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 When, after Jude the Obscure, he turned away from prose, the prose, the poetic output of years lay unpublished with him; he had published only a few poems till then.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 He incorporated into each volume the poems written during the thirty-odd yeas of his early unpublished poetic career.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* 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 Doreset, 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.' 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'.

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

2. Ibid., p.377.
3. Ibid., p.310.
6. Ibid.