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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



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this thesis is *Older People and Ageing in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*. The subject matter arises from my love of Hardy as an author and my belief that the study of older people in literature can contribute to our overall understanding of ageing. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the latter area embodied in the general term 'literary gerontology'. The discipline of 'gerontology', which is defined in the Collins dictionary (2002) as 'the scientific study of ageing and the problems of old people', has developed momentum since the middle of the twentieth-century. One of the developments in the discipline of gerontology has been the suggestion that it can be enriched by the study of ageing and older people portrayed in literature and the Arts generally.

Peggy Koopman-Boyden, in *New Zealand's Ageing Society: The Implications* points out that theories about why humans age date back to the time of the Ancient Greeks who linked the question 'Why do we age?' to the development of potions and ointments to try and arrest the process (13). In the present day the anti-ageing industry is a multi-billion dollar one with the major emphasis still on trying to arrest or even reverse the ageing process. This longstanding, and hitherto fruitless, quest is the major reason that biological theories of ageing have tended to dominate over the long period in which the subject has been debated. Koopman-Boyden notes that although the questions 'Why do we age?', 'Who adjusts best to ageing?' and 'What does it mean to be old?' have been asked throughout human history it was from the mid twentieth century that theories of ageing began to proliferate (14). At the same time the dominant biological theories of ageing began to be complemented by sociological and psychological ones. The study of social gerontology concentrates on the way in which older people function in and are regarded by society. This includes considerations of the extent to which an older person can function independently as well as the way society at large regards and treats its older citizens. Questions to emerge from this line of enquiry include whether the provision of

mandatory retirement (now abolished in many societies) and pensions actually serve to make old people more dependent and whether old people are respected as repositories of wisdom and folklore who make a useful contribution to child rearing and other family functions or whether they are seen as a 'burden' because of the costs of health services, subsidies and pensions. Kenneth Hepburn suggests that human social functioning is determined by four main domains: status in society, both assigned and relegated; connections, that is the way in which people fit in with self-defined social networks; personal resources - both financial and the way in which people construe themselves and, lastly health conditions and behaviours (33-34). The ways in which people respond to these forces are a strong determinant of the psychological responses to ageing. Close attention to the portrayal of elderly persons in literature can provide important information about social functioning at the time of writing or in the era represented.

Literary gerontology is best described as the consideration of ageing and older people in various forms of literary work in order to better understand ageing and old age. It is a branch of study that both complements and interacts with other disciplines such as biology, sociology and psychology. In recent years the interest in literary gerontology has grown with the publication of a number of books on the subject, among them *Stories of Ageing* by Mike Hepworth (2000) and *Writing Old Age* by Julia Johnson (2004). Johnson's collection arose from a seminar of the same name held in March 1999 which was jointly organized by the Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies at the Open University and the Centre for Policy on Ageing (United Kingdom). The seminar produced 'lively discussion' which included the observation that 'gerontology has been dominated by positivism, biomedicine and the use of quasi-science to 'explain' ageing' (1). It was suggested that disillusionment with this approach resulted in the interest in the humanities for ways of trying to understand better the subjective experience of ageing which, in common with other stages of the life cycle, is an individual experience associated with reflection and evaluation. The so-called 'cultural turn' in gerontology had hitherto particularly concentrated on how ageing is treated in everyday texts, in the media, in advertisements as well as in art. The emphasis in literary gerontology had concentrated particularly on whether older people were stereotyped by being portrayed

negatively or positively and, while this is important it should be recognised that the field has much larger potential. At the conclusion of the 'Writing Old Age' seminar Andrew Blaikie, a sociologist summarised, 'If we begin with the question: "What constitutes an 'ageing' novel, or poem or play?" we will probably not move very far. But if we ask: "how might we better understand ageing through fiction and creative writing and what tools for analysis does such literature furnish us with?" then we can travel a long way' (3). Blaikie's central question animates this thesis. Although Hepworth's book was published four years earlier than Johnson's, he also argues for a broader approach in literary gerontology. He states that 'ageing is never a fixed biological or chronological process but an open-ended subjective and social experience' (2). Moreover, 'ageing should always be understood in terms of a tension between subjective experience and the human fate we all share of a limited life span' (2). Hepworth is saying that the individual variation of the experience of ageing and the link between ageing and social milieux opens up multiple possibilities in literary interpretation. I am mindful of this link in the textual analysis that follows.

In November 1999 a leading medical journal, *The Lancet*, produced a supplement entitled *Literature and Ageing* the purpose of which was to show the diverse potential of the subject area including its relevance to medicine. Among the expanding number of uses suggested for literary gerontology Philip Darbyshire and Cushla Beckingham, among others, have suggested that it might have a place in the education of health professionals in helping them to understand such issues as ageing losses, including bereavement and dying. A New Zealand example has been provided by Lorraine Ritchie, a Lecturer in Nursing who wrote her Master's thesis on ageing in New Zealand literature and explored how the study of this could be used to better educate nursing students about ageing and health issues affecting older people (2003). Ritchie used New Zealand literature because of the specific cultural context it provided. She concluded that on the basis of verbal and written evaluations and feedback, coupled with anecdotal evidence, the study of literature was a creative method of teaching healthcare and ethics and a useful supplement to a direct nursing approach. Her views are not universally shared and Neil Pickering, a philosopher who teaches medical ethics, argues forcefully against the premise that poetry

can be of ‘use’ in the teaching of ethics to medical students as poetry is of no intrinsic ‘use’ and by its nature should promote multiple diverse interpretations. The difference of opinion in the views of Ritchie and Pickering can be seen as further evidence of conflicting views on the place of literary gerontology and the need to be mindful of its limitations.

A notable recent addition to the field of literary gerontology is *The Long Life* by Helen Small (2007) which is arguably the first major consideration of old age in Western philosophy since Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Coming of Age* (1972). Small argues that if we want to understand old age we have to think more fundamentally about what it means to be a person, to have a life, to have (or lead) a good life and to be part of a just society (272). She says that ‘the book is an attempt to show what might be required if we are to become more seriously philosophical about old age’ (2). Small links philosophical views of ageing with relevant literary works, for instance, in Chapter 2 ‘On Seeing the End’ (53-88), she juxtaposes works such as Shakespeare’s *King Lear* with the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* (happiness) as considered in *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*. This allows a discussion of Aristotle’s negative characterisation of the old in the *Rhetoric* and the tragedy of *King Lear* to explore the possibilities of compensations for the vicissitudes of old age. In another chapter, ‘The Power of Choosing’ (119-148), she discusses two poems, Philip Larkin’s *The Old Fools* and Stevie Smith’s *Exeat* in relation to the idea of the prudential life-span account of intergenerational justice as advocated by Norman Daniels, a medical ethicist, and the objections to this model of Dennis McKerlie, a philosopher. The purpose of the chapter is to explore the extent to which a ‘just society’ should extend care to a ‘bad old age’ and raises issues such as quality of life, life extension and euthanasia. I will refer to Small’s work as well as that of other writers in gerontology during my discussion of Hardy’s work. Small’s approach of linking philosophical theory to literary works to explore a number of issues of ageing accords with Hannah Zeilig’s proposition of the creation of a dual discourse, ‘whereby theory and literature work together to open up new ways of thinking about ageing’ (47). I will discuss Zeilig’s essay in more detail when considering the limitations of literary gerontology. In this thesis I will be considering how the treatment of ageing and elderly

people in Thomas Hardy's fiction functions to promote or synthesise thematic issues and concerns. Where possible I will follow Zeilig's suggestion that the consideration of older people and ageing in literature is most useful when linked with relevant theory.

### **Literary Gerontology – Applications**

Mike Hepworth proposes five main variations in the treatment of ageing by novelists (20-21). These are:

1. Where the interest of the writer is in one central character, often the narrator, who is ageing.
2. The description and dynamics of a small group of older people living together, for example in a British seaside hotel or Rest Home.
3. Processes of family interaction, where there may be concerns about inheritance or the problems of ageing for poorer people.
4. Age related interaction outside the family situation, where the relationship of the older person to societal issues is often being considered.
5. Where the appearances of older people tend to be incidental or situational. Ageing is not the main interest of the story as such but descriptions of older people and the ageing process may play a significant part of the story when they are used for dramatic effect or to give the impression of social realism, for example a village community or an urban scene.

Hepworth gives examples of works that characterise these five variations but concedes that 'these must be regarded as provisional because much more work needs to be done' (20). Some authors, notably Stanley Middleton, have concentrated on writing novels about older people and their adjustment to ageing with issues such as psychological and philosophical adjustments to bereavement, retirement and loss. There have also been a number of books concerning the particular illnesses that may affect older people, particularly the dementias. This subject has been discussed by Jill Manthorpe (2002) and one suspects that a number of these novels have a strong biographical or family component. A notable contribution to the genre is Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue*

(1994) which features the differing responses of two sons, one a philosopher and the other a neurologist with an interest in pathology, to their mother's progressive dementia and death. Hepworth's variations are not all-inclusive but are helpful to our thinking about the possibilities of literary gerontology. Hardy's writing on all subjects is often enigmatic and so it is difficult to fit his writing about ageing neatly into any single one of Hepworth's variations, however we can particularly identify elements of variations three, four and five in his works and these will be discussed further in the chapters of this thesis.

### **Literary Gerontology – Limitations**

My Honours Research essay (Massey University 2007) explored the theme of ageing in three major poems in order to defend the claim that 'the standard approaches to literary gerontology have been too narrow and that many more interpretive possibilities exist'. On reflection I wonder whether the first part of that claim isn't a little harsh although I still adhere to the second part. Without doubt much of the debate in literary gerontology has been focussed on whether older people are portrayed positively or negatively in writing and the other arts and, while this is an important area of study because it alerts us to wider social and cultural attitudes towards elderly people and the issues of ageing, the possibilities for exploration are much greater. This is well discussed in Hannah Zeilig's chapter 'The uses of literature in the study of older people' in *Critical Approaches to Ageing and Later Life* (1997) which is a particularly thoughtful contribution to the subject because it outlines possible pitfalls and limitations of the approach of reading for instances of stereotypical representation. Zeilig argues that 'despite the increase of interest in the humanities, and literature in particular, little attempt has been made to dissect in any detail the possibilities in which such literature may be useful to gerontology' (39). She contends that 'too often when literature is used the impulse is to make *a priori* generalisations' (46). Further, although 'a novel might be able to tell us something about attitudes during the time in which it was written' we must also recognise that it is 'an individual author's creation and that the response which a reader has to it is highly selective must also be recognised' (46). She explores a number of previous approaches to the relationship of literature and society discussing their strengths and weaknesses and her conclusion looks at the potential ways in which literature might be

used to better understand this relationship and the limitations of the approach. Among her cautions is the statement that ‘care must be taken when extracting themes which are apparent to the researcher, but may have minimal relevance to the work as a whole or to the audiences for whom it was intended’ (44). Zeilig proposes that the most successful applications of literary gerontology have resulted when texts are read reciprocally with theory creating a dual discourse ‘in order to ask what the two together can suggest about ageing’ (47). She cites Michael Woodward’s work which combines the study of literature with psychoanalytical theory as a prime example (1991). I have discussed Zeilig’s paper at some length because I feel it represents the clearest guidance on the topic, particularly with regard to the limitations of the applications of literary gerontology. In exploring the representations of ageing and older people in the fiction of Thomas Hardy I hope to show that these are an important component in his consideration and commentary on society, but in doing so I will try and follow Zeilig’s advice and link textual material with appropriate theoretical approaches.

