun divinest duty
To resume her worshipping.

What stands in contrast to his boyhood experience is the response to Beauty – today ‘she’d scorn my brave endeavour’ and not arouse in him the same contentment and satisfaction it did when he went ecstatic over the scenic beauty of the Eweleaze as a child.

Although he is unwilling to accept the fact, it is obvious that he has himself undergone the changes because of which he perceives his past idol as changed. He insists that despite the superficial physical changes he is unchanged within, his ideals and values remain the same. Yet the admission that Beauty no longer communicates in the same way it did in the past clearly says that, unknown to him, time has used the ‘little chisel’ on his internal self too. Only, he is yet to perceive this change.

The tension between an unchanging external environment and a changed internal world that is touched upon in the poem “In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury” though not overtly acknowledged, stands candidly admitted and accepted in many other poems. It is the dichotomy between the two – the unchanging external world vis-à-vis the changed world within, that causes the sombre mood pervading such poems as “Afternoon Service at Mellstock” (356), “The Oxen” (403), “Just the Same” (650).

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, Hardy's initiation into a world of new ideas through his friendship with Harry Moule, wrought gradually such a change in his attitudes and perceptions, especially in the matter of religion, that the Sunday school teacher of the past now stood alone, having abandoned his earlier religious beliefs and convictions altogether. Hardy was never to recant or go back on his new beliefs, or rather the lack of them, but he would forever look back with nostalgia at a time of greater spiritual or mental calm, and, greater solace. From a moment in the present, he moves in time to the past to remember with tragic wistfulness a totally contrastive situation in the following two poems "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" (356) and "The Oxen" (403).

ON afternoons of drowsy calm
 We stood in the paneled pew,
 Singing one-voiced a Tate-and-Brady psalm
 To the tune of 'Cambridge New'.

We watched the elms, we watched the rooks,
 The clouds upon the breeze,
 Between the whiles of glancing at our books,
 And swaying like the trees.

So mindless were those outpourings! –
 Though I am not aware
 That I have gained by subtle thought on things
 Since we stood psalming there.

'Mellstock' was Hardy's name for Stinsford Church which he attended with his family during his early years in Bockhampton. The poem "Afternoon Service At Mellstock" is subtitled "Circa 1850" indicating that he is traveling as far back into the past as the year 1850 when he would have been a child of ten years. It recaptures the scene of a group of villagers singing, calm-voiced and united ('one-voiced'), through a 'drowsy' afternoon. The second verse includes nature outside into the deep sense of communal unity that exists within the religious worshippers inside: a tremendous link is forged as first they watch and then they too begin to sway like the trees outside.

It is in the third stanza that he shifts his perspective from the past to the present. He calls the remembered religious devotion 'mindless' but nonetheless admits with tragic honesty "that he has not 'gained' through the 'subtle thought' of the new ideas of his present life. The indications he has instead lost – for example that sense of oneness with other men and nature and that calm and peace of childhood.

"The Oxen" (403) is yet another wistful poem where he goes into the past to remember the old rural legend that at midnight on Christmas Eve the oxen kneel down in homage to Christ.

CHRISTMAS EVE, and twelve of the clock.
 'Now they are all on their knees,'
 An elder said as we sat in a flock
 By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
 They dwelt in their strawy pen,
 No did it occur to one of us there
 To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
 In these days! Yet, I feel,
 If someone said on Christmas Eve,
 'Come; see the oxen kneel

'In the lonely barton by yonder comb
 Our childhood used to know,'
 I should go with him in the gloom,
 Hoping it might be so.

The first two verses recapture the rustic scene of believers reared like a 'flock' round a dying fire listening to the legend proclaimed by the 'elders'. The third stanza moves from the past to the present. Although he does repudiate the belief, he does not repudiate the significance of the belief, because in the final stanza, he says he would accompany any believer to see this miracle, knowing it could never be true yet "Hoping it might be so". The pathos of this hope in the truth of the old legend comes from Hardy's yearning for the comfort of his childhood beliefs, a comfort he has to deny himself although he cannot deny its value.

In both the poems, the world outside has remained the same, but they no longer elicit the same response from him primarily because he has changed, his beliefs have changed. The internal world of Hardy has changed sufficiently for the external world, despite its changelessness, to appear changed for him.

Conversely, the shift from the present to the past has also at times given rise to a certain tension through the contrast between a changing external world and an unchanging, inner or personal world. His beliefs, feelings have remained unchanged but the external circumstances have changed; or the object has remained unchanged in a changing world. "A Forgotten Miniature" (1887) speaks of a 'miniature' buried deep into the box that 'nobody ever unlocks'. It lies forgotten and neglected while the world around it has changed; the beauty of the original of the painting has faded with time, many who were alive then are now dead or counting moments for 'sleep'. In stark contrast to the flow and flux of life, the 'miniature' remains, as it was, unchanging and constant. However, just as it has defied time, so life has passed it by. Changelessness is not life-affirming, hence it lies neglected and forgotten by a world thick with movement and change.

In a slightly different vein Hardy speaks of the tension of internal-external world in "Just the Same" (650). The details of the personal tragedy that the poem refers to is kept deliberately vague because it is not the personal story but the universal one of the dichotomy between the inner world and the world outside that Hardy focuses on. The glorious, happy past of 'beauty and dream' has given way to a world turned suddenly to a 'darkened den' of hopelessness. But this is his private world. Outside, heedless and careless of his personal tragedy, 'the people frisked hither and thither' In total contrast to a shattered private world, the world at large remained surprisingly 'just the same'. The contrast here is as much between the past and the present as it is between private grief and public indifference.

"Where They Lived" (392) and its companion piece "Life Laughs Onward" (394) has Hardy look backward at the past through a dismayed account of changes that have taken place. In the first poem he gives an account of the ruin a former residence has fallen to. In both the poems the approach is similar: the present is contrasted with a happier past. In "Where They Once Lived" the ruin and neglect the house has fallen to is recounted against a background of remembered

beauty, and the accompanying warmth of a happy family life within it:

The once slippery turf is sodden
where we laughingly sat or lay

In “Life Laughs Onward” (394), the house of a former loved one is now occupied by others – indeed the house itself is a newly constructed one in the site of the old. New people, new lives have now replaced the old, carrying no trace of the former occupants. The poet wistfully acknowledges, as the title suggests, that life had indeed laughed onward: the old has given way to the new: ‘I saw that Old succumbed to Young.’

But the regret so apparent in both the poems is silenced by his acceptance of the flow of time. In the earlier poem, he accepts, though just barely so, that the ruin of the place is an unalterable truth, so “Time calls, ‘Pass below!’” while in the next poem, he admits that his “too regretful mood died in my tongue” as he accepts change as an essential feature of the flow of time, and concludes it with a terse ‘Twas well.

“Reminiscences of a Dancing Man” (165) as the title suggests is an enthusiastic recollection of the heady, dance-filled evenings at

the 'Almack's' with the 'gay Cremorne' providing the 'jaunty' music for them. Every detail of hall, ball and dance is recalled with obvious delight. The crowded rooms at 'The Argyle' where girls and young men danced the polka is joyfully remembered only to arrive finally at the sad question of the fate and fortunes of the damsels they danced with. In a rather macabre image, he pictures them as worm-ridden skeletons dancing in the halls of death as they danced in life. The contrast between the brightly lit 'Almack's balls', the enthusiasm and joy in them with the concluding picture of what the dance, the dancers and musician have been transformed to now, is striking. The two contrasting pictures are placed alongside each other. Hardy's message about the transience of life, of beauty – indeed, of the incomprehensible nature of life itself – comes across clearly, though he uses no words to actually express them. The glaring irony expresses it most effectively.

"Former Beauties" (195) too touches on a similar theme. As the title suggests, the poem is about the changes wrought by 'time'. The poem is developed through a series of statements and questions contrasting then and now. These 'middle-aged' thin-lipped and gaunt 'market dames' fill the poet with a sense of disbelief that they are

what the former beauties have become with time. Aghast, he asks in disbelief:

Are these the ones we loved in years ago,
 And courted here?
 Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
 We vowed and swore ...?

The external physical change is so drastic, Hardy is certain that it must accompany mental, psychological changes as well: he is certain they retain no memory of their former beauty, their earlier lives otherwise the grim, gaunt and old visages would have retained, even if just barely, a vestige of their former selves.

That time can be so devastatingly destructive that there is a total barrier between what was and what is, is again the theme of “In a Former Resort after Many Years”. Here too a mild shock is caused by the changes he can see in former acquaintances – changes brought on by time and age: They are now like the grotesque faces in ‘El Greco’s’ painting, each one looking more like a ‘rag drawn over a skeleton’.

Physical changes have come paired with mental changes: Hardy doubts their ability to recognize him. He imagines their minds

cluttered and muddled with memories from a time that is dead, about people long gone. They too appear more dead than alive.

A deep poignancy runs through the poem "I Look into My Glass" (52) where the change wrought by time that he views, is his own. Hardy almost always makes no attempt to triumph time, thus, although he accepts the painful physical changes (the 'wasting skin') brought on by the passage of years, the anguish he experience is caused by a lack of accompanying mental and emotional changes within him. Unlike the "Former Beauties" and the acquaintances of a former resort whose physical changes apparently accompanied mental and emotional transformations, Hardy is left to face an unwieldy situation of physical ageing and emotional youthfulness. He feels this is a deliberate act of vindictiveness on the part of 'time': it 'Part steals, lets part abide' so that his ageing 'fragile frame' is shaken with the 'throbbings of noontide'. The conclusion one draws is that though Hardy might have airily surmised that internally if we retain a part of ourselves as we have been, age cannot totally wither us ('Former Beauties'); yet when he has to actually live through this, he apparently prefers that 'time' take all.

