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" (887) 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 agone,
   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 ‘throbings 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
finally fall asleep together. When the soldier awakens at daylight, he is shocked to see the effect of 'Time’s transforming chisel' on Agnette: 'crease where curve was, where was raven, grizzle ~/Pitts, where peonies once did dwell'. She is quick to see his dismay and angrily retorts:

'Yes, Sir, I am old' said she,
And the thing which should increase love
   Turns it quickly into scorning -
   And your new-won heart from me.

She leaves him angrily. He does not follow her, or deny the truth of her accusations. Rather he faces the truth squarely: she has perceived his 'native weakness' and he accepts the truth of her insight. He too leaves, not just the ruins but the very area. He has visited his past and come face to face with reality. He does not deny the truth but accepts it with the concluding comment that 'Love is lame at fifty years'. To revisit the past is to come face to face with reality, whether one accepts it, or not.

The soldier of "The Revisitation" accepts the truth bravely, but the speaker of "My Cicely" (31) when similarly challenged, responds by denying reality and insisting on illusion. When the city man learns his old sweetheart has died, he makes a pilgrimage to her graveside in the far west of England. Once there, he realizes that there has been a
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’ ...  

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’. 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) 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’. They are different from the
common images used by poets because Paulin says that “it seems ... e\text{idetic images are seen in the literal sense of the word”}.\textsuperscript{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.

\begin{verbatim}
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!
\end{verbatim}
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 upswum,/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

2. Ibid., p.44.
6. Ibid., p.200.

8. Ibid., p.121.

9. Ibid.