One question that might well be asked is ‘Why has Thomas Hardy been chosen as the author to be studied for this thesis?’ The short answer to this question is because he has always been one of my favourite authors. Reading his work is always a pleasure; one continually discovers new possibilities in character and plot and so re-reading the works for this thesis is anything but a chore. A second reason is that very little has been written about ageing and older people in Hardy’s work so it seemed a fruitful area to explore, particularly as Hardy is a shrewd judge of character and he uses his characters and characterisation to comment, often critically, on social issues and changes in nineteenth-century society. These include the changing rural lifestyle in Victorian England, the role of the Church and Christianity, considerations of gender and class, the institution of marriage, the influence of myth, folklore and superstition, and what F.B. Pinion describes as ‘the powerlessness of the human will in the face of inanimate forces’ (*Art and Thought* 1977, 36). All of these profoundly affect the lives of older people and yet little, if anything, has been written previously about ageing and older people in Hardy’s novels and short stories. I have confined my study to a limited number of Hardy’s novels and short stories as a consideration of the entire Hardy canon including his poems, which

number around a thousand, would create a vast topic. Suffice it to say that a separate thesis considering the subject of ageing in his poetry would be very worthwhile as a number of poems, particularly those written as he became an older man, dealt directly with the subject.

There has been a convention to divide Hardy's novels into 'major' and 'minor' works (Widdowson *Hardy in History* 1989, 47). The six novels usually regarded as 'minor' are *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *A Laodicean* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882) and *The Well-Beloved* (1892/7). Several decades ago George Wing (1963) used an analogy with target shooting to divide them into 'outers', 'inners' and 'bulls'. Wing's 'outers' include the same six novels listed in Widdowson, and his 'bulls', the symbol of shooting perfection, are *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1885), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Hardy himself divides his novels into groups. In the General Preface to the 1912 Macmillan Edition of his novels and short stories he groups them into 'Novels of Character and Environment', 'Romances and Fantasies' and 'Novels of Ingenuity'. This sounds simple but as Widdowson points out, 'as with so much of Hardy's explanative writing, this appears simple, clear, and helpful, but is, in fact, the reverse' (*Hardy and History* 1989, 48). Hardy regards *Jude the Obscure*, for example, as a novel of character and environment but, as the coincidences within the plot have major consequences for the protagonists, it also has many of the features of a novel of ingenuity. He classifies *The Hand of Ethelberta* as a novel of ingenuity and yet when we consider both Ethelberta and Lord Montclere we can see features consistent with a novel of character and environment. *The Well Beloved* is cited as a novel of romance and fantasy but this classification seems inadequate when considering the quest of Jocelyn Pierston to find his romantic ideal, as he ages, in the three generations of women named Avice Caro. Pierston's quest rests much with his character and that of Portland Bill or the 'Island of Slingers' and its residents add vital elements of character and environment. My conclusion is that divisions of Hardy's work into the categories discussed above are not particularly helpful as far as the topic of the present thesis is concerned. My interest is primarily about the representation of older people and ageing in Hardy's fiction and how, or whether, that



might help us to better understand not only the societal issues of the day but also the broader aspects of human ageing. This has determined the choice of Hardy's works on which I will concentrate. The result is chapters on two of Wing's 'bulls', *Jude the Obscure* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, an 'inner', *The Woodlanders* and an 'outer', *Two on a Tower*. The last has been chosen for its treatment of the relationship between an older 'worldly' woman Lady Viviette Constantine and the innocent youth Swithin St Clere, and Viviette's tricking of the much older Bishop of Melchester to save her honour. In addition to the main plot the interchanges between the two octogenarians, Swithin's grandmother and her housekeeper, both of whom regard the other as having the weaknesses of age, provide an interesting commentary on perceptions of ageing. While the four novels listed above provide individual chapters in the thesis, passing reference is also made to the treatment of ageing issues in Hardy's other fictional work including the short stories. The actions of two men in their sixties, Lord Montclere in *The Hand of Ethelberta* and Jocelyn Pierston in *The Well-Beloved*, both of whom attempt to form romantic attachments with women in their very early twenties are discussed as Hardy appears to have a particular fascination for the subject of romantic relationships between people of very disparate ages.

### **Developing a hypothesis**

My working hypothesis is that 'Older people play a central, and hitherto underestimated, role in the vital themes considered in the fiction of Thomas Hardy. I referred earlier to Hepworth's 'variations' in the treatment of ageing by novelists. A few of Hardy's short stories are specifically 'about' older people, 'Old Mrs Chundle' for example, and he also uses older people as observers or narrators, such as in the short story sequence 'A Few Crusted Characters' in the volume *Life's Little Ironies* (1894) and *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891). These can be viewed as examples of Hepworth's first 'variation' and form a minority of Hardy's work. I am unaware of any of Hardy's novels or short stories that can be considered as representing 'variation' two and the bulk of his work can be viewed as combinations of 'variations' three, four and five. In *The Woodlanders* Grammer Oliver and Old John South are not major protagonists but their actions have

major impacts on the fate of the main protagonists Grace Melbury and Giles Winterborne. In addition Hardy uses them to provide commentary on medicine and phrenology in the case of Grammer Oliver and the vulnerability of older labourers who had life lease cottages in the case of John South. The description of the treatment of elderly farm workers at 'hiring-fairs' in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, scenes that were drawn directly from his essay *The Dorsetshire Labourer*, can be viewed as a combination of 'variations' four and five. Older people are used by Hardy in these works to help create a picture of social realism in the market scenes but also contribute to the consideration of societal issues and change. It is my fundamental claim that the older people in Hardy's fiction are more than casual bystanders in country scenes or comic relief in the tragedies.

My research topic is 'The role of older people and ageing in the fiction of Thomas Hardy'. From this develops the research question 'Has the role of older people and ageing been underestimated in Thomas Hardy's fiction?'. If this question is turned into a positive statement, 'Older people and ageing play a central role in the discussion of vital themes in the fiction of Thomas Hardy' we arrive at the hypothesis that I intend to test. In the thesis I use the term 'ageing' in its broadest sense which includes the impact of age difference between key protagonists such as Swithin St Cleeve and Viviette Constantine in *Two on a Tower*. I also consider 'ageing' as it applies to buildings, institutions and environments because Hardy often uses ageing symbolically to imply decay and loss of relevance. In *Jude the Obscure* churches and university buildings are often described as ancient or decaying in the context of the questioning of the relevance of these institutions by Hardy through the narrator. The suggestion is that their oldness symbolises lost relevance and the fact that they belong to a past age. This symbolism is also a feature of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, once again with reference to churches but also earlier civilisations particularly the Roman one as Casterbridge (Dorchester) was substantially founded by the Romans. In *The Woodlanders* the metaphor of ageing and antiquity is applied to the forest and village to emphasise the clash of modernity upon the secluded traditional way of life.

I start with a chapter briefly discussing the major societal issues in late Victorian England and some of the particular themes that Hardy discusses in his fiction. This includes a consideration of whether Hardy's observations are objective or coloured by an idealistic view of a 'rural idyll' that may be some distance from reality and draws on the work of Roger Lowman and more recent critics. This is followed by Chapters considering older people and ageing in four novels, *Jude the Obscure*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Two on a Tower* and *The Woodlanders*. I conclude with a consideration of ageing issues in a number of Hardy's other works and in a chapter that aims to synthesise the findings and discuss them in relation to the hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### Major Societal Issues in late Victorian England

From a distance of over a hundred years a popular perception of the Victorian Age as a period of stability and certainty has arisen. From this perspective, a commonly held impression is that it was a time when a stable nation with a profitable mixed industrial and rural economy was ruled by a universally loved Queen who also presided over a worldwide Empire. This image also includes certainty of religious and moral beliefs within an accepted social class structure consisting of the ruling aristocracy, landowners, middle and tradesman's classes, the working class and the (deserving and undeserving) poor. This commonly held perception of Victorian society, as a period of snug, ordered security, is highly inaccurate, as many scholars and historians have noted. Jane Thomas, for example, suggests 'it is impossible to draw an objective and clear literary and cultural picture of an age that changed so rapidly that traditional certainties and ways of knowing were constantly under threat' (1). Thomas continues:

The term 'Victorian' became associated with confidence, direction, progress and identity, and as such functioned as a comforting amulet to ward off everything that threatened to undermine the security of the middle classes. In reality, Victoria's reign was characterised by change and instability: the discrediting of old traditions; the usurpation of a God who could always be relied upon to sanction the deeds and words of the philanthropic and paternalistic, by an indifferent and mechanical natural process; the loosening of the chains of matrimony and the empowerment of women and the working classes: what Thomas Carlyle referred to as 'a boundless grinding collision of the New with the Old'. (3)

For all the vast wealth that resulted from advances in technology, industrialisation and the expansion of the Empire, many were unemployed, particularly former rural workers who had migrated to growing cities and factories in search of a better way of life. Upward mobility, and the new capacity to advance the formerly rigid social ladder due to financial success (often the result of industry), made uncomfortable inroads into the formerly hierarchical class system; it was the great age of the rise of the affluent 'middle class'.

The era is also marked by the ongoing subjugation of women, on the one hand, and challenges to the role and placement of women, as inferior and relegated to the domestic sphere, on the other. These challenges took the form of philosophical tracts written even in the century before (for example by Mary Wollstonecraft) and in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill (who published his *The Subjection of Women* in 1869) and Marion Reid (who published her *A Plea for Women* in 1843). Serious female writers (as opposed to ‘silly’ ones in George Eliot’s term) also rose to the fore in the nineteenth century, albeit that many wrote under male pseudonyms, challenging the conventional notion that literature was the preserve of male writers.

With respect to religion, rather than being an age of certainty it was an age of doubt. Two major works of the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Lyell’s *The Principles of Geology* (1830-33) and Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), cast doubts on the historicity of the Bible, particularly the account of the Creation, and a number of leading poets and writers professed agnosticism. Major poems of the age such as Alfred Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” and Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” are viewed as embodying this sense of doubt. In addition to its being an age of religious doubt it was also a time of great social and demographic change. Industrialisation was a feature of the whole nineteenth century and this particularly affected rural England; many rural workers migrated to towns and cities seeking better paid work and machines were used to carry out much of the land work that had traditionally been done by hand resulting in unemployment and the need for rural workers to find alternative employment. The second half of the century also saw the rise of trades unionism and the beginnings of the woman’s suffrage movement. It was against this background of unrest and uncertainty in Victorian England that Hardy wrote his novels and short stories most of which are based in rural England, particularly the area he called ‘Wessex’. Many of the tensions and ambiguities we find in his fiction are reflective of the turbulence of the age, and Hardy’s ambivalent attitudes towards them. He both lamented the loss of the traditional past and the rural idyll and, at the same time, championed aspects of social progress, routinely critiquing conventional religion, marriage law and male sexual hypocrisy and double

standards (indeed, it is arguably his position on these latter issues that resulted in his loss of public favour).