Tension between illusion and reality faces the time traveller as he revisits the past. The poems “The Revisitation” (152) and “My Cicely” (31) represent two different approaches to the reality he may discover there. The poems are among the several dramatic narrative verse that Hardy wrote. These two describe the experiences of the dramatic narrator as he revisits his past. In “The Revisitation” (152) an old soldier revisits the scene of a painful love affair after a period of twenty years. The month is again July, just as it was when the ‘joyless hour of discord’ had occurred. Haunted by memories and unable to sleep, under the influence of a mysterious sense of romance, he sets off for the old trysting place – an ancient ruin. The place is significant because though wilderness surrounds the area of the ruin and ‘herds’ daily feed there, the ruin itself is of an ancient battle-cum-burial ground. Thus the landscape is ambivalent: it could be a scene for union or for disruption as the idyllic pastoral setting lies over an ancient scene of violence and death.

The speaker, described as one for whom the past was all: ‘living long and longer/In a Past that lived no more’, comes face to face with his lost love, Agnette, in the ruins. Obviously, for both of them the relationship had been, and still is, important. They talk and

confusion of names, 'his' Cicely still lives but in circumstances of shame and degradation. On his return to the city, he decides to pretend that the dead Cicely is 'his' Cicely rather than accept the reality of what 'his' Cicely has transformed into:

Far better
To dream than to own the debasement
Of sweet Cicely

Thereafter he avoids the West Highway where she works as a barmaid, 'lest I disturb my choice vision'.

Hence, the past of one's memory and the past in reality can sometimes be painfully diverse. What imagination forms it into in our memories finally may have little to do with the past as it actually was because more often than not 'Times transforming chisel' is the aspect ignored by memory.

However, in the "Poems of Pilgrimage" (65-75), Hardy expresses 'an assertive creative response to the Past ... as a sensitive learned, modern man ... keeping alive the memories of general human history associated with places and things' ...⁵

According to Zietlow, Hardy in these poems assumes the stance of a pilgrim, actively seeking out the sacred monuments of the European continent and describing the key episodes most of which

'involve the blending of disparate levels of time, disparate geographical locations and disparate experiences'.⁶ Most of these poems focus on an actual experience in these historical places thereby providing an interesting insight into the relationship between the present and the past.

In "Rome: On the Palatine" (68) as Hardy wanders around the ruins, his 'visual imagination begins to beguile/The outer sense' and he sees not the ruins but what they may have been like in their 'pristine glow'. At that instant an orchestra strikes up a Strauss Waltz and the music swirls through the monument making him feel indeed a part of the past.

... blended pulsing life with
lives long done,
Till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present one

Hardy's experiencing consciousness enables him to, for the moment, transcend time and history and transform them into felt experience.

But it is not only disparate times, but also disparate places that are blend by the creative perspective of the historian. In the poem "In the Old Theatre, Fiesole" (67) Hardy blends the history of Rome with that of his native countryside. While walking through the Circus, Hardy meets a child who shows him an ancient Roman coin:

... her act flashed home
 In that mute moment to my open mind
 The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome.

In certain moments when the mind is “opened” history presents itself in moments of vision.

Another poem “Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the Graves of Shelley and Keats” (71) attempts to see a connection between levels of the past in an effort to testify in the present to the sanctity of human creative effort. Generations and centuries ago, the creativity of Cestius built the Pyramid not knowing that it was only as a first step towards the final design which was completed only when the graves of Shelley and Keats came to be located nearby. Hardy thus blends various levels of the past, separate creative efforts of others, in his creative vision of the past.

Hardy’s pilgrimage to the historical past is not only to places, but also to moments in time. In “Lausanne: In Gibbon’s Old Garden 11-12 P.M. June 27 1897 (The 110th anniversary of the completion of the ‘Decline and Fall’ at the same hour and place)” (72) Hardy appears to actually see Gibbon and hear him speak. Gibbon closes his famous book shut, and from the distance of 110 years addresses Hardy, questioning him about the present. The question about the

moral ethical standards of the day asked using a quote from Milton blends the various times into one. All their various efforts blend to form one concerted effort, spanning generations, against the enemies of truth, Gibbon's words, coming across to the present, seems to reinforce Hardy's comment on the world as he sees it in 1897. The elaborate and detailed subtitle testifies to Hardy's obsession with anniversaries. His poetry is replete with references to dates, months as also to anniversaries of every significant occasion. It is as if Hardy believed that each recurrence of the date of the occasion would shed further light into it. Thus, by adding new dimensions of meaning each passing anniversary, he keeps the moment alive. He goes into the past to give the moment life and length.

In "Shelley's Skylark" (66) Hardy is able to demonstrate how imagination and creativity can expand the significance of the past. Shelley's Skylark today is a 'pinch of unseen, unguarded dust'. It lived its meek, short life unaware of its effect on Shelley and its own immortalization in verse. It 'only lived like another bird ... Lived its meek life; then one day, fell —'. He wants the earth into which it has blended, preserved. He calls on the fairies to 'go and find/That tiny pinch of priceless dust' and provide for it a gem-encrusted, silver-

lined casket, so that its dust can remain through 'endless time'. Thus, for Hardy, the bird, like Cestius, is a link in a chain that involves the destinies of others and other times. It inspired Shelley who immortalized it in verse, and now Hardy consecrates it in this poem saving it from 'Earth's oblivious eyeless trust'. Thus, the past is expanded in its scope as an act in the past finds its final conclusion generations later, in the present.

A very significant poem that explicates Hardy's perspective on time and the past is "On an Invitation to the United States" (75). In *Life* (pp.331 and 343), Hardy is mentioned as having been twice invited to visit the United States. He never did go. This poem throws light on the reason behind his hesitation. The United States is a young country with hardly any history behind her and Hardy is not eager to visit such a country – 'I shrink to seek a modern coast/Whose riper times have yet to come.'

An ancient country like England, where he lives, has a rich, long past, and is 'scored with prints of perished hands'. It satisfies him to live in a country with a past as he is able to 'Give past exemplars present room,/And their experience count as mine.' He recreates, and relives the historical past just as we have seen him do

so with his personal past. Through the instrument of his imagination, he is able to count their experience as his, thereby achieving a fusion of the past and the present.

At times Hardy chooses to deliberately fuse the past and the present to form a complex whole. “At Castle Boterel” (292), “During Wind and Rain” (441) and “The Old Neighbours and New” (640) are the outstanding examples that come to mind.

A superb interplay of time zones, the skillful movement from present to the past and then back again to the present from where he briefly moves to the future only to come back to the present – this is the complex time structure of “At Castle Boterel”. Boterel is Hardy’s name for Boscastle near St. Juliet which he had visited with Emma in 1870. The poem is about his revisit to it in 1913. The walk up the hill in the present is sodden and wind-lashed. In its midst he is assailed by memories of that earlier walk up the hill with Emma in ‘dry March weather’. The vision of that earlier walk up the hills becomes so strong that it completely overshadows the present experience. He remembers the joy-filled, walk of the past and numbers that experience amongst his most valued. Juxtaposing this scene from the past is the memory of Emma’s passing away at a later date. He

accepts the finality of death, yet is consoled by the thought that while that experience and Emma live in his memory, he will be able to defeat death and time. He acknowledges that the victory will be short-lived as his own time is running out. This reference to his own death, switches the time from the past to the future. Finally, he comes back to the rain-sodden present with the awareness of having revisited old love's domain for the last time. Hardy's 'sand is sinking': he is already an old man and he will not be making another journey to Boterel hill. As he looks back, he clearly sees Emma's 'phantom figure' – but now it seems to be 'shrinking shrinking' – indicating that Emma and all that she represents in his life – love, youth, vitality – are part of the 'old love's domain' which he will have no room for anymore in his life. The poem gains in complexity and richness because the climb up Boterel hill is in the present as well as the past. Each experience is in complete contrast to the other: while the first was in spring in the pleasurable company of the woman he loved, undertaken at a time of youth and hopefulness when he would have been completely focussed on the present relishing the moment, and perhaps looking forward to the future (of the relationship), the second is a lonely walk up the hill on a wet and windy day, years later. He is

old and looking backward at the past. The actual present experience gains importance only by its association with the past. Because Hardy fuses the two experiences, he is able to make the climb up the hill a rich mixture of the disparate characteristics of both experiences. It is thus a journey taken in 'dry March weather' as well as the bitter wet day, it is full of hope and pleasure and dejection and defeat because Hardy has fused the past and the present.

The same approach, though at a relatively simpler level, is used in the poem "The Old Neighbour and Now" (640). The poet is visiting the new rector but finds the ghost of the old rector – an 'old friend, for long years installed here' – seated at the armchair. He is visible only to Hardy so while the new "smart and cheerful" rector explains his future plans. Hardy's attention is fixed on the past – 'the olden face', and he just barely manages 'a vague smile' to the present, the new rector.

The fact that the old rector who had died in harness, was an old friend and had been there for 'long years' shows that the place, the office, the room, the chair are all closely associated in Hardy's mind with him. It is thus that although Hardy walks in aware he is to meet someone else, the above associations are too strong to ignore, and he

actually begins to feel he sees the old friend's face greet him and sit through the interview. Memories of past meetings in the very room are too strong and the past begins to overshadow both the present (the new rector) and the future (as represented by the future plans he talks about).

Hardy's coming face to face with the past while having to pay at least a little attention to the present shows that sometimes for Hardy the barriers between the past and present are enough to cause more than a little perplexity.

