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Older People and Ageing in the fiction of Thomas Hardy

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ABSTRACT

In recent years interest in literary gerontology, the study of older people and ageing in literary works, has grown. Interest has focussed on whether old people are portrayed negatively or positively in writing and the other arts, and whether the study of old people in literary works can help gerontologists in their understanding of ageing.

The present thesis explores the issues of older people and ageing in the fiction of Thomas Hardy concentrating particularly on four novels: *Jude the Obscure*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and *Two on a Tower*, although reference is made to other works. The working hypothesis is that 'Older people and ageing play a central and hitherto underestimated role in the vital themes considered in Hardy's fiction'. Hardy was chosen because very little has been written about the subject in his work and because he is such a shrewd observer of character and a perceptive social critic.

I conclude that older people and ageing do play a substantial part in the Hardy fiction canon. The major themes are: a close consideration of social issues expressed through the words and actions of older people; the significance of psychological adaptations to ageing in his characters; the investigation of relationships between people of disparate ages; and the use of the symbolism of antiquity represented in buildings, institutions, archaeology and nature to amplify the changes brought about by modernity. The subject is worthy of further and more detailed study.

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In 2001 I finally got round to a long held ambition to study English for a degree. My choice of Massey University has been well vindicated and I clearly remember my first contact course tutorial with Warwick Slinn which was on Keats and Coleridge. I realised then that I had made a good choice. Warwick also supervised my Honours Research essay and I am grateful to him for his wise advice while preparing this as well as his support during my period of ill-health in 2006. In addition to Warwick's guidance I have benefitted from the stimulating teaching and enthusiasm of William Broughton, John Muirhead, Doreen D'Cruz, Phillip Poole, Allen Meek and Dick Corballis, the last of whom shares with me the hope that the name Dick will be preserved in perpetuity unsullied by other connotations. In addition to these inspiring teachers I have also found the exchange of ideas with fellow students at contact courses and postgraduate student seminars to be of great value. Dr Judith Collett a physician with an English degree also provided useful suggestions.

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TEXTUAL REFERENCES

A combination of the Wordsworth and Penguin editions of Hardy's novels and short stories has been used in the preparation of this thesis. I have used the Wordsworth Edition of *Jude the Obscure* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and the Penguin editions of *The Woodlanders* and *Two on a Tower* for the four novels discussed in detail in chapters three to six. There was no particular reason for this choice other than the fact that these were the editions in my personal library. A list of abbreviations used for the novels and short stories is provided at the end of this section including the relevant editions used.

The Wordsworth collection of Hardy's novels is based on his 1912 Macmillan editions and embody the writer's final corrections. The Penguin edition uses the first editions in volume form of each of Hardy's novels dating from 1871 to 1897. The use of both editions makes no material difference to the subject matter discussed in this thesis.

I was fortunate enough to obtain an original copy of Charles Booth's *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* (1894) signed by the author himself. I was equally fortunate to obtain a numbered original copy of *Old Mrs Chundle* published in 1929 by Crosby Gaige, New York.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for Hardy's works in the body of the text. The full Bibliography follows the final chapter.

Principal Chapters:

JO	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>	Wordsworth edition
MC	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>	Wordsworth edition
TT	<i>Two on a Tower</i>	Penguin edition
TW	<i>The Woodlanders</i>	Penguin edition

Other Hardy Works:

CM	<i>A Changed Man and other Stories</i>	Sutton Publishing, Stroud, Gloucestershire.
FMC	<i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i>	Penguin edition
HE	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i>	Everyman Hardy edition
L	<i>A Laodicean</i>	Penguin edition

OMC	<i>Old Mrs Chundle</i>	Crosby Gaige. New York 1929.
RN	<i>The Return of the Native</i>	Wordsworth edition
TD	<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	Penguin edition
TWB	<i>The Well-Beloved</i>	Wordsworth edition