Given the extended focus in Hardy's novels on rural England, it is necessary to understand better its nature during the (later) nineteenth century, the period in which Hardy wrote fiction. Alun Howkins, in *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850 – 1925*, observes that 'to recognise the notion of "one" rural England is problematic' (1). Rather, England was an amalgam of rural economies each with its own distinctive social and economic structures. Despite this there were some central continuities apart from that of region: 'These included the family, the sexual division of labour, aspects of the church and other institutional structures' (2). Howkins also considers the discontinuities evident at the time which include rural depopulation, agricultural depression, new farming techniques or ideological shifts which 'do not have the causal clarity of a single variable change but ... altered the world in which men and women lived and ... were seen by those who experienced them as being decisive changes' (2). Within the framework of the variability of social change in the England of this time Howkins discusses the years 1850 to 1925 (which spans the years in which Hardy wrote fiction and poetry) in terms of three sub-periods which overlap. The first runs from 1850 to 1875 which he characterises as 'a time when rural society and its productive systems entered a stage of calm in which the rural order functioned by and large successfully after a period from the 1790s which had been dominated by endemic unrest and economic uncertainty' (3). He argues that contradictions and problems in these years were controlled in most situations by the 'carrot and stick' of a new paternalism of which the aristocracy, landlord farmers and the clergy were the principal agents. The newly emerging police force was also beginning to be a factor in maintaining societal norms (1-3).

Howkins' second sub-period runs from 1872 to 1895 and is a time 'in which the established and apparently "permanent" society of the years after 1850 entered a series of crises' (3). He views these as arising partly from contradiction from within the system itself, such as the growth of education and rural depopulation, and partly from factors outside the system such as the importation of foodstuffs. These combined with some

long-term factors like the growth of religious nonconformity and economic depression to present a challenge to the former paternalism (3). The 1870s and 1880s saw the emergence of trades unionism and radical politics which brought country districts more 'in line' with an overwhelmingly urban society (3-4). Howkins' third sub-period extends from 1895 to 1925 and saw the emergence of a new farming system based on more diverse cropping combined with an undermining of the traditional regional patterns as transport and urban incomes, particularly among the working class, improved. This third sub-period was also dominated by the 1914-18 World War and leads up to the depression of the 1930s. Howkins stresses that even in times of relative social calm the harsh realities of poverty were very evident. Although by 1870 the Poor Law was being administered more benignly much of the outdoor relief was given to people who had labouring potential and those particularly likely to suffer cruel treatment in the workhouses were the aged, sick and women, particularly single mothers. Another contentious issue was the employment of women in the agricultural workforce. On one hand it was an economic and practical necessity, particularly at harvest-times, but it also ran counter to the commonplace 'ideal' of women as 'the angel of the hearth' running the household. Howkins observes that 'the economy simply couldn't function without women's labour' (100) and yet this undermined the acceptable stereotypes of proper feminine occupation. He further states that 'much woman's work in the countryside was visible and public, as opposed to the acceptable and private work of the house' (101). He notes that 'the work of the dairymaid was acceptable to even refined Victorian opinion while that of the field worker was usually not' (101). He argues that the very difference in name is significant – the *dairymaid* and the *fieldswoman*, the first with a stress on innocence and the rural idyll, the second with connotations of experience and harshness (102). Interestingly, Hardy follows this convention in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) with Tess being portrayed as a dairymaid at Talbothays in her period of apparent innocence and love for Angel Clare, and a fieldswoman at Flintcombe Ash when she was deserted and 'maiden no more'.

The publication of Hardy's fiction straddles all three of Howkins' sub-periods, particularly the first two, but it should be remembered that the action in many of his

novels and short stories is retrospective and takes place in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier and thus harks back to a period of ostensibly greater certainty and security. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1885), for instance, begins ‘One evening of late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span...’. Hardy is often evoked as a great chronicler of (early) nineteenth century English rural life, and his books read as a testament to an era of society that was fast disappearing in the face of industrialisation and changes in values and beliefs. He is held in high regard by many observers for his description and commentary on rural Wessex, but how historically accurate are his representations? This is an issue to which I will return in the discussion that follows.

A great deal of knowledge about the condition of older people in the Victorian period can be obtained from Pat Thane’s seminal works *Old Age in English History* (2000) and *A History of Old Age* (2005). She in turn draws on the great survey of Charles Booth, *The Life and Labour of the People in London* which was begun in 1886. Booth’s survey was extended to other districts including the rural community and was published as *The Aged Poor in England and Wales* in 1894. Booth’s innovative work provided significant and detailed information about working class life and influenced political and administrative steps taken against poverty in England in the early twentieth century.

Population censuses in England and Wales were carried out regularly in the nineteenth century but it was 1881 before reliable data were available. In 1834 six per cent of the population were aged 60 years or over (Thane 166). The population of England and Wales was estimated at 26 million in the 1881 census, with four per cent over the age of 65 years. By 1891 the population had grown to 29 million with an unchanged percentage over 65. These figures merit some comment. Although the percentage of older people was small compared to the current eighteen percent in the United Kingdom they still numbered over a million, a not inconsiderable group. When one reflects on this number it is surprising that older people didn’t feature more prominently in the writings of the time. It is my contention Hardy’s work is notable, against this trend, for the ‘voice’ it gives to elderly characters.



From Charles Booth's work we know that the poverty level amongst older people in late nineteenth century England was high. This is shown in the following table presenting the figures from two towns that feature prominently in Hardy's work, Dorchester (Casterbridge) and Bridport (Port-Bredy):

	<b>Dorchester</b>			<b>Bridport</b>		
	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Paupers over 65 years</b>						
<b>Indoor</b>	41	13	54	32	23	55
<b>Out-door</b>	136	229	365	111	271	282
<b>Medical only</b>	11	13	24	8	11	19
<b>Total paupers</b>	188	255	443	151	305	456
<b>Population over 65 years</b>	614	680	1294	502	672	1174
<b>Percentage of paupers</b>	30%	37%	34%	30%	45%	38%

Adapted from Charles Booth. *The Aged Poor in England and Wales*, 1894 pp 296-7.

These poverty levels are slightly, but not much, higher than the national levels of the time. We can conclude, therefore, that although the percentage of older people in the United Kingdom at the time was small there were significant absolute numbers of them and the poverty rate among them was high – about a third were paupers. Booth also comments on the vulnerability of older workers at times of hardship saying ‘they may not actually be dismissed, but if any mishap breaks the thread of their employment it is difficult for the man of fifty to make a fresh start, and even at forty five it is not easy to do so’ (321). If this was the case then those in their sixties and beyond must have faced almost insuperable difficulties. These statistics on the poverty rates of the time are important to bear in mind when considering Hardy's portrayal of older rural people, very few of whom are paupers.

The question of the balance between accuracy and idealism in country writing between 1840 and 1900 has been discussed by Merryn Williams in *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (15-49). She discusses the portrayal of rural England in the work of a number of authors who were Hardy's contemporaries, including William Barnes, William Howitt, Alexander Somerville, Karl Marx, William Rider Haggard and Richard Jefferies, pointing out that in each case their social criticism was tempered by the perspective from which they wrote, and at times each allowed sentimentality and prejudice to influence the validity of their social comment and portraiture. Of William Howitt she says '[his] rhapsodies over the extraordinary "blessings and privileges" of rural life, his cheery assurance that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, are continually being interrupted by unpleasant facts' (18). She argues that Jefferies writes his early essays from a 'middle class point of view' abusing working people for their indifference to religion and attacking 'agitators unrepresentative of the people' (38). Further, she suggests, 'As the end of his short life approached Jefferies became more and more radical' and later 'his conception of history ... is virtually Marxist and shows how completely he had changed in the years of struggle and suffering since his early letters to *The Times* newspaper' (49). Of Hardy, Williams observes that:

The version of Hardy which has become established sees him as the novelist of a vanishing way of life, with a nostalgic yearning for old-fashioned rural simplicity and a deep hostility to the disruptive forces of urbanism, industrialism, even education.... (xiii)

She goes on to say that 'the popular version is still firmly established and needs to be examined and refuted in further detail' (xiii). She argues that when this occurs 'a very much greater and more complex artist emerges than has been recognised before' (xiii). This means that we have to recognise that Hardy's writings contain dichotomies and changing attitudes to rural life and social conditions. This has to be borne in mind when considering issues of older people and ageing, the topics of this thesis.

Hardy's creation of 'Wessex' merits discussion in light of the issues raised above. Geographically the Wessex of his novels is practically the Wessex of history described

by Hardy to his friend Herman Leigh in 1915 as including ‘the counties of Berkshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset and Devon – either wholly or in part’ (quoted in Williams 104). This description does not include Cornwall, the scene for the majority of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) or Oxfordshire, where a significant part of *Jude the Obscure* (1895) takes place. Nonetheless all of the major novels except *Jude* are primarily set in Dorset. Of more importance than the geographical accuracy of Wessex is the sense in which Hardy represents the characters and conditions of the region’s inhabitants at the time of writing. The degree to which Hardy’s depiction of Wessex, particularly the characters and actions of older people, is accurate is an important consideration for the purposes of this present thesis. Does he describe older people and events realistically or is he presenting an idealised picture? We are not helped by Hardy’s own contradictory comments on the matter. In the General Preface to the Wessex Novels (1912) he writes:

At the date represented in the various narratives things were like that in Wessex: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages. (x)

In the preface to the 1895 edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) however, he says:

Since the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a *partly real, partly dream-country*, has become more popular as a practical, provincial definition; and the dream-country has by degrees solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take house in, and write to the papers from. (x; my italics)

Simon Gatrell has outlined how Hardy developed ‘Wessex’ as a ‘whole culture – predominantly rural and pre-industrial – ... in [his] novels and poems’ (19). He points out that Wessex ‘matured’ as Hardy wrote new fiction and revised earlier editions (19). Gatrell notes, for instance, that it was not until *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy’s fifth novel, that he first used the term Wessex. Before that ‘the idea that his novels might be seen as embodying a single culture in part through a common and consistent nomenclature had not evolved in Hardy’s imagination’ (21). Gatrell argues that Hardy acts ‘overtly as local historian for the more accurate information of his readers for the first time in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*’ and here ‘begins to focus on the discontent and

poverty of the working people in his narrative' (25). Gatrell describes Hardy's last novel *Jude the Obscure* as a 'railway novel' (28) because almost all the main travel is by train and the advent of the railway not only enlarges the geographical scope to areas beyond Wessex but it also represents the irreversible transformation of the culture of Hardy's youth by technological and social change. Examples of these changes included national schools, industrialisation, the penny press as well as the railway itself. Gatrell then describes how Hardy incorporated the Wessex tradition more fully into his other novels, including the early ones, as he revised them for subsequent editions.

Gatrell's overview of the Wessex 'concept' in Hardy's work is largely sympathetic. Joe Fisher, on the other hand, takes a much more cynical and critical view of Hardy's construction of Wessex and his historical accuracy. He argues that Hardy's work overall contains hidden texts likening his works to 'cartoons imperfectly covered by the painting of the 'finished' canvas (8). Fisher asserts that 'Hardy draws a cartoon of Swiftian brutality on his empty canvas, then covers it ... deliberately imperfectly, with what has been regarded as the "finished" text' (8). He is highly critical of the 'Wessex tradition' calling Hardy 'a trader' who 'effectively buys in and sells on the raw material of Wessex, adding value by creative artifice of manufacture, and synthesising an observed "reality" into an "acceptable" unity by means of plotting and narration' (7). Fisher's argument is that Hardy has to 'trade' the harsh realities of life in Wessex for a more sanitised version because of the demands of serialised presentation and his primarily middle class readership. His criticism becomes even more strident as he states:

The 'traded' Wessex is an anthropological travelogue, the picturesque and sometimes organically threatening background of bourgeois drama, ersatz tragedy and melodrama. Poverty is an honourable state; no one starves; no one rises up against his or her master. There is no hint that the real Blackmoor Vale was site of the worst poverty and unrest in the 1830 Swing Riots and hardly any sign of the poverty endemic in Dorset throughout the period Hardy writes about. (14).