Interestingly, both the above poems deal with people, with whom the poet has had close emotional association and places that are closely associated in his memory with the person. The old rector at his arm chair and Emma walking up Boterel Hill with him are visions, hence that automatically are conjured before him.

Tom Paulin in *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (1975)⁷ speaks of this ability of Hardy's to project images from memory with the clarity of real, actual happenings, onto the bare, external world and uses the term 'eidetic' to describe such images. He explains the term to mean 'voluntarily producible visual images that have almost photographic accuracy'.⁸ They are different from the

common images used by poets because Paulin says that “it seems ... eidetic images are seen in the literal sense of the word”.⁹

Thus Hardy’s ability to ‘see’ such visions and ghosts of a loved one from the past is an extension of the same ability his grandmother possessed, he says, in “The One We Knew” (227) to not just remember but ‘see’ the past she loved.

In what is easily his best poem, “During Wind and Rain” (441), Hardy uses the same technique of super-imposing time frames so adroitly as to make the composite picture a complex, almost prophetic, vision.

THEY sing their dearest songs –
 He, she, all of them – yea,
 Treble and tenor and bass,
 And one to play;
 With the candles mooning each face....
 Ah, no; the years O!
 How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss –
 Elders and juniors – aye,
 Making the pathways neat
 And the garden gay;
 And they build a shady seat....
 Ah, no; the years, the years;
 See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all –
 Men and maidens – year,
 Under the summer tree,
 With a glimpse of the bay,
 While pet fowl come to the knee....
 Ah, no; the years O!
 And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
 He, she, all of them – aye,
 Clocks and carpets and chairs
 On the lawn all day,
 And brightest things that are theirs....
 Ah, no; the years, the years;
 Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

The poem is very skillfully constructed. Each verse presents a picture of domestic bliss where there is liveliness, hope and harmony as the family work and play together. Against these positive life-affirming pictures are set the dark and harsh images of the last two lines of each stanza, beginning with the ballad-like refrain 'Ah, no, the years, O'. The refrain serves as the signal to indicate change of time frame: the perspective changes from present to the future so that the scenes of happiness are in the past, as if seen from an unhappier present, literally, as the final lines indicate, during wind and rain. All the images surrounding the happy domestic scenes are of violence ('the rotten rose is ript from the wall'), disease, ('the sick leaves reel down in throngs') storm and death ('the white storm-birds wing across');

‘down their carved names the raindrop ploughs’) indicating that human happiness is transitory and threatened by inimical forces from all sides. The final picture of rain running down the carved headstones of their graves is of natural forces eroding it gradually till nothing remains, not even their memory.

The contrasts between life and death are made through a series of effective images. The reality and relevance of human happiness seems to be emphasized by the clarity of the images describing them, only to be negated by the contrasting picture of darkness of the last two lines of each stanza. The time-switch between present and future and present seen as past and future as present forces the reader to experience the process of life and come face to face with the transitoriness of human happiness. Man is made aware of his mortality by the images of darkness so that finally from this perspective, the innate pathos underlying human happiness is communicated with great impact.

Hardy uses his ability to cross time zones to great effect in this poem. His time switch makes the vision concise and compact, and therefore more effective and allows the later events to pass their judgement on the value of the present experiences and values. It

enables him to telescope the various stages of human life and thus present an ironic picture of human happiness.

For Hardy the look backward, or the journey into the past is nearly always spurred on by a present event or circumstance. The past is viewed from the vantage point of the present although the present performs often, no further role than that of a doorway to the past, or at best of a contrastive background against which the past stands out in relief.

Hardy's journey to the past begins from the present and often the associative link, however frail, can be just about anything. Often, certain dates permit him to celebrate the anniversary of an event in the past. It mostly is personal in nature but not always so. The outstanding example is the poem referred to earlier – "Laussane: In Gibbon's old Garden." The title explicates further "11-12 P.M. The 110th anniversary of the completion of the 'Decline and Fall at the same hour and place'. This 110th anniversary takes him to the remote past and he imagines Gibbon discussing the ethical-moral downfall, signaling perhaps the decline and fall of yet another great civilization, the European.

In "Joys of Memory" (367) Hardy clearly states the importance of the calendar in his life. As an important date in Spring dawns, he greets it by remembering 'a like date I once live through'. The whole day is spent, not enjoying this day, but 'old hours re-greeting' as he whiles away 'hour by hour', remembering. From Spring till December and back again to Spring, his celebrations of anniversaries of past events continue. The present just provides the pegs on which he will open up his memories of the past.

"An Anniversary" (407) seeks to show the irony between Then and Now by going back in time to the exact day and month: 'It was at the very date to which we have come/In the month of the matching names/When at a like, minute, the sun had upswam,/Its couch time at night being the same.'

The memory of certain physical sensations lie buried deep within him until a similar sensation experienced years later recalls the earlier experience and with all the details, the circumstances surrounding it, intact. In "Under the Waterfall" (276), the very common place experience of dipping his arms elbow deep into a basin of water reminds him of a joyful day in the past spent in the mountain wilderness with his beloved. Somewhere in that journey, they had

stopped by a stream to drink, lover-like, from the same glass. In washing the glass in the running mountain stream they had lost their 'prized' possession. Desperately the two had immersed their bare arms deep into the water in a fun-filled, though unsuccessful, search. The dip of the arms into the basin of water in the present takes him back in time. The past is the content of the entire poem whereas the basin of water, having performed its duty of opening the floodgates of memory, is forgotten after its first reference.

Music was an integral part of Hardy's life; he played the fiddle with his father at church functions and at social events in his village. It would always occupy a central place in his life. Music then, is yet another mode of traveling to the past: 'Since every sound moves memories' ["A Duettist at her Piano Forte" (543)], "Rome: On the Palatine" (68) amply demonstrates the manner in which music helps him not only to travel back in time, but fuse disparate times together. The strains of the Strauss Waltz coming from a nearby hill into the ruins of Rome he is standing in, suddenly brings the past alive for him. Music not only is an important path to the past, it also excites his imagination and creativity and allows him to see time as a whole, and the past and present fuse into one instant out of time.

Actual items that are associated in Hardy's memory with a loved one, is a very obvious 'gateway' to the past. Touching his father's violin brings back the past vividly ["To My Father's Violin" (381)], while the 'Old Furnitures' (482) takes him back generations as he imagines the various 'relics of householdry' being handled by his ancestors; 'a curl of hair cut in youth and gifted as a lover's keepsake, 'discovered' years later when the relationship and circumstances are vastly changed, takes him tenderly and wistfully back to the past ["On a Discovered Curl of Hair" (630)].

The journey from the present to the past is undertaken also through actual journey. 'In Castle Boterel', discussed earlier, an actual journey to 'Boterel', an actual walk up the hill allowed him to re-enter the realm of memories. His "Poems of Pilgrimage" (65-75) especially, "Rome: On a Palatine", "In the Old Theatre, Fiesole", "Genoa and the Mediterranean", "Shelley's Skylark" and "Lausanne: In Gibbon's Old Garden", all have the common thread of a physical journey urging a mental journey to the past to flood his mind, so that he is quite oblivious of the actual instance in the present that starts him on this mental journey.

Similarly, certain places hold the key to his memory; places that are important to Hardy because they provide a link with the past. In 'Places' mentioned earlier, Hardy's visit to these places associated with Emma's youth, allow him to travel back in time to 'see' the events in her past, just as the sight of the Roman road takes him back years to his childhood. In "They Could not Come" (598) he mentions the various journeys he makes to places associated with his loved ones, only to be disappointed as no memories come flooding. But he does admit that it is the one time, that making journeys have failed to evoke memories; otherwise it is a tried and tested method of going back in time.

His other favourite mode of traveling to the past is in the guise of a ghost. Hardy imagines, in "The Haunter" (284), the ghost of Emma haunting his life, desperately trying to communicate. She accompanies him even to the 'old aisles where the past is all to him'. In "He Revisits His first School" (462) he thinks the best way to revisit his early past (his first school) is in the guise of a ghost and that is what he hopes to do some day. He says as much in "I Travel as a Phantom Now" (387). Time has reduced him to 'so bare a bough'

that he prefers to travel as a phantom. 'And thus I visit bodiless' he admits, in order to understand more of the mystery of life and man.

Logs ["Logs on a hearth" (433)], trees ["Ten Years Since" (691)], leaf ["A Night in November" (542)] are the other portals to the past that he has used in his poems.

Hardy's imagination and creativity just need the flimsiest of inspirations to enable him to not just journey to the past, but to reawaken it and live through it all over again. In "The Small Hours" (208) just imagining playing the violin is sufficient to bring back long-forgotten melodies.

Thus, his powerful imagination uses the mode of memory to bring about a confluence of the past and present.

END NOTES

1. Hynes, Samuel. *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
2. *Ibid.*, p.44.
3. Eliot, T.S. *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).
4. Hynes, Samuel. *Op. cit.*, p.44.
5. Zietlow, Paul. *Moments of Vision: The Poetry of Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974).
6. *Ibid.*, p.200.

7. Paulin, Tom. *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
8. *Ibid.*, p.121.
9. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER-IV

THE PAST REVIEWED

“Scenes in ordinary life that are insipid at twenty become interesting at thirty and tragic at forty”, Hardy wrote in his journal on the 19th April 1888.¹ He acknowledges that the changes wrought within man by time are strong enough to alter his perspective so that viewing the same event at two different stages of life will yield or elicit two different reactions. Time may or may not change the external world, but life experiences do change the worldview and the reactions. Hence, one of the basic reasons for Hardy’s frequent look “backward” to his past is the desire to view the old event in yet newer light.