So we are left with Hardy's own enigmatic comments about his creation of 'Wessex' and a mixture of views about his representational authenticity ranging from the tolerant to the sceptical from his critics. For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that these divergent

critical opinions about the ‘validity’ of Hardy’s Wessex can be extended to encompass a consideration of the validity of his portrayal of elderly rural characters given that paupers don’t make up a third of his elderly characters.

## Hardy’s themes

There are many thematic concerns running through Hardy’s oeuvre to which he returns again and again, albeit in sometimes modified or adapted ways. Many of these are relevant to the discussion that follows and as such will be briefly outlined here. The first of these that I want to discuss is his lament for the passing of traditional country life, particularly in his native Wessex. As Jody Gallaher Ross observes about *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, ‘the sense of the past is irretrievably lost taking with it innocence, security, love and comfort’ and this ‘resonates on several levels throughout’ (44). This idea is common to many of his novels and short stories. Turning to Hardy’s essay *The Dorsetshire Labourer* (1883), may help to shed some light on his fictional representations in the light of the debate raised above about the veracity of his portrayals of the countryside. The autographed copy of the essay is in the Dorset County Museum (Lowman 7) and describes Hardy’s observations of rural life and workers in some detail. 1883 was the year of Hardy’s return to Dorchester after years spent in London and elsewhere and he remained based there for the rest of his life. Some critics therefore view the timing of the essay as providing evidence of new directions in his writing and thinking following the return. Hardy drew directly on the essay for four passages in the later novels: the vignette of the old shepherd at the hiring-fair (lines 214-29: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* 125); the narrative of the outsider who comes to appreciate the individuality of the labourer (lines 53-95: *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* Chapter 18); and the accounts of rural depopulation (lines 618-42: *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* Chapter 51 and lines 275-93: *Tess of The D’Urbervilles* Chapter 52) Lowman (11). There is also a hiring-fair scene in Chapter 6 of *Far From the Madding Crowd* that has many similarities with the one in the essay.

For a long time *The Dorsetshire Labourer* drew regular and uncritical praise. It was read 'straight' as a realistic account of rural life in the county. Irving Howe, for example, calls it a 'superb essay' which is 'important for its own sake and for the light it casts on the Wessex novels' (71). He also contends that 'Hardy does not stoop to sentimentality and remarks on country women in a fine passage' (71-2). R.J. White, in a comment that makes clear an uncritical assumption about the factuality of the essay's content, said that '*The Dorsetshire Labourer* ought to be reprinted in sufficient quantities to provide a copy to every sociologist or sociological literary critic in England and America' (6). Merryn Williams also writes about the essay in favourable terms, suggesting it marks a point of commitment by Hardy to the people of Dorset and their living conditions:

This article with its clear message that people who worked on the land must be treated as fully human, in some ways marked a turning-point in Hardy's career. From now on he would commit himself to writing novels about Dorset and its people and would produce his greatest work. (170)

F.B. Pinion suggests that 'the study marks an important turning-point in Hardy's fiction; in future his labouring poor are no longer used as comic relief. From Whittle onwards they not only enlist the reader's sympathy; they become central figures in major novels' (*TH: Life and Friends*, 184). As the above quotations suggest, the term 'turning-point' is used by more than one critic in commentary on the essay.

For my purposes in this thesis, it is important to note that although the essay discusses labourers as a whole Hardy also makes keen observations about older rural people. Given the above laudatory comments it might be felt that *The Dorsetshire Labourer* could be viewed as a benchmark account of the rural labourer in Dorset but Roger Lowman, in a recent scholarly edition of the essay, asks important questions about the veracity of Hardy's portrayal. He questions whether Hardy presents an accurate account or an idealised one influenced by his experiences away from Dorset and his contacts, and a desire to be part of London society. Lowman argues that 'if Hardy was ever going to write directly about the problems of the rural world it would be in *The Dorsetshire Labourer*, but he avoids confronting them ... the elements of the problems are not so much as overlooked but they are actually ignored' (99). Lowman argues that Hardy

writes 'pastoral' and that he treats the countryside as a metaphor for the supposed virtues of rural living rather than providing an accurate representation of the difficult conditions experienced by many of its inhabitants. According to Lowman, Hardy's somewhat idealistic picture in *The Dorsetshire Labourer* effaces real rural conditions at the time in the service of idealism. He provides several strong arguments to back his case. The first is Hardy's description of labourers' houses as those of 'merry squalor' and his assertion that, by definition, living like this in the country is superior to a similar house in a city. In such descriptions Lowman argues, Hardy is 'keeping his distance from the social problems in order to avoid addressing them' (106). Another example is Hardy's apparent acceptance of the concept of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor which Lowman cites as an example of Hardy's 'rural conservatism' (106). Moreover, suggests Lowman, Hardy also treats Joseph Arch, the early trade unionist, in a rather light-hearted fashion. Lowman's book provides more than a reprint of *The Dorsetshire Labourer* with a commentary. It also provides criticism about Hardy's portrayal of society in the rural novels and arguments about 'pastoral' writing more generally, and suggests why he considers Hardy an exponent of such writing. Lowman argues that Hardy's somewhat idealistic picture is carried over from *The Dorsetshire Labourer* into his rural novels. This accords with the views of Fisher about the concept of 'Wessex' discussed earlier. If Lowman's arguments are accepted then some caution is required when interpreting Hardy's portrayal of labouring people and rural England and naturally that also would include his representation of older people and ageing issues.

Another dominant thematic strand, one I will consider in my subsequent discussions of some of the Hardy's novels is the idea of 'the powerlessness of the human will in the face of inanimate forces' (Pinion *TH: Art and Thought*, 36). This is certainly a central concern in many novels as commentators and critics regularly note. Robin Gilmour refers to Thomas Huxley's opposition between the cosmic, the ethical, and the individual, and says that 'this is the stance adopted in Hardy's later novels, particularly *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*' (138). He continues, 'Tess and Jude are evolutionary victims, registering their ethical protest against the cruelty of the cosmic process written into the institutions of society, and bearing witness in their tragic

destinies to the realisation, in Huxley's words, "that the cosmic process has no sort of relation to moral ends" (138). Hardy's view of this 'powerlessness' was framed by his study of religion, science and philosophy. Timothy Hands has established Hardy's commitment to evangelical Christianity in the early 1860s followed by a gradual loss in religious faith from then on (66). The suicide of his mentor Horace Moule in 1874 had a profound effect on Hardy and caused him to start questioning Christianity (Millgate *TH: Biography revisited*, 141). Horace Moule was the middle son of Rev Henry Moule, the local vicar of Hardy's boyhood, who had recognised young Hardy's ability and who gave him extra tuition, including an introduction to the classics. Horace, a brilliant scholar, was seven years older than Hardy and was somewhat hero-worshipped by him. Until his death, the full extent of Horace's depression and alcoholism had not been recognised. Later Hardy was to combine the topics of aspiration to scholarship, alcoholism and depression in Jude Fawley of *Jude the Obscure*. Millgate suggests that the more Hardy contemplated Moule's suicide the more his doubts about Christianity accelerated. However, Moule's death was not the sole reason for Hardy's move to agnosticism. He also read extensively in the fields of science and philosophy in which challenges to Christian orthodoxy were increasingly voiced in the later nineteenth century. He described himself as 'among the earliest acclaimers of *On The Origin of Species*' (Millgate *TH: Life and Works* 158) and geology, archaeology and astronomy were prominent amongst his scientific readings. His knowledge of and interest in astronomy are evident in *Two on a Tower*, discussed in Chapter 5.

Questions about gender issues and the sexuality of women are repeatedly explored by Hardy who can be seen as 'ahead of his time' in this respect when judged by the contemporary reactions to his novels. His first novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871) drew criticisms of 'an occasional coarseness' with readers finding that the novel was 'disagreeable' and 'portrayed no display of passion except for the brute kind' (Brady 1999, 93-4). His later works such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* drew much harsher criticism. These resulted from Hardy's acceptance of female sexuality and aspects of plot such as Tess's 'purity' despite having a child when unmarried, and Sue and Jude living together, their ambivalence towards marriage and



their having children out of wedlock. Rosemarie Morgan notes that ‘to bring moral seriousness and sexiness together in the single female form [as he does with Sue Bridehead] was not only to fly in the face of current convention, code and belief, it was also subversive’ (xii). The conceptual bifurcation of woman as ‘madonna’ and ‘whore’ was strong in the Victorian era and as Morgan says, functions to create a ‘social usefulness’ not only through consolidating division between the sexes, but also dividing women against their own kind. Yet though Hardy pushed the boundaries of the day there is ambivalence in his presentation of these issues. Kristin Brady notes that Hardy’s female characters are seen ‘to operate in an association of conflict and contradiction: Hardy’s texts like women and dislike them; they depict and evoke both pleasure and pain, both arousal and anxiety; they are the source for female readers of both frustration and fascination’ (104). Hardy has also drawn criticism from feminist writers because of the perceived limitations that they feel he imposes on his female characters. Penny Bouhelma, for example, sees Hardy’s women as ‘cultural signs, representations of historical ideas about women and about gender (quoted in Brady, 83). In an essay entitled ‘The Unmanning of the Mayor of Casterbridge’, Elaine Showalter proposes that ‘it is in Hardy’s understanding of the “feminine spirit of his man of character”, of Henchard as a “New Man” rather than in his depiction of “New Women” that the case for his “feminist sympathies” can be made’ (quoted in Brady, 83). The feminist perspective of Hardy’s writing can perhaps best be summed up by saying that although he presents women’s sexuality in a way that was radical for its time he nonetheless does so from a masculine perspective with limitations and reservations in his scope. In this thesis I make the claim that older characters make significant contributions to the debates about the role of women, social institutions and traditions. To that claim one must add the caveat that feminist writers, in common with other critics, have pointed to Hardy’s apparently mixed feelings about some of the issues of the role of women in society.

Hardy’s early training as an architect is often cited as the reason why buildings feature strongly in a number of his books and are frequently used symbolically. In some novels, architecture is a key feature of the plot – as it is in *A Laodicean*, for example, which turns on the competition between two architects, one older the other young, to restore Stancy

Castle. The castle's new owner is a young woman, Paula Power, who is acutely aware of the fact that she is newly rich and has no background in the ancient family that have been previous owners. In other chapters of this thesis I will be highlighting the juxtaposition of the old and the new. In this case they are represented by the ancient castle and its previous familial owners, and the new, represented by Paula as a woman with recently acquired wealth and somewhat confused views about her role as owner. Ultimately the castle is destroyed by arson committed by the illegitimate son of one of the ancient family. In other novels, buildings - often old, sometimes in ruins, feature symbolically as will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In *Jude the Obscure* the ancient buildings of Christminster University and Churches represent the society to which Jude aspires but can never attain. The cruel irony is that in his work as a stone mason Jude helps to restore and maintain the very buildings that are symbols of the society that rejects him because of his working-class origins. The other building that looms large in some of Hardy's fiction, particularly the short stories, is the workhouse. This represents poverty and, as discussed earlier in the chapter, contained high numbers of old people and single women. In addition to architecture Hardy was also fascinated by archaeology and this features in the novels discussed, particularly *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Two on a Tower*.

As far as the subject of my present thesis is concerned it would be fair to say that issues of ageing and antiquity can be seen as a major theme of Hardy's works but the study of older people in its own right is not. However, older people make significant contributions to the development of the themes discussed in this chapter and are significant in relation to Hardy's exploration of social issues. Moreover, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, they often appear to undermine social conventions subversively, in the manner suggested by Joe Fisher. Nonetheless as discussed earlier in this chapter, we need to be mindful of the possible problems of authenticity in Hardy's representation of older people. With these qualifications in mind I will now turn to the four novels that have been studied in depth for this thesis, starting with *Jude the Obscure*.

## CHAPTER 3

### **‘Weddings be funerals ‘a b’lieve nowadays’ : Older People and Ageing in “Jude the Obscure”**

*Jude the Obscure* was Hardy’s last novel and can be viewed at one level as a novel of social protest. While social criticism was a common theme in much of Hardy’s work what distinguishes *Jude the Obscure* is the intensity and relentlessness of the commentary. Dale Kramer observes that ‘even a hundred years after its first appearance *Jude the Obscure* has still the freshness of affront and the rawness of despair’ (169). He goes on to ponder that ‘one may well ask what called forth the intensity and particularity of its anger that makes this novel the most challenging [of Hardy’s] for readers to enjoy as a piece of literature’ (169). He concludes that it is because it is unmistakably a modern novel as the central questions of the late nineteenth Century are still as pertinent over a hundred years later. Norman Vance notes that ‘commentators have laid varying emphasis on three connected social themes: educational and social disadvantage, marriage and divorce, and the position of women’ (vii). The comments and actions of a number of older people in the novel contribute appreciably to its themes and social comment. Notable older people in the novel include Jude and Sue’s Aunt Drusilla, Widow Edlin, a ‘hunch-backed old woman of great intelligence’ who encourages Jude’s studies (JO 27) and the unnamed mother of a shepherd who is described as ‘an old woman without a single tooth’ (JO 119). Hardy also makes use of the age difference between two of the main protagonists Sue Bridehead, Jude’s cousin and trainee teacher and Richard Phillotson the village schoolteacher. Although Phillotson is only in his early forties at the time of their first marriage the gap between their thinking and actions seems far greater than 20 years. In this relationship Hardy appears to be drawing attention, as he does in other novels, to the significance of age insofar as the difference in the protagonists’ ages acts to highlight their ages and the psychological and emotional attributes that might be attributable to them; stressing age difference also highlights the impact of age on social and personal perceptions. Part of Sue’s physical loathing of Phillotson derives from their age difference. The other character in the novel of

particular interest with regard to the topic of ageing is Little Father Time, the son of Jude and his first wife, Arabella, who materialises from Australia and lives with Sue and Jude. As well as using elderly characters Hardy also uses descriptions of the age of buildings and institutions to comment on the changing social order. In this chapter I discuss these characters and issues as they are represented in the novel and in relation to the social themes introduced by Vance (vii).

It has been argued that '*Jude the Obscure* is Hardy's fullest analysis of the relationship between the individual struggling in the context of both universal and temporal forces that work in tandem to restrict happiness and freedom' (Kramer 175). It could be argued that 'deny' might be a more apt term than 'restrict' although Jude and Sue, like Tess and Angel Clare in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, do experience some transient freedom and joy. The problem is that we know that such times are only temporary and that the forces will intervene, usually sooner than later. The three connected social themes that Vance proposes contribute to the 'universal and temporal forces' acting on the characters and are closely interwoven throughout the novel. Hardy's first unpublished novel *Poor Man and the Lady* was very much concerned with social inequality and was criticised as a result. Prospective publishers judged the book as 'too openly hostile to the upper classes' (Millgate *Cambridge Companion* 8), and Hardy's handling of the topic of social inequality was a major reason why it was not published (Seymour-Smith 87-92). Widdowson and others have noted continuities between the radical satire on inequalities in *Poor Man and the Lady* and *Jude the Obscure* (Widdowson *On TH* 1998, 168). Jude is a working-class man aspiring to a University education in Christminster. His childish imagination is, ironically, fired by the village schoolteacher Phillotson. Another significant early influence on the young Jude occurs on a Sunday walk to churches to decipher Latin inscriptions on fifteenth-century brasses and tombs. While doing this he meets 'a hunch-backed old woman of great intelligence, who read everything she could lay her hands on, and told him more yet of the romantic charms of the city of light and lore' (JO 27). These older people clearly assist in the development of Jude's dreams of academic scholarship in a city of mystic spires while his aunt, who is also old, discourages him. He finally dies, sick, lonely and destitute with the 'hurrahs' of the

University Remembrance Day sounding loudly nearby. An earlier Remembrance Day marked the return of Jude and Sue to Christminster and this occasion was significant in that he was mocked by his former working-class colleagues and saw Phillotson in the crowd during the festivities. Jude's death with the satiric background echoes interposed with quotations from the book of Job creates a stark ending but his disillusionment begins much earlier when he receives only one reply to his letters of introduction to the Masters of the Colleges. The single reply he gets from T. Tetuphenay advises him to 'remain in your own sphere and stick to your own trade [rather] than adopting any other course' (JO 99). It is difficult to know whether this reply or the neglect of the other Masters embitters Jude more. We don't know Tetuphenay's age but we can surmise that because of his position he is at least middle aged and he definitely represents the 'old order' in his close alignment with the ancient institution.

The second major theme of the novel proposed by Vance is that of marriage and divorce. Hardy's treatment of these subjects in the novel was one of the main reasons for its hostile reception. At the wedding of Jude and Arabella the narrator sardonically observes:

the two swore....they would assuredly believe , feel and desire precisely as they had believed, felt and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (JO 46).

When, later, the marriage turns sour, Jude refers to marriage as a 'hopelessly vulgar institution' and a 'sort of a trap to catch a man' (JO 237). This comment reflects his entrapment by Arabella and although expressed from the male perspective it also accurately expresses Sue's views. Ultimately, after a period of separation from her husband Phillotson, she returns to the marriage in a spirit of sacrifice as she seeks to purge the evil that has befallen her and Jude in the deaths of their children. Someone faced with the consequences of such a ghastly tragedy might well look for some form of redress in their grief but as Gatrell observes Sue's behaviour in the last chapters constitutes the harshest indictment in the novel of marriage explicitly ordained by the Christian church (*TH: Proper study of Mankind* 150). He also feels that when Hardy

wrote the novel he was angrily bitter about marriage (151) and that this influenced how he portrayed the subject. Vance describes Hardy as attacking the 'inhumane but religiously sanctioned traditional attitudes which upheld loveless marriage regardless of personal unhappiness' and suggests this was 'specifically an attack on inflexible High Church dogmatism' (xiii). Notable here is Vance's emphasis on 'traditional attitudes' because it is clearly these, in a variety of manifestations, that are under attack in the novel. Interestingly both Jude and Phillotson are able to terminate their marriages relatively easily on the grounds of their wives' adultery (real or apparent) (Gatrell 174), although Phillotson scandalises the people of Shaston by his action which he describes as 'giving my tortured wife her liberty'(JO 216). Of particular interest is Arabella's apparent endorsement of the bondage marriage appears to represent for women. In an exchange with Phillotson she tells him that he should have forced Sue to stay with him and that he should have kept her 'chained on' to 'break her spirit for kicking' (JO 279). She goads him with 'Call yourself a schoolmaster' (JO 279) and the exchange ends with her retort that emphasises his age: 'Well – don't you forget to try it next time, old man.' To this he replies: 'I cannot answer you, madam. I have never known much of womankind' (JO 279). An irony of this exchange lies in the fact that it is the earthy, hedonist peasant woman Arabella who has inveigled a man into marriage who is advising the middle-aged schoolteacher Phillotson, an establishment figure, on the subject of marriage. A further irony is that she is presenting the male view as further endorsed by the muttered comment of his friend Gillingham 'I think she ought to be smacked, and brought back to her senses' (JO 203)

The third closely-linked theme noted by Vance is the position of women in society. Sue's actions and utterances are clearly important in this regard and she has been the subject of much discussion particularly from the perspective of feminist criticism. I will discuss Sue further below, but as Widdowson suggests there have only been the briefest passing references to Arabella in the 'rush to re-read the new woman, Sue, which Widdowson describes as 'somewhat myopic' (1998, 180). Arabella's words and actions contribute importantly to the discussion of the place of women in society and reference

has already been made to her exchange with Phillotson on the subject in which Arabella concludes:

“Then shall the man remain guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.” Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi’ it! Haw haw!” (JO, 279).

If Arabella is an important but overlooked contributor to the novel’s discussion of the gender inequities of marriage I contend that we can also learn much about the position of women in late Victorian society by close observation of the two older women Aunt Drusilla and Widow Edlin.

Analysis of Sue’s character has evoked ‘a multiplicity of perspectives nearly all of which, if they are to lead to a satisfactory explication must ignore supporting “evidences” of others’ Dale Kramer (172) writes. Hardy appears to deliberately portray Sue as an enigmatic and edgy character. Much of her restlessness stems from the constrictions that late Victorian society places on women, particularly one who seeks to be a freethinker and independent spirit. She is not sufficiently confident to deny society’s rules outright. She initially accepts the punishment meted out by her Training College for breaking their curfew before escaping from the back window. More significantly having carefully chosen casts of Venus, the Roman goddess of love rather than chastity, and Apollo, the god embodying male beauty and (non-Christian) moral excellence, she finds it necessary to lie to her landlady about her purchase for fear of the consequences. She quotes freely from liberal philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and is able to debate about them with Jude as an equal. But it is her equivocal attitude to the subject of physical intimacy that evokes particular interest. I have hypothesised that their age difference is one of the reasons for her physical recoil from Phillotson but that doesn’t explain her refusal of the earlier graduate friend and her reluctance with Jude. This reluctance is only overcome when Jude pushes the issue by referring to Arabella. From Sue:

‘But she’s not your wife!... And I –’  
‘And you are not either, dear, yet,’ said Jude. (JO 231)

This exchange is followed by Jude saying that he has ‘waited with the patience of Job’ and that ‘I don’t see that I’ve got anything by my self denial’ (JO 232). Shortly after this

she acquiesces. Sue has already told Jude that: 'My life has been shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me' and that 'I have mixed with them [men] ...almost as one of their own sex', before going on to observe that 'no average man - no man short of a sensual savage - will molest a woman by day or by night ...unless she invites him' (JO 127), and concluding that the death of her earlier friend, whom she similarly denied, 'caused a terrible remorse on me for my cruelty' (JO 127). This revelation on Sue's part is remarkable. Is she naïve despite her wide reading? Can she be viewed as a latent lesbian? Or does she feel this represents the 'new woman's' views about sex? While a detailed analysis of Sue is outside the brief of this thesis, suffice it to say she plays a major role in Hardy's discussion of the place of women in late Victorian society and her actions and observations played a part in the criticism that the book engendered. It is my contention, however, that the role of the elderly female characters in advancing challenges to the traditional institution of marriage is also of great significance, albeit, like Arabella, these women are often overlooked in critical accounts of the novel.