‘... I begin again, as if it were new,/A day of like date I once lived through ...’ Hardy says in “Joys of Memory” (367) admitting that the act of remembering is not a passive one; he is not a mere spectator but a participant all over again, but with the experience of the intervening years to give him the benefit of objective distance as well as maturity and understanding.

While in the majority of the Time-related poems, Hardy is able to easily “exhume” the memories and relive them with the freshness

of actual happenings, just those poems will be considered in this chapter in which he has not just viewed but reviewed his past. To them he has brought to bear the objective distance that time and life-experiences, as well as his basic honesty, provided.

Dennis Taylor (*Hardy's Poetry*, 1981) says 'the central issue in Hardy studies is what happens to experience as it is made into literature, the experience remembered ...' (p.xiii).² He borrows Middleton Murray's phrase 'the culmination of experience' to describe the memory of the experience that is exhumed (p.88). In the same argument, Taylor puts forth the case that the exhumation of emotions after a long period of time does not mean that the emotion interred has lain static because 'his advance in awareness coincides with a regression into memories which are eventually seen in the final form and matured significance' (p.88). The experience and understanding accumulated over the years helps understand the past in all its depth and significance.

The poem "House of Hospitalities" (156) best explains Hardy's attitude to memory and the past. The house of hospitalities has changed from a place where the narrator says they 'called in friends' for festivities for cheer, music and food, to a deserted ruin where 'the

mole now labours,/And spiders knit.’ The seasons and time are long past for this house, but for him the story is different. The house may be in ruins

Yet at midnight if here walking,
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking
Who smile on me.

In fact memory is the index to indicate a mind still alive, he feels.

‘We two kept house, the past and I’ he admits in the “Ghost of the Past” (249) indicating the presence of the past in his present. ‘I did not mind the Bygone there –/The Present once to me’, he says further. In fact, the present stands transformed because of the memory of the past: ‘There was in that companionship/Something of ecstasy’. As time takes its toll on the mind and heart, the memories get dimmer. ‘And then its form began to fade/Began to fade’. When life itself begins to decline; memory does too:

It dwindles in my eye;
It looms a far off-skeleton
And not a comrade nigh,
A fitful far-off skeleton
Dimming as days draw by.

In fact Taylor says ‘... remembering is hardly distinguishable from awareness itself. When memory begins to die, the mind begins to die’. (p.94)

At the simplest level are the lyrics like “To Louisa in the Lane” (822), “Faint Heart in a Railway Train” (516), “A Countenance” (847). As he looks back at the childhood infatuation discussed in Chapter-I that forms the subject of “To Louisa in the Lane” he understands that his shyness came in the way of what should have been. He now wishes for a second chance. As an old man he wishes to be able to go back to the same “hallow in the lane”, to be able to meet her again and rectify the mistake of his boyhood.

Similarly in “Faint Heart in a Railway Train”, he goes back to a moment of temptation that he let slip away. He recounts an ordinary railway journey, the tedium of which is broken by a fleeting glimpse of a woman’s ‘radiant face’ at a passing station. The momentary vision passes even before he can muster courage to alight. From the distance of years, as he looks back he is filled with regret at his indecision ‘... O could it but be/That I had alighted there!’

The poem “An Opportunity” (577) remembers how ‘forty springs back’ he had met this lady casually. They had parted without regret at the close of the day and never run into each other the next forty years. Looking back, Hardy is regretful that they never utilized the ‘opportunity’, otherwise they might have come to mean

something to each other and a totally different life together would have taken shape. He is mildly bitter as he wonders at the workings of human life:

This is a bitter thing
For thee, O man: what ails it?
The tide of chance may bring
Its offer but nought avails it

All the three poems referred to here deal, with various degrees of seriousness, with what he later recognizes as missed opportunity. In each case he puts the blame not on Fate or circumstances, but squarely on himself. Time has provided him the insight he lacked when he actually lived the experiences. Now what is left are only realization and mild regret.

Hardy's memory of incidents and people from the past though impressive in its detail, it is the objective distance of time that he allows into the remembrance that becomes the focal point. In "A Countenance" (847), Hardy remembers a lady whose slightly irregular face he had found attractive. He says her laugh was 'not in the middle of her face quite' and goes on to describe in an amazingly total recall, her slightly peculiar hairstyle, her 'too full' lips which, he had then found quite pleasant. He even remembers how the lower lip cast a shadow that looked green when she passed under 'midsummer

leaves'. Regretfully he remembers how their lives went their different ways and he lost 'all sight and touch of her'. Now, remembering her as an elderly man with the infatuation behind him, he wonders if he would have remained as attracted or charmed by her irregular looks after the first flush of love had died or if he would, like the others, have eventually 'minded' it when 'love became unblinded'.

Hardy brings the freshness of honesty to his recollection here. He is aware that time changes all; even love and our reaction do not always remain as they were.

Knowledge of later sorrows sometimes cast their shadows on happier memories. As he experienced them, the events were perhaps entirely happy, but subsequent failure of the relationship underscores the memory with sorrow and bitterness. "At the Piano" (482) deals with a relationship that is at its peak – the woman is playing at the piano while her lover stands close by looking on and admiring not just the music but her as well. A picture of bliss. The man's joy has him slipping into a totally happy reverie, the happy sight in front of him 'sent him mentally straying/In some fancy place/Where pain had no trace'.

But this scene of contentment is marred by the reference to the 'Cowled Apparition' – misfortune, comes between them causing a diminishing of everything – her 'notes seemed to sigh' and the lights to go dim. They are both unaware of the changes, although 'Time laughed awry,/And the Phantom hid nigh. The indication seems to be when they look back later with the experience of the bitter end to their relationship behind them, the scene will not seem to have been as perfect as they think it is when they are living it.

Stretching logic to a point rather far, Hardy says in "Before Knowledge" (374) that 'well had I borne/Each scraping thorn' had she but called to him from 'across the stretch between' before they actually met. They were destined to meet, yet the period of life before that, were days of pain and struggle for him: all of which would have lessened or vanished had she but called out to him from beyond the gap. An argument that does defeat logic unless one understands that he is looking at the past without her in his life from the perspective of the present when she is in his life. It is with the knowledge of her soothing presence that he looks back at the pain in his life before her entry into it and involuntarily the thought is, if only he had known what was to follow, he would have borne it all better.

Many of Hardy's dramatic poems are structured on the theme of the Past Revisited. "The Tramp Woman's Tragedy" (153) and "The Flirt's Tragedy" (160) have as narrators the architects of the tragedy the poem is built round. A stupid, playful attempt to arouse the jealousy of the Tramp woman's 'only love' ends in tragedy. He kills his supposed rival and is hanged for it while she remains alone drifting aimlessly, haunted by her past. Filled with remorse, she is left 'haunting the Western Moor'. "The Flirt's Tragedy" speaks similarly of love and rejection. The narrator, though rich is not physically attractive to win his lady's love, though she toys with his affections. He hires a good looking youngman to court and subsequently betray her. After the betrayal, he steps in to save her through marriage which is no more than a compromise for her. When she finally learns of his role in her ruin as also that he has killed her former lover; she commits suicide. He is as haunted by memories as by guilt. As with the tramp woman so with him there is a realization that being remorselessly haunted by the Past is the payment for their role in the tragedies. '... leave unregarded/A Cain to his suffering', he begs his listener. For both, memory of their guilt is their Nemesis.

“The Sacrilege” (331) has a very similar structure. Here the narrator is the twin brother of the man (“Born at my birth of Mother of Mine”) who is beguiled and led to crime by a wanton woman. Just before being hanged he extracts the promise from the narrator to seek vengeance on her. He does so, only to be haunted forever by the memory of his crime:

No mortal knew that deed undue
 But he who schemed the crime
 Which might still covers ... But in dream
 Those ropes of hair upon the stream
 He sees, and he will hear that scream
 Until his judgement-time’.

The criminal is haunted by the memory of the crime in so devastating a manner as to be itself the judgement or punishment for the crime. Thus memory does function as conscience. Even if the world at large remains ignorant of his crime, his dreams still remain haunted by the vision of his crime, and he will know no peace henceforth. Like the Ancient Mariner, they are compelled by their memory to re-live the past again and again and understand their suffering through it as their punishment from which there will be no freedom until memory lasts.

Similarly, the persona of ‘The Rivals’ is able to recognize, in hindsight, her role in the tragic end to her marriage, but at a time when all is past and the knowledge serves little purpose. Though she

is contrite, the relationship is beyond saving. The man, whose devotion she so baselessly rejected, is long since dead: 'Bitterly have I rued my meanness/And wept for it since he died'. Her jealousy has been aroused by her sense of insecurity. First she suspects him of loving another, subsequently she discovers it is no 'other' but her own photograph of long ago, that he keeps locked and sighs over. But instead of reassurance, what follows is a new jealousy – this time of her former self: 'I chafed that he loved not the me then living,/But the Past woman still'. In retrospect, she can see her role in the breakdown of their relationship and she acknowledges it but at a time too late to be of any significance.

Other simple lyrics with the theme of past revisited emphasize the insistent, overwhelming and enduring nature of memories of certain events. "The Satin Shoes" (334) deals with the story of a bride besotted with the idea of wearing satin shoes to her wedding. But it rains on her wedding day. As the 'lane is life a pool' she cannot wear her satin shoes: 'Her dream is shown to be inept,/Her wish they overrule'. But the memory of a wedding without those shoes tortures her to insanity: 'From her wrecked dream, as months flew on,/Her

thought seemed not to range'. When she has to be taken to the 'madhouse' finally it is the satin shoes they use as enticement:

If you will go, dear, you must fain
Put on those shoes – the pair
Meant for your marriage, which the rain
Forbade you then to wear.

The lady has been so disappointed that although time moved on, she remained back mentally at that day when her simple dream was shattered. That is the power of the past: at times it can obliterate the present and make nonsense of the time-flow so that chaos and confusion may even result.

“The Dance at the Phoenix” (28) similarly demonstrates the power of the past and the power it exerts to revisit it. Jenny had been a less than virtuous maiden when she agrees to marry her 'rural' admirer, privately promising to remain faithful to him. She keeps her promise, her two sons are grown men when she learns 'Her early loves from war had come,/The King's-Own Cavalry'. As she hears the music of their celebration at the Phoenix Inn, she feels the stirrings of temptation as the memories of the past waken:

And yet those notes – they thrill me through,
And those gay forms move me anew,
As they moved me of yore!

The past beckons her too strongly and she sneaks into the Phoenix. She dances, her old age notwithstanding, to return to her sleeping husband only early next morning. When he wakes up, Jenny lies dead next to him. The memories of the past, the desire to actually relive them, are too strong for Jenny. She chooses to revisit her past, sacrificing both her present and future.

“Bereft” (157) tackles a similar subject from the other side, as it were. Here too a spouse is overwhelmed by her past. In this case, it is the memory of her dead husband. Every little homely detail of his presence in her life is remembered and contrasted with the changes his absence has brought. ‘When the summer dawns clearly,/And appletree-tops seem alight./Who will undraw the curtain and cheerily/Call out that the morning is bright?’ The past so overwhelms her, she wishes herself dead too. The look backward has made her realize the importance of his long years’ presence in her life: she feels incomplete and alone now without him.

The woman in “The Farm Woman’s Winter” (162) undergoes a very similar experience. Her mate has died of cold and exposure and left a vacuum in her life. She looks back at the past questioning the human situation where one gets what one does not want and loses

whom one does. 'So savage winter catches/The breath of limber things/And what I love he snatches,/And what I love not, brings.' For both these women, the loss of a loved partner awakens them to grief and regret as they realize the irreplaceable nature of their loss.

The conclusion arrived at by the narrator of "The Inquiry" (198) shows how certain unalterable truths about life and the human situation becomes clearer when one travels back in time. The narrator enquires after one 'Peggy Beech' with ill-disguised curiosity and keenness. He remembers how he and a certain John Waywood had courted her promising to marry her only when financially successful. That took its time being realized. In the meantime, his and John's interest was worn down by time while, ironically, hers remained constant. On looking back, he can clearly see how that long wait between promise and its fulfillment managed to diminish the value of everything. Only retrospectively viewing the situation he is able to see the entire story in its actuality. In the light of the changes brought on by the long wait, her constancy appears lifeless and dull rather than inspiring and commendable. Time has transmuted everything vital to the unimportant:

In years ago at Hermitage
This faded face was counted fair,

None fairer; and at Hermitage
 We swore to wed when he should thrive.
 But swore to wed when he should thrive.
 But never a chance had he or I,
 And waiting made his love outwear,
 And Time, that dooms man's love to die,
 Preserves a maid's alive.

The comment of Dennis Taylor referred to earlier, says 'his increase in awareness coincides with a regression into memories'. Hence, his purely personal poems that are time-related display this 'awareness'. It is only when hindsight provides him the necessary insight and objective distance, can he present, and recognize, the experience in its true and 'final form and matured significance.'

A poem of personal memory that looks back the entire span of his long lifetime is "He Never Expected Much" (873). The by-line says 'A Reflection on my Eighty-Sixth Birthday'. As he looks back those eighty-plus years, he says with the finality of last words, that life has kept its faith in being faithless:

Well, World you have kept faith with me, ...
 Upon the whole you have proved to be
 Much as you said you were
 Since as a child I used to lie
 Upon the leaze and watch the sky,
 Never, I own expected I
 That life would be all fair.

His memory of the events in his life, taken in their totality, scanned from practically the end of it, seem to confirm the belief he set out with as a young child.

He expected, and his life experiences later confirmed, that life does not 'promise overmuch' – nothing in extremes, what it does do is string up a lifetime of little events and small occasions: 'just neutral tinted haps and such'. With hindsight, he realizes that the slings and arrows of life – ('strain and ache') left less mark on him simply because he had been forewarned, and therefore fore armed, against them.

"The Self-Unseeing" (135), as we have seen in discussions in earlier chapters, again deals with a childhood memory recalled later. The occasion remembered is one of domestic bliss – the mother, father and the dancing child (himself) are experiencing one of the happiest times of their lives: 'Blessings emblazoned on us that day.' But, as with all human experiences of happiness, only in retrospect does one recognize this condition. Thus, Hardy says, in the midst of bliss, the three were 'looking away', unaware of the momentous nature of the time.

Memory, thus, functions as nemesis often. Again, it may even be the cause of grief and regret. The enduring and insistent nature of memory permits the existence of personal or internal time (like Bergson's "La Durée") so that certain experiences of the past seem to have an existence out of time.

But a proper perception of an event or situation seems to be the most important outcome of the journey to the past. Revisiting these situations with the greater wisdom gained through the intervening years (Taylor's statement that the 'advance in awareness coincides with the regression into memories' mentioned earlier) allows Hardy to 'review' them with greater neutrality or objectivity. But it is to his "Poems of 1912-13" (277-297) the group of twenty-one deeply moving and poignant lyrics written at the sudden death of Emma Hardy, that Hardy most successfully brings his analytical powers. He dissects the exhumed experiences and emotions with honesty and the objective distance of a scientist. The relationship, which had seen tumultuous days, is analysed, once it has become a part of the past (which it does, with Emma's death).

"The Going" (277) demonstrates Hardy's early inability to come to terms with her death; he turns his gaze instead to the past. He

relives the memory of his first sight of her: 'You were the swan-necked one who rode/Along the beetling Beeny Crest'. He remembers their early years together as happy days: 'Life unrolled us its very best.'

But the look backwards also brings memories of their subsequent unhappiness, which, now, looking back seems strange and incomprehensible: 'Why, then, latterly did we not speak?' There is regret that they made little effort to bridge the breach: 'Why ... Did we not think of those days long dead,/And ere your vanishing strive to seek/That time's renewal?' However, Hardy's questionings end on a note of pained acceptance of the 'unchangeable' as he concludes 'All's past amend'.

Looking back at their relationship of more than thirty years, Hardy accepts the various phases it went through – the good and the bad phases – and is filled with regret that time has run out for them before any positive steps could be taken to rebuild the relationship.

Interestingly, Hardy mentions here, as well as in a few other poems ("After a Journey", "At Castle Boterel", "Beeny Cliff", "Places") that a journey to a happier past can reawaken the happiness again. Hence, it must be the intense journey back to the early, happy

years together, after Emma's death that is responsible for the rekindled love in Hardy for her. Revisiting times of love and happiness brings it all back into the present.

That is why in the poem "The Voice" (285) of the same series, Hardy refers to her as the 'woman much missed' because he says now 'you are not as you were/When first you had changed from the one who was all to me,/But as at first, when our day was fair'.

The voice of Emma seems to beckon him and he follows, certain that it is the Emma of earlier times that he will find. The love he feels, then, is for the Emma that was, the Emma of the past. However, it is only after the death that he can view the earlier Emma in the Emma that lived with him, as a stranger, in his house all these many years. But to view her as the same person and feel a rush of love for her, Hardy had to travel back to the past and review his early memories of her first, down 'even to the original air-blue gown'.

In "After a Journey" (289), Hardy revisits Cornwall and the places there associated with their first meeting and courtship. Physically being in the same places again, led, as if by Emma's ghost, seems to reawaken the past so vividly that he actually thinks he sees her 'facing round me everywhere,/With your nut-coloured hair,/And

grey eyes, rose-flush coming and going'. After the first 'awe', there is the recognition and satisfaction of having 're-entered your old haunts at last.' Almost as if the younger Emma of his courtship still exists, he says 'Through the years, through the dead scenes, I have tracked you'. And the first question on meeting her face to face is: what did the subsequent breach in their relationship mean to her? Without apportioning blame to either, he describes the breach in neutral ones: 'Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division'. He realizes now that Death in a sense has brought that 'division' to an end and brought about, paradoxically, something like a reconciliation. The physical actuality of the experience of revisiting the old haunts evokes the memories so emphatically that the past merges with the present and Hardy can actually ask the question troubling him about a time much after the early past associated with those places. Most importantly, memories of love fill him all over again with love for his late estranged wife.

Though not from the series "Poems 1912-13", a poem that similarly revives memories in order to analyse the situation better, is "We Sat at the Window" (355). The memory is of day in 1875 at Bournemouth, when the two are imprisoned indoors by the incessant

rain outside. While the rain outside ‘babbled unchecked’ and rushed out of ‘gutter and spout’ in ‘the busy way/Of witless things’, there is complete silence within:

Nothing is read, nothing to see
 Seemed in that room for her and me ...
 ... We were irked by the scene, by our own selves,
yes.
 For I did not know, nor did she infer
 How much there was to read and guess
 By her in me, and to see and crown
 By me in her.