I now want to turn to the role of older people in developing the themes Vance's identifies. The quotation that begins this chapter is made by Widow Edlin. She is a true friend to Jude and Sue and provides support to Aunt Drusilla in her illnesses and dying. Simon Gatrell describes Mrs Edlin as 'representing most fully the little common-sense and flexibility that is needed by society in interpreting ceremonies such as marriage' (153). Vance views Mrs Edlin as 'supplying the function of a chorus offering intermittent detached commentary' to Hardy's 'brilliant if artificial dramatic economy as well as the bleakness of Greek Tragedy' (xv). As she becomes more involved in the fortunes of Jude and Sue she changes from a passive and traditional acceptor of the institution of marriage to someone who is prepared to confront Phillotson on the eve of his second marriage to Sue. Gatrell suggests that her initial view is 'that marriage should be taken easily, as it comes, as a festival. Don't think about it, just do it, make the best of it together.' (154). As Widow Edlin says:

'Nobody thought of being afeard o' matrimony in my time, nor of much else but a cannon-ball or empty cupboard. Why when I and my poor man were married, we thought no more o't than a game o' dibs'. (JO 254)



She later recognises at three separate points in the novel ‘that this idea is out of fashion, that society has changed and thus marriage has also changed.’ (Gatrell 154). As a consequence we see a change in her utterances about marriage which culminates in her fruitless visit to Phillotson on the eve of the second marriage to try to persuade him to abandon it:

‘[Sue is] forcing herself to do it, poor dear little thing; and you’ve no notion what she’s suffering’ (JO 324).

Her pleading continues:

‘She’s his wife if anybody’s ... She’s got nobody on her side. The one man who’d be her friend the obstinate creature won’t allow her to come near. What first put her in this mood o’ mind I wonder!’. (JO, 325).

Phillotson’s cold rejoinder is to assert that it is ‘all voluntary’ on Sue’s part and follows with:

‘You’ve turned round, Mrs Edlin. It is unseemly of you’. (JO, p325)

His coldness is only partly a response to what she has said. He has been challenged by a woman and an old one as well. The significance of these exchanges clearly extends beyond the development of plot. We have seen an elderly woman of apparently serene temperament not only change her hitherto laissez-faire attitude to marriage but to openly challenge a man who is her social superior.

Jude’s Aunt Drusilla is consistent in her opposition to any of the Fawleys getting married and in her discouragement of Jude’s meeting Sue in Christminster. Timothy Rivinus notes that Jemima Hardy proscribed marriage for her children and possibly served as a model for Aunt Drusilla’s views and for Hardy’s ambivalent portrayal of marriage as a potentially damaging traditional institution in a number of his novels (239). Drusilla is described as ‘a tall, gaunt woman, who spoke tragically on the most trivial subject’ (JO 8). Other descriptions include ‘Jude’s old and embittered aunt’ (JO 93) and ‘a harsh old woman’ (JO 94). Her consistent demeanour and speech raise the question of whether she has clinical depression, a condition that is prevalent among old people and can go unrecognised. (Mathews, Mathews & Mathews 34) A further feature of depression is

that of rigid thinking and inflexibility to change. Hardy uses the contrast between the characters of Drusilla and Widow Edlin to develop the ideas about marriage and it could be postulated that the reason that the latter could change and challenge her ideas on marriage was that, unlike Drusilla, she did not suffer from depression.

It might be argued that Drusilla's views are correct given the unhappy circumstances of the marriages of Jude's and Sue's parents and the tragic events associated with their forbears of an earlier generation, revealed to them on the eve of their intended wedding by Mrs Edlin (JO, 247). Drusilla's gloomy views are not confined to marriage however. She constantly discourages Jude asking, 'why didn't go off with that schoolmaster of thine to Christminster or somewhere?' calling him 'a poor ordinary child', and then 'concluding that it is 'a place much too good for you ever to have to do with ...' (JO 12). Drusilla, then, is the first person to articulate the impossible divide between being lowly born and having a University education.

I have advanced the argument that a significant part of Sue's physical revulsion of Phillotson derives from their age difference. Their chronological age difference is about 25 years but it is their psychological and sociological age difference that is most important. In common with a number of other characters in the novel Phillotson may well be depressed. The narrator's descriptions of him are far from flattering and stress his ill health as well as his 'elderly outlook': He has 'an unhealthy-looking, old-fashioned face rendered more old-fashioned by his style of shaving (JO 139). He describes himself to Gillingham as 'the most old-fashioned man in the world on the subject of marriage (JO). When Arabella meets him on the road to Alfredston he is described as 'an elderly man of spare stature' with a 'touch of slovenliness in his attire and Arabella addresses him as 'old man' (JO 277). Earlier when Jude asks Sue if Phillotson has mentioned marriage she says, 'An old man like him!' to which Jude replies 'Oh come, Sue he's not so very old' (JO115). In addition to the frequent descriptions and verbal comments about Phillotson's age, as a schoolteacher he also represents the established, or old, order. His profession is not enough to allow him to study for the ministry at Christminster but it is enough to force the loss of his job when he flouts social convention and allows Sue a divorce. Hardy is showing that he, like the others, is under societal constraints, albeit at a

different level. Sue's final acceptance of physical relations with him is presented as a form of supreme sacrifice. Although Sue has been able to experience enjoyable sexual relations with Jude, albeit after initial hesitation, the prospect of physical union with Phillotson remains repulsive to her. It is highly significant that she makes the 'sacrifice' on the night that she met Jude in church and exchanged passionate kisses with him and is resisting the temptation to join him again. She clearly initiates the embrace and kissing (JO 343). After that Widow Edlin tells her that she 'ought not to force [her] nature. No woman ought to be expected to' (JO 350). Nevertheless Sue goes to Phillotson who is aware of her reluctance, 'You shrink from me again? – just as formerly!' (JO 352), and when she submits, 'A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry' (JO 353). This is a description of a ritual sacrifice rather than the consummation of a happy union and Sue is sacrificing herself to do penance for the tragedy of her children. Her aversion to Phillotson which makes the sacrifice so intense is grounded in their differences both in age and outlook.

No discussion on ageing in *Jude the Obscure* would be complete without consideration of Little Father Time, the boy from Jude and Arabella's first marriage whose existence and imminent arrival Arabella reveals to Jude by letter (JO 239). Jude and Sue keenly adopt him with tragic results. The boy gets his nickname from his lugubrious manner which makes him seem old before his time. 'He was Age masquerading as Juvenility and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices' (JO 241) and he derives no enjoyment from the things that would normally pleasure children, like the antics of the kitten in the railway compartment (JO 242). Sue is seen at a fair as 'a young woman...accompanied by a boy with an octogenarian face' (JO 273). There are some medical syndromes that result in premature physical ageing. Children with Progeria, for example, start developing the physical characteristics of ageing at eighteen months, appear old by the age of eight and die at an average of thirteen years from premature coronary artery disease and stroke (Kirkwood in *Brocklehurst* 33-4). Werner's syndrome is an autosomal recessive condition which also results in premature biological ageing. People with the condition lack the teenage growth spurt and are of short stature, greying and loss of hair together with skin changes, cataracts and bone thinning begin in early

adulthood and the person appears old in their fourth decade (Kirkwood 33-4). In contrast to these physical conditions, Little Father Time does not appear to have a syndrome of premature biological ageing but is self consciously old before his time, an example of premature psychological ageing. Like Drusilla (and Phillotson) his behaviour can be viewed as paradigmatic of depression. Because of his demeanour Sue discusses the family's plight with him as with an adult with the disastrous consequences of his killing of his two siblings and taking his own life, leaving the horrific note, 'Done because we are too menny.' (JO 298). Helen Small makes an interesting comparison between Little Father Time and the disillusioned and discredited Professor of English, David Lurie, in J.M. Coetzee's Booker Prize winning novel *Disgrace* (1999). Her comparison derives from their both being 'old before their time' and that both are 'vulnerable to the charge of melodrama' (218), but the main similarity, Small contends, is that their 'oldness' profoundly influences their actions. As Lurie helps euthanase dogs at the Animal Clinic he reflects that it is being done 'because we are too menny', the exact words of Little Father Time (146). Small asserts that Lurie's choice, unlike Little Father Time's is an adult one. Murder-suicide is definitely an adult action so what Little Father Time does is commit an adult act based on a child's understanding. Some literary gerontologists would object to the representation of premature ageing in Little Father Time solely on the grounds of its extreme negativity but it could be argued that Hardy develops this character for far more than a mere negative stereotype of ageing. F.B Pinion (TH *Art and Thought* 1977) notes the parallels between Little Father Time's actions and the Crucifixion and suggests that 'it is significant that the doomed sufferers (Jude and Sue) first meet at the cross in the pavement which marked the spot of Martyrdom' (111). On such a reading, Hardy is using Little Father Time as part of his protest against conventional religion and the establishment. There is an irony when Jude repeats the words of the doctor that attended the deaths:

'... there are such boys springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown in the last generation – the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they have the staying power to resist them. He says it is the beginning of the common universal wish not to live' (JO 299).

Here Jude suggests that the prematurely aged Little Father Time represents a new generation and new views which one might think could mean new opportunities and progression but in reality draws a response of denial, depression and withdrawal. In a fascinating and complex representation, then, in the figure of Little Father Time Hardy might be seen as commenting on modernity as a force that 'ages' individuals – if not physically, then emotionally and psychologically.

*Jude the Obscure* is a bleak book so it is not surprising that many of the older people, and those who represent ageing, are bleak characters. Yet there are exceptions. Widow Edlin does not simply display the stereotypical qualities attributed to the elderly. Indeed she displays some of the virtues that can be seen in older people who have adapted well to ageing:- equanimity, kindness, patience and, significantly, adaptability to change. The old woman who encourages Jude in his studies is clearly alert and vital, but as Joe Fisher points out in her encouragement of Jude's scholastic efforts – an encouragement that seems markedly 'modern' in contrast to the traditional and conservative responses of the Christminster scholars - she is leading him to the disappointment of academic rejection. Fisher advances this as another example of a 'hidden text' – an elderly person advocating decidedly modern views - which undermines prevailing values (187).

Jude himself can be viewed as ageing prematurely and this process is caused by his constant stream of reversals coupled with his depression, alcohol use and risky behaviours. As Joe Fisher says, 'Jude dies of ossification before he reaches his book's [a thirty year old Latin grammar] age (179); 'the work that he needs to do in order to earn a living eventually leads to his death, turning his lungs to the stone which builds that structure (179). There is also a close relationship between the old buildings that Jude works on and visits and their symbolic reference to a bygone age. The description of the buildings is also couched in terms of 'underlit scenes'. This adds to the sense of gloom and foreboding. Fisher also notes the resemblance of Jude's physical appearance to the buildings in that he is 'dark, bearded, Levantine and Christ-like' (JO 178). To Jude and Sue the buildings represent ancient customs, particularly the antiquity of Church and University traditions, to which they cannot aspire. Sue seems to recognise this, saying of

Wardour Castle, 'Wardour is Gothic – and I hate Gothic' (JO 117). Fisher further observes that 'all Jude and Sue can 'choose' to 'see' are old buildings and ruins, precisely the structures and the history (whether physical or ideological) they are trying to escape (182).

The symbolism of dim light and antiquity is notably used when Jude enters Christminster. From afar the city had given the promise of bright lights, spires and freedom but when he arrives the reality is different. The streets are empty and dominated by gloom and ancient University buildings. The narrator's foreboding descriptions of the city are the first indication that his ambitions will fail. A solitary policeman, an establishment figure, challenges his being on the street in the evening, a far call from the warm welcome that he was expecting in the city of spires. Hardy's association of the antiquity of Church and University buildings with darkness and gloom is not accidental. In effect Hardy is suggesting the 'past it' of the Church and 'not for the likes of you' of the University, are synonyms for the way the same pejorative comments are sometimes made about older people.

The themes of older people and ageing which are the subjects of this thesis are thus represented in a number of different ways in *Jude the Obscure*. They are interwoven with, and help to develop commentary on the major social issues that Hardy highlights including the institutions of the Church, University and marriage, the position of women in society and social disadvantage. I develop discussion of these topics further in consideration of other Hardy novels in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Mrs Goodenough's Revenge: The Mayor of Casterbridge**

Older people and issues related to ageing play crucial roles in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). The full title the novel is *The Life and Death of The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character* and as Jakob Lothe points out 'Character' is a key word (119). In Aristotelean terms Michael Henchard, the mayor, displays *hamartia*, the 'infamous tragic error' or 'flaw' that will result in his fall from grace and prosperity. He clearly has many worthy characteristics but eventually it is the *hamartia* that brings about his tragic downfall. Millgate describes Henchard as 'one of Hardy's most remarkable exercises in characterisation, the richly and sympathetically imagined embodiment of those qualities of ambition, vigour, violence and sexual aggressiveness which Hardy knew to be lacking in himself...It was perhaps psychically necessary for Hardy that so virile a figure should suffer so catastrophic a fall, yet admiration for Henchard remains the novel's dominant note' (Millgate *TH Biography revisited* 2004, 233-6). Everyone that I have met who has read the novel confesses to a degree of sympathy with Henchard and many can see facets of his character in themselves albeit not expressed in such dramatic and tragic ways. He is a colossal figure but he has his uncertainties about ageing and can be viewed as representing old values particularly when compared to the younger Donald Farfrae. I will discuss these together with the themes about ageing and older people in the novel.

Two actions by the young 21 year old Henchard pave the way for the subsequent tragedy. First, he auctions his wife and baby at a country fair while under the influence of rum laced with rum. The rum-laced rum is sold to him by a Mrs Goodenough in whose tent the auction occurs. Years later she contributes to his downfall as she reveals these events when she appears before him in his role of magistrate. Second, filled with remorse the day after the auction he takes an oath sworn on a Church altar that he will abstain from alcohol for 21 years, the length of his life so far. The second action appears to be commendable on first consideration but it is also significant in that it is the first depiction of one of his faults to act hastily and dramatically without due thought, and then

act just as dramatically when he feels remorse when things go wrong. Sadly the end of the period of his abstention from alcohol coincides with his tragic downfall and a return to drinking exacerbates his problems.

Henchard's downfall has already begun by the time Mrs Goodenough appears as a defendant before him in his magistrate's court, but until then he still retained public sympathy. The great significance about her revelation in court is that it exposes Henchard's discreditable past to the townspeople. Here an elderly disreputable woman is pivotal to the plot. Less pivotal to the plot but nonetheless important in terms of characterisation is the hiring-fair scene in which the threatened rejection of the old shepherd and the staunch support of his son results in Farfrae's intervention. This serves to underline Farfrae's generosity of spirit and helps him secure Lucetta's affection. The hiring scene itself can be seen as a romanticised portrayal of rural working life and the position of elderly people within this. The contrast between the characters of Henchard and Farfrae is a dominant concern of the book and one that the narrator quite clearly suggests is the result of their differences in age, albeit with some inconsistencies, that I will discuss further.

Other minor elderly characters play important roles in the novel in terms of both plot development and characterisation. One such is Conjuror Fall, an aged hermit with supposed powers of prediction. Henchard seeks advice about the weather from Conjuror Fall, and in this way is portrayed as resorting to traditional folklore in contrast with the young Farfrae's new ideas and progressive technology. We can also learn much about local society and folklore from the actions and speech of older people such as Mother Cuxsom, Soloman Longways and Christopher Coney. As in all Hardy's writing setting has a vital role to play in the development of theme and character. Hardy describes the older and disreputable part of Casterbridge, Mixen Lane, in some detail. Henchard as mayor and successful businessman moves in circles far removed from Mixen Lane, in the newer parts of town, but becomes a resident in the older parts after his downfall. An even more distant past is evoked in references to an old Roman amphitheatre on which the town has been built. Critics have suggested that the amphitheatre represents the



impossibility of escaping the past, a key thematic concern in many Hardy novels. These themes will be discussed in this chapter and will be linked to similar themes in other chapters.

The incident where (the ironically named) Mrs Goodenough, the old furmity seller, appears before Henchard in his capacity as magistrate on charges of drunkenness and disturbing the peace constitutes the turning point in his downfall. Prior to this there was a possibility that he could re-establish himself despite his reverses and his rivalry with Farfae. Her revelation of Henchard's wife selling episode twenty years earlier is sensational and guarantees that his demise will be irreversible. Gatrell describes it as 'perhaps the central moment of the novel, the moment when the tragic hero is confronted with the consequences of his own moral flaw, the moment that the mayor understands that his power and name will disappear' (79). The narrator suggests 'Had the incident been well known of old and always, it might by this time have grown to be lightly regarded as a rather tall wild oat' but 'small as the incident ... had been of itself, it formed the edge or turn in the decline of Henchard's fortunes' (MC 169) As a result 'he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to sink rapidly on the other side' and 'the velocity of his descent in both aspects became accelerated every hour' (MC 169).

Gatrell suggests that this scene represents 'Triumphant class and gender revenge by the old, seedy, penniless vulgar woman over the powerful authoritarian male mayor' (79). From the outset Mrs Goonenough is described in very disparaging terms, terms that emphasise her age. The narrator tells us 'a haggish creature of fifty presided' over the making of the furmity, 'an antiquated slop' (MC 4). In the next few pages she is described as a 'hag' on three further occasions and she acts 'slily' as she laces the furmity with rum. When Susan and Elizabeth-Jane encounter her at Weydon Priors eighteen years later she is described as 'an old woman, haggard, wrinkled and almost in rags' (MC 16). When she arrives in Casterbridge, the *old* constable reports her as being 'an old flagrant female, sir, committing a nuisance in a horrible profane manner against the church wall, sir, as it "twere no more than a pot house"' (MC 150). In court she is described as 'an old woman of mottled countenance, attired in a shawl of that nameless

tertiary hue ... neither tawny, russet, hazel nor ash' with a 'sticky black bonnet' and an 'apron that had been white in times so comparatively recent, as to still contrast visibly with the rest of her clothes' (155). Interestingly a white apron had been her only mark of respectability in the furmity incident. Hardy's portrayal, then, is of an old, poor, disreputable woman with a propensity for deceit. In the repeated description of her as a 'hag' who acts in sly and deceitful ways Hardy might be seen to allude to the myth of 'old woman as witch' or 'bedame' which Keats uses in *The Eve of St Agnes*, a convention that was not only common in nineteenth century writing but dates back to mediaeval times. The sneaking of the rum into the furmity might suggest that she could be adding other ingredients – was it all really rum or was there some form of witchcraft at work? The main reason for her portrayal, however is to create the contrast between the aged woman and Henchard who still represents authority and power despite the fact that by the time of the court case he is no longer mayor and his business has started to decline. His most important vestige of status is the magistracy which he takes very seriously. True to character he has a direct approach with 'rough and ready perceptions' and 'sledgehammer directness' which 'had often served him better than nice legal knowledge' (MC 155). Not for the first time this directness proves his undoing as his command to Mrs Goodenough not to ask any questions or to say anything results in the exposure of his wrongdoing. Significantly, both the second magistrate and the clerk of the court refuse to believe her story because of their prejudice against her and it is up to Henchard to reveal the truth. In her words, 'It proves that he's no better than I, and has no right to sit there in judgement upon me' (MC 157). What is so interesting is that Hardy uses an old woman as the agent of Henchard's downfall, to extract what Gatrell describes as 'triumphant class and gender revenge' (79). More than anything that the young, male outsider Farfrae does or says, it is the actions and words of this elderly female insider that seal Henchard's fate. Before we leave Mrs Goodenough it should also be observed that without her intervention in the furmity tent, Henchard would never have sold his wife and daughter. Notable too is that Mrs Goodenough's initial use of alcohol exploited Henchard's weakness, that she frequented Mixen Lane (where Henchard will end up) and that she tells Susan that she has heard that Henchard has gone to Casterbridge (MC 17) and is thus the agent that leads to their reunion, a further ingredient in Henchard's

downfall. She may be old, female and poor but she has the power to influence events radically.

At their first meeting Farfrae and Lucetta observe a scene in the market place of the hiring fair held traditionally at Candlemas (February 2nd). The fair was the time that farm labourers were auctioned and on this occasion a very old man is passed over as being of 'no value' (MC 125). His son insists that if anyone wishes to purchase him the deal must include his father as well. The son is reluctant to leave his sweetheart but emphasises the responsibility that he has for the care of his father. The farmer is not keen on the prospect of an additional old worker of limited productive value and gives them half an hour to think it over. In the meantime Farfrae, under the influence of Lucetta's pity for the young couple, goes out and hires both workers instead. His action is a major factor in arousing her initial attraction to Farfrae.

The incident is important in terms of the plot but also in its commentary on rural labour. The hiring fair scene is taken almost directly from Hardy's description of such events in his essay *The Dorsetshire Labourer* (II 203-55). While the scenes are identical the outcomes are quite different. In both essay and novel the old shepherd is described as being 'so bowed by years and hard work that, approaching from behind, a person could scarcely see his head (MC 125, DL II 217-8). The shepherd of the essay is left lonely and desolate with only the remembrance of hiring successes of his prime to bring scant comfort, while in the novel the shepherd is saved by the persistence of his son and the magnanimity of Farfrae. Moreover the shepherd in the essay gets soaking wet and suffers 'the lot of those who have no sons and daughters to fall back on, or whose children are ingrates, or far away' (DL II 213-4). In his reading of these two divergent representations, Lowman pounces on the difference saying that 'a part of Hardy approved of the fairs as a colourful element in the old way of life' (89) but 'his hiring of the old shepherd [ in MC] is primarily romantic rather than utilitarian, and that it 'is typical of Hardy's blandness that the old shepherd is presented picturesquely, and his problem is solved sentimentally' (145). We are thus left questioning Hardy's motive in the portrayal and its veracity in representing the plight of older agricultural workers.

The dynamics of the relationship between Henchard and Donald Farfrae are central to the tragedy of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The narrator outlines the differing characteristics and responses of the two men throughout the novel. The differing attitudes of the two men it is suggested derives in some part from their age difference. When they first meet Farfrae is in his twenties and Henchard in his early forties. Henchard is still physically powerful, as is shown when he fights Farfrae (Chapter 38) and he has him at his mercy. Nonetheless, Farfrae is described as being ‘years younger than the Mayor of Casterbridge; fair, fresh and slenderly handsome (MC 122 ). Farfrae as Henchard’s groomsmen is described as ‘too inexperienced, too thoughtful, too judicial, too strongly conscious of the serious side of the business, to enter into the scene in its dramatic aspect’ (MC 64). Of their regard for Lucetta we are told ‘On Farfrae’s side it was the unforced passion of youth. On Henchard’s the artificial coveting of maturer age’ (MC 139). Henchard is described as ‘getting on towards the dead level of middle age, when material things increasingly possess the mind’ (MC 115), the suggestion being that as an older man his interest in Lucetta is more practical than romantic. Despite the narrator’s comment, Henchard may be slow at reacting to signs of courtship but once committed he seems much more passionately committed than Farfrae who is attracted to both Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane very readily but without the apparent depth of feeling.