There is a sterile, soul-destroying vacuum between them. It is only when Hardy looks back at this memory, can he diagnose the basic problem with their relationship: lack of communication. They knew so little of each other, yet each had virtues enough to surprise and please the other had they but got to know of them. At the very start of their married life (they were married in 1874), they had ceased to try to know each other properly; the upheaval that followed their entire thirty-odd years together was the natural outcome of this lack of communication between them: ‘wasted were two souls in their prime’. It could have been forestalled had they but become aware of the ailment, the poem seems to suggest. But it is only now, scores of years later that Hardy himself has been brought face to face with it after hindsight provides him the necessary insight.

strong, individualistic attitude has finally brought the relationship to ruin. Thus, Hardy now concludes: 'the deep strong woman is the weakest, and the weak one is the strong'. It is her reserve restraining her from finding a 'balm' for her 'torrid sorrow' that is the root cause of the 'deep division, and our dark undying pain.'

On looking back, Hardy has come to the above conclusion that extended, is his realization too after examining the situation described in the poem "You Were the Sort that Men Forget" (364). A strong woman is a poor communicator and hence the cause of the ruined relationship. The same strength when manifested in an attitude of forthrightness and honesty is again the barrier to good inter-personal communication. Such a woman fares poorly in personal relationships. The men have not taken too kindly to her because, he now realizes, she practiced no 'art':

You'd not the art – you never had
 For good or bad –
 To make men see how sweet your meaning,
 Which, visible, had made them glad.

It is not only that she kept her sweetness from ever being 'visible' but also because she was honest to the point of rude tactlessness, that they turned away: 'you would by words inept let fall/offend them all.'

Hardy realizes that she compounded her sin of omission by a certain obtuseness in her relationships:

You lacked the eye to understand
 Those friends off hand
 Whose mode was crude, though whose dim purport.
 Outpriced the courtesies of the bland.

Her sterling qualities won her no friends: contrary to expectations, they only brought her sorrows, because she lacked tact and discernment. Without these qualities, the poet today understands, human relationships seldom can endure. Nature's gift of a warm and loving heart goes to waste in so far as it neither know how to give, nor does it receive, what it richly deserves.

What Hardy has us infer from the above two poems is his realization that unless one can bring to human relationships sensitiveness and wisdom, goodness, virtue or even moral strength alone is not sufficient. The 'art' he mentions is not necessarily negative in its connotation; in fact, by linking it with the gifts of Nature in the last but one line he has shown that the term has been used in the positive sense of a sensitivity perceptive of the needs of others. However, to be aware of the goodness lying behind all that gruffness, to be close enough to read her well, yet not be affected by her 'inept words' would require the kind of objectivity only time can

provide. Hence, a sensitive honest portrayal of the complex subject such as this, is only possible in hindsight, perhaps. However, sometimes objective distance provided by time is alone not enough: it has to be aided by a complete renunciation of the self. Hardy makes this possible through the use of his favourite mode of traveling back: in the guise of a ghost. In the poem, "I rose up as my Custom is" (311) the narrator is one who was once a poet, but now is a ghost. On All Souls' Day, he rises and visits his old love and her new husband to enquire about her well being. How easy it is to plumb the depths of honesty as a ghost, he discovers since he no longer is a player amongst the others. He is even able to view himself, if a little smugly, quite objectively and see the drag of a companion he was when alive: 'Wrung in brow,/And crazed with the ill eyed.' She admits honestly, yes, 'A poet is the worst' kind of a husband because 'Women are practical and they/Crave the wherewith to pay their way,/And slake their social thirst'. A poet is an 'ideal' they have a passing infatuation for, but they look for a provider in a husband. Material comfort and social status are what they look for in a husband – '... look at this man snoring here –/He's no romantic chanticleer,/Yet keeps me in good style'. It is easier for a woman not to have to plumb the depths

of her heart but remain satisfied with the material gains. A poet forces her to know herself and face her true feelings honestly: he tries to 'quest into my thoughts,/... wants to know/What one has felt from earliest days,/Why one thought not in other ways/And one's Love's of long ago'. She is not comfortable confronting her deeper feelings. The poet-ghost is shocked to discover the truth: 'Her words benumbed my fond faint ghost', because this truth underlying their relationship, and the true nature of woman was surely beyond his expectation, although he was unlike like the 'snoring' man beside her now, but had been a caring, sensitive, intuitive poet. A woman's logic, her insecurities and her true feelings are truly beyond the comprehension of the most sensitive of men – even distance in time may not bring him closer to the truth. Hence, Hardy gives him the dispassionate interest of a ghost.

Again, perhaps because much of it is wistful thinking only, in the use of a ghost can Emma become the caring companion of old that Hardy wishes for, so desperately. Hardy imagines in "The Haunter" (284) an Emma who loves to 'companion him to places/Only dreamers know', but is perplexed by the problem of letting him know she does so. There is a hint of self-reproach when Hardy imagines

Emma's ghost commenting on the lack of communication when alive: how he ignored her when alive thereby not permitting her to evolve into a loving companion. She is desperate that channels of communication be now opened between them: Hardy's imagining her thus is indication that a communication of sorts is now established.

When she was alive, Hardy's indifference drove her away, he now feels and honestly wishes for a kind of reunion. Now that she is a ghost, Hardy imagines she understands better, is more caring and he in his turn, is more honest and contrite.

Developing this theme of self-awareness further, are a few other poems of Hardy. In them, memory becomes the mode of honest introspection. A poem mentioned earlier "A Countenance", carries a hint of this brave facing up to his drawbacks. The poem describing a face, from the past, with 'her laugh', 'not in the middle of her face quite' comments how this lack of symmetry affected others adversely while attracting him. On looking back from the distance of years, he wonders whether the attraction he experienced for the unusual was because it was for so brief a period. But would familiarity have finally bred contempt? Was that only a passing fancy; could something so unusual have evolved into anything more enduring, is his query. But

the unspoken confession is – Is he capable of giving such an infatuation a sustaining power? He knows himself well enough – hence the query.

But for that honest self-appraisal, Hardy had to travel many years in time, many years beyond the power of the infatuation to be so ‘unblinded’ into honest introspection.

Elaborating on the theme hinted in Stanza II of ‘The Haunter’ mentioned earlier, Hardy wrote “An Upbraiding” (486). Here again he imagines Emma’s ghost accosting him about his earlier indifference vis-à-vis his rekindled love for her. Her ghost accuses him of trying to communicate his love for her now while ignoring her when alive: “Ah, what would I have given alive/To win such tenderness!’ But all this love for her after her death does not convince her and she asks is this love only because she is dead and unattainable now – when he dies and no more barriers exist between them, what will she see in him, she wonders, his newly discovered love for her or his earlier indifference?:

When you are dead and stand to me
Not differenced, as now,
But like again, will you be cold
As when we lived, or how?

Hardy is capable of this kind of honesty not only because he is innately so, but more because time has removed the immediacy of the situation and he can not only see others as they are, but also view himself through the eyes of others as they see him. There is acceptance of his fickleness as also perhaps an acceptance of the unpredictability of the future. It is certain that Emma's question will remain unanswered – not because he will not answer, but because he cannot. He cannot anticipate his own feelings or reactions – his past and present have proved that.

That is why there is much tentativeness in the poem "Afterwards" (511). Published in 1917 when he was seventy-seven years old, it is concerned with the question of how he would like to be remembered after death. He likens the event to the closing of a gate behind one: Time will close the 'postern' behind his 'tremulous' time on earth. Each stanza imagines a different moment of death and the accompanying scene in the world of nature and its birds and animals. The imagination of the world of nature is vivid and detailed. He wonders how the world might remember him – he wishes to be remembered as 'a man who used to notice such things', as one who 'strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm'. A poem

where irony is conspicuous by its absence, in which the mood is not of gloom but peace and quiet, it is suffused with a love of the small details of the natural world. There is an impressive modesty in his wish to be only remembered as a countryman with a loving, observing eye.

This poem fuses past, present and future into one unified vision. He goes into the future to look at the present as a part of the past. Perhaps only through such a demolishing of time barriers is it possible for him to contemplate an absolute like death.

As an ultimate example of honest introspection perhaps few poems can equal: "Survival" (662). As he gazes at the fire, mesmerized by the 'green-grained sticks of fire' he is reproached by his own voice – his conscience, cataloging his various sins. His occasional wavering from the truth, his indifference to his late wife, his reluctance to form a consistent philosophy of life, are the subjects on which his conscience apparently continually pricks him. Lastly, 'his own voice' in parting, leaves the message of charity above all. The ability to honestly face up to the lapses of one's part requires a tremendous distancing from it through time if only because then the perspective is most likely to be nearer the truth.

Physical distance as well as distance through time are both necessary to clearly perceive the change and evolution of religious beliefs. Two poems discussed in earlier chapters, “The Oxen” (403) and “An Afternoon Service at Mellstock” (356) touch on this theme. “The Oxen” is built on the traditional belief still persisting in rural England that the Oxen ‘kneel’ at the stroke of midnight on Christmas Eve in homage to Christ. It is a comforting belief, and Hardy shifts the time perspective from the past to the present to say ‘So fair a fancy few would weave/In these years’. Yet, looking back, he accepts the value of these legends although he can never believe again its truth. He wishes, however, the belief could be authenticated – he would travel great distances to be able to do so, ‘Hoping it might be so’.

A companion piece of this poem is “An Afternoon Service at Mellstock”. It describes a drowsy afternoon service at mellstock in the year 1850. As the congregation looks out at the elms, the rooks and the clouds outside, they begin to sway ‘like the trees’ – forging a bond between man and nature. Hardy calls the worship ‘mindless’ as it is based on tradition and faith alone. Yet he cannot deny the value of such worship at the community level: it bonds the congregation, as

well as man and nature into one cohesive community. He realizes, looking back at these services, that their real value in human and social terms cannot be denied or replaced. For all the conviction he now has in his turning away from traditional faith, he still yearns, he realises, for that special sense of oneness such worship nurtures. In losing his faith, he acknowledges, he has lost that special feeling of wholeness with other men and nature he had as a child:

‘... I am not aware
That I have gained by subtle thought on things
Since we stood psalming there’.

Both the above poems take Hardy back to childhood memories and reawaken that sense of comfort experienced through traditional faith. With poignant honesty he realizes the loss of solace, such beliefs provided. He knows that world of such solace is forever denied to him now.

Thus, Time for Hardy is not always inimical to man's he uses his life experiences to move towards self-understanding, though not always leading to self-making through self-awareness and consciousness. Often the pain of recognition is just pain and anguish.

END NOTES

1. Hardy, F.E. *Life*, p.207.
2. Taylor, D. *Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

Chapter-V

CONCLUSION INTEGRATED VISION

This research has focused on the poetry of Thomas Hardy with a view to arriving at an understanding of Hardy's integrated vision of time. Fundamentally, this has involved the reading and analysis of the primary source – the poems of Hardy that deal with the subject of time.

For the sake of convenience, the research and analysis has been carried out in five segments corresponding to the five broad aspects that Hardy's varied perspectives have been narrowed down to. They constitute the various chapters of the thesis. A Preface has been included that briefly touches on the relevant philosophical interpretations of the subject of time in order to better view Hardy's handling of the subject.

Thomas Hardy's achievement as a novelist has been from the beginning, so overwhelming, that his achievement as a poet was, until quite recent times, quite overshadowed by it. This is ironic in view of

the fact that Hardy himself held quite a different attitude to his two vocations; he is said to have declared that he would never have written a line of prose if he could have earned his living at poetry. It was verse, he believed, that “contained the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature”.¹

All through his creative period, Hardy wrote poetry – from his early twenties until his death at the age of eighty-eight. When, after *Jude the Obscure*, he turned away from prose, the prose, the poetic output of years lay unpublished with him; he had published only a few poems till then. A selection from his poetic creations of thirty years produced his first volume, *Wessex Poems*, published in 1898 when he was fifty-eight years old. After that, at regular intervals, Hardy published seven more volumes: *Poems of the Past and Present* (1902), *Time's Laughingstocks* (1909), *Satires of Circumstances* (1914), *Moments of Vision* (1917), *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), *Human Shows* (1925), *Winter Words* (posthumously, in 1928). He incorporated into each volume the poems written during the thirty-odd years of his early unpublished poetic career.

Consciousness of the passage of time exists like a groundswell through a major part of Hardy's poetry. In fact, six of the eight titles

of the volumes of his poetry have direct or indirect links with time and bear sufficient testimony to Hardy's interest in the subject. *Wessex Poems* and *Human Shows* are the only two that seem to stand part, but only apparently so. Wessex is a place frozen in time – its timelessness being its most outstanding characteristic while *Human Shows* with its suggestion of mortality, does carry suggestions of the theme of time.

I considered it appropriate to include a Preface that briefly touched on the more significant philosophical interpretations of the concept of time to provide a backdrop for Hardy's own views on the subject, although Hardy was emphatic in his assertion that his works revealed only passing 'impressions' and not a systematic philosophy.² But he is also the poet who advocated the formulation of personal philosophy – 'let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience'.³ Starting with a mention of Plato's interpretation of time as a 'moving image of Eternity', it includes Aristotle's definition as 'the life of the Soul in movement as it passes from one stage of Act or experience to another' that makes it more in consonance with human experience of it by making time an empirical concept – much

more than the Kantian view of it as *a priori* or independent of all experiences.

The Preface next contains G.J. Whitrow's explanation about the concept of Time in his book, *The Natural Philosophy of Time*⁴ as emanating from the distinction between desire and satisfaction and the consequent sense of purpose and associated effort towards the goal. Man marks the period of effort by a series of 'scientific abstraction' or *time*, as ordinarily understood. He distinguishes between 'clock time' and 'cyclic time', understanding by the first term the visually continuous, infinite divisible time measured, for convenience, by clocks and timepieces. 'Cyclic time' is the abstract division of time into periodic cycles giving us years, months, seasons, days and nights. This is the time that man is most familiar with, and as it is an experiential concept only in so far as the aspect that concerns with what happens during it, what follows is the hypothetical division of 'time' into past, present and future, thereby imposing a time-logic on the flow of life. Albert Einstein's interpretation of time made the past, present and the future relativist concepts.

Mention has also been made of Marcel Proust's concept of 'extra-temporal' time when in a moment 'out of time' the past, present and future blend via the medium of memory.

Henri Bergson's internal time or *la durée* or duration is an apprehension of the present state as a continuum of previous states perceived by what he calls intuition. Bergson's intuition is something akin to imagination and the mode of apprehending *la durée* is consciousness, which he describes as based on memory. Thus, true time goes beyond any division into past, present and future and becomes the continuous life of memory, consequent to which the past prolongs into the present.

With Proust and Bergson, time ceases to be mechanistic and becomes a biological or anthropocentric phenomenon.

Although Thomas Hardy makes a passing and rather dismissive reference in his journal to the new Bergsonian concept of time as an old idea in a new bottle, yet his concept of time as revealed in his poetry shows similarity of view to quite an extent – the role of the memory in man's experience with time being the most basic feature shared by both.

In an attempt to arrive at a clearer understanding of Hardy's attitude to the past, in the Introduction effort was made at analysing the socio-historical influences surrounding Hardy's years of young adulthood. Mention was made of the fact that the nineteenth century saw writers focused their attention on the past – often the personal past. Some exposition of the underlined cause was attempted: the loss of belief in formal religious teachings was seen as the basic reason for the writers' turning their attention to their memory or to the past. Emphasis was laid on the fact of Dorset, Hardy's birth place, being located in that corner of England where the winds of change were slow to blow through, whereas the rest of England was in the grip of the cataclysmic Industrial Revolution. As an apprentice under the architect, Hicks, in Dorchester, Hardy was thus exposed to the fast-changing world of railways, telegraph and London newspapers during the day, only to return home in the evening to Lower Bockhampton and its unchanging, familiar rural, centuries-old ways. Thus, in the course of a single day, he seemed to cross, as it were, time barriers and move fluidly from the contemporary to the historical. This is reflected in Hardy's innumerable poems where he easily moves back in time from a moment in the present. Reference was also made to the

fact that Hardy's intellectual horizons were fluidly changing and expanding. Awareness of new ideas, chiefly radical, through his association with Horace Moule, brought about not just new ideas but a breaking away from the old, though comforting beliefs. They would stand forever rejected by Hardy, but he would look longingly back at a time of confidence and less tentativeness and a much less perplexed self. Therefore, if his homeland, Dorset, was slow to change, the changes in the perception of Hardy changed Dorset for him sufficiently for him to yearn for the world that existed once with a trusting, more secure individual at its center. Additionally, as it was the last three decades of his life that were devoted exclusively to poetry, and Hardy was a prolific poet, the bulk of his over nine hundred poems are really poems written by a man looking back into his past. Hence, they tend to be ruminative, nostalgic and retrospective in nature so that the basic pattern is of Now and Then.

Chapter I, entitled The Past as Time Past, deals with those poems where Hardy's attitude is simple and nostalgic without ever slipping into sentimentality. These are poems of personal memory involving childhood memories that are fondly remembered and recounted. Hardy's theory of 'exhumed emotion' is explained,

mention being made of “He Never Expected Much” (873) as an outstanding example of it. Childhood memories [“The One We Knew” (227)] showed memory could prove a link between generations cohering them together as well as functioning as vital medium of keeping local traditions, local lores alive through time. At the local, communal or familial level, memory proved a cementing force, bonding the group together [“The One We Knew” (227), “A Church Romance” (211), “The Roman Road” (218)]. At another level, such bonding seemed to lead to segregation – as in “A Church Romance” the family is bonded together into a separate unit by their shared ‘memory’ of the Hardy parents’ romance and courtship; the parents are bonded into yet closer and separate unit by their personal memory shared exclusively by the two.

The importance of memory in giving life and length to events and people long gone was also highlighted here. While Hardy generally accepted the flow of time and made little or no effort to transcend it or stem the flow, “On a Discovered Curl of Hair” (630) spoke of a curl of hair cut in youth that defeats time’s ravages and retains its youthful colour while the rest of the head greys in time,

while in “Outside the Casement” (626) there is the naïve query of denial might not defeat time:

Should we counterfeit
Not knowledge of it
And stay the stroke that would blanch and numb?

Juxtaposing these poems were others such as “The Missed Train” (759) where he admitted and accepted the passage of time and its effect:

‘Dim wastes of dead years bar away
Then from Now!’

Most importantly, Hardy accepts that the flow of time is one directional and non-reversible and that nothing ‘backward climbs’ and ‘Twice-over cannot be!’ [“A Second Attempt” (720)].

The antinomial character of the majority of Hardy poems stands revealed in poems discussed in Chapter II – The Past as Present. He placed the present alongside the past thereby not only achieving a fluid passage through time but also interesting ironic contrast. The innumerable poems that state the contrast between Then and Now [“Boys Then and Now” (875), “Before Life and After” (230), “The Dawn after the Dance” (182), “Former Beauties” (195), “In a Former Resort after Many Years” (666), “Lodging House Fuchsias” (835), “Logs on the Hearth” (433), “The Old Neighbour

and the New” (640), “Molly Gone” (444)] were at the simplest level of this ironic, antinomial structure. A more complex perspective was displayed in poems such as “Just the Same” (650), “A Forgotten Miniature” (887), where the tension between the Then and Now was manifested through the contrast between a changing external world and an unchanging, constant inner, personal world. Tension between illusion and reality in “My Cecily” (31) and “The Revisitation” (152) where the illusion of the past is preferred to the reality of the present, showed yet another dimension of this poetic structure.

Poems such as “At Castle Boterel” (292) and “During Wind and Rain” (441) where the poet showed impressive ease at crossing time barriers continually, are discussed to show the complexity of his poetic vision. In several Hardy poems the present experience proved a gateway to the memory of the past which then appeared before him with the clarity and detail of eidetic images.

Emphasis was given to the several modes of traveling back to the past that Hardy employs. Physical sensation [“Under the Waterfall” (276)], music [“The Self Unseeing” (135), “Rome: On the Palatine” (68)], actual items associated with the loved one from the past [“To My Father’s Violin” (381), “The Little Old Table” (609),

“On a Discovered Curl of Hair” (630)], journeys [“Lonely Days” (614), “At Castle Boterel” (292)], places [“They Could not Come” (598), “Roman Road” (218)] and ghostly visitations [“The Haunter” (284)] as well as logs, trees, leaf were the chief modes resorted to by Hardy. Imagining playing a violin was enough to bring back long-forgotten melodies in “In the Small House” (608). In several of these poems there appeared a sense of a confluence of the different times described.

“Scenes in ordinary life that are insipid at twenty become interesting at thirty and tragic at forty”, Hardy wrote in his journal on the 19th April 1888. Hardy acknowledges time and its passage through his life through remembered experiences in the poems considered in Chapter III – The Past Reviewed.

While the majority of the time-related poems showed Hardy’s exhuming the moments from the past and re-living them with the freshness and detail of eidetic images, Chapter III of the research concerns itself with those poems where he or the dramatic persona, not only views but ‘reviews’ the past experience. Time for Hardy is not always inimical to man: he uses his life experience to move towards self-understanding, though not always leading to a self-

making through self-awareness and consciousness. Often the price of recognition is pain and anguish.

As the above quoted comment demonstrates, Hardy believed life and experience colour our judgement and deepen our awareness and understanding. The exhumed emotions are as fresh as when interred decades ago, but the poet's understanding of them sometimes has changed significantly after they were exhumed. Mention has been made in this context of "We Sat at the Window" (355), a poem narrating an event of 1875 after a gap of unspecified years. The rain outside patters and spouts noisily while the couple imprisoned inside by it are silent:

Nothing to read, nothing to see
Seemed in that room for her and me ...
... we were irked by the scene, by our own selves, yes

The frozen, stagnant vacuum in the relationship speaks of the aridity of a point of no return. However, as he exhumes this memory, there is recognition of the sense of waste here as also a realization of missed opportunity. Here the distance of the moment from its exhumation and the resultant change in the understanding of the poet in the intervening period has made him see the reality of his life in clearer terms – the tragic waste of 'two souls in their prime'. Objective

distance is then the instrument accessing this ability to review and understand. Thus, now with hindsight he does not look for any extrinsic factors but places the onus for the failure, perhaps correctly, on both of them.

Similarly, in “Had You Wept” (313), hindsight gives him a glimpse of the truth. The complexity of a close human relationship requires such objective distancing from the issue, and he comes to the insightful realization that in a close relationship stoic endurance actually harms by isolating. The truth that dawns is – ‘The deep strong woman is weakest, the weak one is strong’. Retrospectively seen, the solution seems obvious:

Had you wept; had you but neared me with a hazed uncertain
ray...
... a new beginning, a fresh, fair heaven have smoothed the things
awry’.

The element of regret that follows such moments of epiphany often assume tragic overtones. But it is not always that the sense of regret is so; there are several simple lyrics such as “To Louisa in the Lane” (822), “Faintheart in a Railway Train” (516), “A Countenance” (847), where the regret though sincerely felt, is only just lightly touched upon.

‘We live forward but understand backward’ Hardy had noted down in his notebook. Oftentimes, the ‘backward’ understanding comes too late. In the poem “The Rival” (362) realization and recognition of her sole role in the final breakdown of the relationship does come to the persona of the poem, but when it can serve no other purpose than unending remorse and anguish. Hence, memory sometimes functions only as nemesis, dispensing retribution where due. Again, there are times when knowledge of later sorrows cast their gloom on an earlier happy memory giving a dark, ironic undertone to the remembrance, as in “The Self-Unseeing” (135), “At the Piano” (842).

Hence, the discussions so far showed that knowledge does not bring relief. Furthermore, it became clear that distance in time alone may not lead to objective distance; the person may have to cast aside his identity by casting aside his being even, in order to probe the situation dispassionately. Only in the guise of a fleshless entity, a ghost, the persona of “I Rose Up as My Custom is” (311) began to understand a woman’s insecurities and needs, although when alive he had been a feeling, caring, sensitive poet.

The Poems 1912-13 dealing with Hardy's soulful and deeply moving analysis of the breakdown of the former love and camaraderie between his first wife and himself, undertaken after her death, showed that separation, even through death perhaps, was necessary to find the grace and generosity to assess the situation dispassionately, or perhaps, compassionately. The distance gave the proper perspective, but the disquieting question Hardy posed was, if the physical distance were to miraculously disappear, would the compassion and understanding remain? ("An Upbraiding" (486) touched on this particular aspect).

In certain poems ("The Oxen" (403), "An Afternoon Service at Mellstock" (356) the look backwards brought an awareness of a different kind. While the situations described remained forever unchanged, Hardy's attitude towards them had changed simply because his belief had undergone radical change. But his rejection of those earlier beliefs and his yearning for the self that he had been then made for ironic contrast that was poignant in its honesty.

In the final chapter, Integrated Vision, the major statements and conclusions evolving from the discussions in the previous chapters are restated in an attempt to discover a coherent pattern.

The Introduction has led to the conclusion that certain socio-economic influences of the times played a significant part in the shaping of Hardy's particular perspective towards the past. Biographical elements also contributed to it. They are briefly stated in this chapter in order to see them in perspective with conclusions drawn from discussions of the next three chapters. The first chapter, The Past as Time Past, those poems were studied that revealed an attitude to the past that was simple and nostalgic. Poems of personal memory involving incidents and experiences of his childhood and family life at Upper Bockhampton are fondly remembered from a great distance of time and experience ["Childhood Among Ferns" (846), "The Roman Road" (218), "A Church Romance" (211), "The One we Knew" (277)]. The poems included here view the past as time gone and in them Hardy did not try to forge a link with the present. He was content to see them as time which is past. Hardy's theory of 'exhumed emotions' was seen to tie up with his facile use of the mode of personal memory. Personal past, communal past and historical past were seen sometimes to merge ["The One We Knew" (277)] or even to diverge at some point ["The Roman Road" (218)]. The bottom-line here, however, was the conclusion that if memory, on the one hand unites then on the other it segregates individuals or groups as well.

In Chapter II, The Past as the Present, those poems that showed exhumed emotions disregard the barrier between the past and the present, were analysed. The various modes of going to the past were discussed and the conclusion arrived at was that Hardy in viewing the present and past simultaneously, setting them side by side and achieved not just ironic contrast but an integrated vision of the past and present.

Chapter III, titled The Past Reviewed, involved analysis of those poems where Hardy or the dramatic persona, was able to review and in hindsight understand experiences and situations of the past, both in personal as well as dramatic situations. Memory was seen as an instrument of justice as nemesis, in whose past had seen some crime; elsewhere memory also sowed grief and regret, while its most important function was as a mode of introspection. Often, however, nothing else was achieved save the knowledge of understanding.

The pattern that finally emerges is that memory is an ally of man against time. It helps him elicit an understanding of the situations and of himself. With the help of memory, he can select, discard and focus on the central emotion or situation which when in ordinary

sequence of events is quite lost in the confusing complexity of related and unrelated details.

Hardy makes an interesting remark in *Life* (December 4, 1890, p.230) that no individual is always and only one 'person': 'I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances'. In this belief, Hardy comes close to Marcel Proust's contention that 'each man is a swift, uninterrupted succession of selves. Sometimes these are disconnected. It is only in the retina of the mind, memory, that we can hope to recover and recognize previous selves, even discover a thread of unity.'⁵ Memory then is seen to play an important role in the journey of self-discovery. In fact, memory, Hardy's poems showed, proved instrumental in making an artist of him in so far as it enabled him to re-order the past experience and his personality and to elicit and underlying unity in them. To refer to Proust again, 'whether or not he is conscious the fact, memory is man's most powerful ally against the destructive power of time. It enables him to remould his life in retrospect'.⁶

In other words, human beings being different, often disconnected, selves it was only through the mode of memory that he

can recover and recognize previous selves. This recognition affords him an integrity, with the disparate selves projecting a picture of wholeness. Oftentimes, such an integrity could include in one single sweep several generations of a family line even ["Heredity" (586), "Pedigree" (390)] and a picture of wholeness would be revealed. Hence, his integrated vision of time, by keeping him in touch with his inner experiencing self saves him from a sense of living in fragments, from moment to moment, and leads finally to an integrated vision of self.

END NOTES

1. Hardy, F.E. *Life*, p.302.
2. *Ibid.*, p.377.
3. *Ibid.*, p.310.
4. Whitrow, G.J. *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961).
5. Proust, M. *The Past Recaptured* Tr. from French by Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1970).
6. *Ibid.*

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