Farfrae, the younger man, represents progress and innovation. He has a formal system of accounting in contrast to Henchard’s rule of thumb and introduces new methods into the corn dealing business. He also introduces new machinery such as the horse-drill (Chapter 24) which is ridiculed by Henchard. Farfrae asserts that it will ‘revolutionise sowing hereabouts’ making Elizabeth-Jane say, ‘then the romance of the sower is gone for good’. Her remark is consistent with the idea that Hardy is lamenting the loss of a rural idyll. The age contrast is also an issue in the mayoralty. When Farfrae is offered the mayoralty he hesitates saying, ‘I’m over young and may be thought pushing’ to which councillor Vatt replies ‘We have had older men long enough’ (MC 188-9). The message is clear: younger men are thought progressive by the townsfolk while older men are regarded as hidebound and conservative. When Henchard confronts Farfrae about his forcible

removal from approaching the King's carriage he invokes his seniority, despite his reduced social status, in saying, 'What, you forward stripling, tell a man of my age he'd no business there' (MC 211). Those exchanges tell us that both men believe that seniority confers certain rights such as the holding of responsible positions.

But the age difference must be regarded as playing a much stronger part in their social dynamics than to their personality traits. In fact, the characteristics of the two men often appear to overturn conventional stereotypes of age-related traits and behaviour. In the passage quoted above, Farfrae is described as 'too thoughtful, too judicial, too strongly conscious of the serious side of the business' – all attributes one would associate with maturity. Similarly, the departure from the common stereotype of 'the impetuosity of youth' becomes dramatic when we consider Henchard's impulsiveness. He has a volcanic temper and 'his violence and bouts of irresponsibility lead to the failure of all his relationships' (M Williams, 146). His impetuosity is not all negative, however, as it often results from pangs of remorse and a desire to correct wrongdoings.

As with Jude Fawley (and several other of Hardy's characters) alcoholism and depression play a major part in Henchard's character and downfall although, unlike Jude, it is possible to argue a bipolar aspect to his behaviour. An early conversation with Farfrae highlights Henchard's depression as the latter says:

I sank into one of those gloomy fits I sometimes suffer from ... when the world seems to have the blackness of hell, and like Job, I could curse the day that gave me birth.

Ah, now, I never feel like it', said Farfrae. (MC 60).

In Chapter 3 of this thesis I discuss the high prevalence of depression among the characters in *Jude the Obscure* and the fact that the condition is common in older people in whom it can take atypical forms. Henchard admits to periods of profound depression which are exacerbated by the events leading to his downfall. He comes close to committing suicide and his final demise is precipitated by gross self-neglect. His 'last will' is melodramatic and evocative of some of the utterances of Jude Fawley in his

despair. The inevitable conclusion is that the accumulation of adverse events as Henchard ages greatly exacerbates his pre-morbid personality. If the younger Farfrae were subjected to the same events we expect that his responses would be different but this would be a result of a different personality rather than age. Thus in considering the age difference between Henchard and Farfrae we must conclude that the significance is more important in relation to social dynamics than to personality traits.

Mother Cuxsom, Christopher Coney, Solomon Longways, Buzzford the dealer and Nance Mockridge are the major representatives of older rustic townspeople in the novel. They are significantly more important than just casual bystanders who provide a backdrop to the actions of the major protagonists. We hear them in the Three Mariners hotel where Coney and Buzzford describe Casterbridge to Farfrae in negative terms on his first night in the town. When they are watching the congregation coming out of church after Henchard's remarriage to Susan their 'special genius', in contrast to Farfrae's is needed to 'expound the subject according to their rights' (MC, 65). They comment disparagingly on Henchard's choice:

'Tis forty years since I had my settlement in this here town,' said Coney; 'but daze me if I ever see a man wait so long before to take so little! There's a chance for thee after this, Nance Mockridge' (MC 64).

Older characters also contribute to social commentary advanced by the novel. They reflect, for example, that Mother Cuxsom was rewarded by the Agricultural Society for 'having begot the greatest number of healthy children without parish assistance' (MC 65). As well as the comment on her fecundity, the children are healthy which was unusual for the time, but the real nub of the comment is that she managed without parish assistance, in other words she was a member of the 'deserving poor'. The older rustics thus help to perpetuate the idea of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Mother Cuxsom observes that the number of children still kept them poor as, 'Where the pigs may be many the wash runs thin'. (MC 65). The conversation then leads on to a reminiscence of the 'doggery as there was in them ancient days' which includes drunkenness and promiscuity and a reflection of the effects of age on mobility:

‘Ah, the miles I used to walk then; and now I can scarcely step over a furrow!’

The conversation is cut short by the ‘appearance of the reunited pair – Henchard looking on the idlers with that ambiguous gaze of his’ (MC 65). This allows only a further brief negative interchange between Nance and one of the others before Christopher and Solomon, observing that ‘we hardly know how to look at things in these times’, go off drinking because of the sudden death of a man the day before which makes it ‘scarce one’s while to begin any work o’ consequence today’ (MC 66). The conversation is brief, less than two pages of text, but it is not inconsequential. It contains crucial comments about the major protagonist and his relationships that add to overt commentary by the narrator and so influence the reader’s perception of Henchard’s character. The older people also make important social comments about past and present times.

The older village rustics’ comments and actions are often apt and amusing but they also have a sinister side. Coney, aware of the old tradition of placing pennies on dead people’s eyes, has no qualms about removing them from Susan Henchard’s so that he can spend the money on drink. Longways colludes in this action. Nance Mockridge is an unpleasant person. She is first seen expressing her indignation that Henchard, the Mayor, should have sold ‘growed wheat’ to the bakers. ‘I’ve been a wife, and I’ve been a mother and I never see such unprincipled bread in Casterbridge as this before’ (MC 23). But she is also a gossip who is more than happy to reveal to Henchard that Elizabeth-Jane has worked as a servant in the Three Mariners. Again this might be seen as an apt rejoinder to Henchard’s condescending attitude to her and his criticism of Elizabeth-Jane’s treating her as an equal but there is no mistaking her delight at the ‘skimmity-ride’ and her joy at seeing Lucetta ‘toppered’.

The attitude of the apparently ‘respectable’ older village rustics towards the ‘skimmity-ride’ warrants close scrutiny. While the instigators of the ride are the rough and criminal element that inhabit Mixen Lane, Nance takes positive pleasure at the prospect, Mother Cuxsom is drinking at the inn called Peter’s Finger, ‘the church of Mixen Lane’ while the ride is being planned and Longways and Coney have an ambivalent attitude towards the

ride and whether they should interfere with it by telling the authorities. Longways says 'I have my doubts if it will be carried out' and 'If I were sure o't I'd lay information, 'Tis too rough a joke and apt to wake riot in the towns'(MC 208). Coney reflects that:

Farfrae was still liked in the community; but it must be owned that, as the Mayor and man of money, engrossed with affairs and ambitions, he had lost in the eyes of the poorer inhabitants something of that wondrous charm which he had for them as a light-hearted, penniless young man, who sang ditties as readily as the birds in the trees. (MC 208).

Thus we observe a conflict on their part between the responsibility to report an intended felony and the entertainment of the 'skimmity-ride' with its attendant ridicule of their superiors in society. We are left to conclude that though the older townspeople may be superficially good-humoured and philosophical they bear a resentment to those who might be considered their 'betters', particularly if they have risen from humble origins, and that they aren't averse to participating in their humiliation. Hardy uses them not only as a repository of history and customs but also to reveal divisions in social class.

Mixen Lane, with its 'church' Peter's Finger Inn is where the disreputable and criminal element of Casterbridge congregate. The fact that Henchard lives there after his downfall is indicative of the depth of his ruin. It is the older seedier part of town, adjacent to Fordington the scene of a severe cholera outbreak in 1853 during which Hardy's mentor the Rev Henry Moule performed heroic deeds in caring for the sick and trying to limit the outbreak. We are left in no doubt as to the nature of its characters. It is the haunt of the poachers, petty criminals and prostitutes who plan the 'skimmity-ride'. We get no firm idea how many of them are older people but we do know that Mother Cuxsom and Nance Mockridge, who describes herself as 'a respectable woman', visit there and mingle with ease. This undermines the concept of a 'respectable' and a 'disreputable' rustic working class. Perhaps Hardy is wanting to indicate that the division is not great and that their outlook towards those of a higher social class is similar?

Both Lucetta and Henchard harbour fears about growing old. It is interesting to speculate on whether there is something in their singular characters which make them more likely to verbalise these fears than some of the other protagonists. Tony Fincham considers



Lucetta 'a clear portrait of a histrionic personality' whose 'every appearance on the Casterbridge stage reinforces this personality type' (10). He cites the medical definition of this type which includes dramatic and importunate behaviour, emotional lability, shallow emotions and capricious infatuation. Small wonder then that she expresses her fears to Elizabeth-Jane:

'I wonder if I wear well, as times go!' She observed...  
'Yes – fairly' (from Elizabeth-Jane)  
'Where am I worst?'  
'Under your eyes – I notice a little brownness there' (E-J)  
'Yes. That is my worst place, I know. How many years do you think I shall last before I get hopelessly plain?'  
There was something curious in the way in which Elizabeth, though the younger, had come to play the part of the experienced sage in these discussions. 'It may be five years,' she said judicially. 'Or, with a quiet life, it may be as many as ten. With no love you might calculate on ten'. (MC 135)

Lucetta's major concern about ageing is the loss of physical beauty which is a rather shallow concern and it is the younger woman who is 'sage' but who also introduces the idea that living a quiet life will preserve her appearance longer. Clearly Lucetta by nature will not have an undisturbed life and not long afterwards she fears that the ageing process has already occurred:

'When I came here I was a young woman; now I am rapidly becoming an old one. Neither my husband or any other man will regard me with interest long'. (MC 195)

Lucetta thus reinforces the superficiality of her character promoting the view that a woman's attractiveness is merely physical and that when this is lost with ageing she is worthless. On closer consideration, however, Lucetta's fear of ageing might have some valid grounds. As Christopher Gilleard and Paul Higgs argue:

'the positive choice of age-related status...may prove more difficult for women than for men, because women have rarely benefited socially or personally from the ascription of maturity or 'seniority' (49).

I make more detailed reference to this fear of ageing in the Discussion chapter of this thesis as it is shared by Felice Charmond of *The Woodlanders* and, interestingly by Henchard himself.

Henchard's fear of growing old is that it will make him dependent on others particularly Elizabeth-Jane. 'His health declined; he became morbidly sensitive' and he had no wish to be an inoffensive old man, tenderly smiled on by Elizabeth' (MC 240). This triggers his wandering from Casterbridge; a man for whom 'the serious addition to his years had considerably lessened the spring of his stride, that his state of hopelessness had weakened him, and imparted to his shoulders...a perceptible bend' (MC 243). For Henchard being old and dependent would represent the final stage of his humiliation.

The representation of Casterbridge, the town, presents interesting perspectives on the changes which occur with the passage of time. As Merryn Williams suggests 'Casterbridge, for all its surface impression of "great snugness and comfort" has plenty of brutality and hardship in its everyday life' (149). Indeed the brutality and hardship experienced by some in the town contributes to Henchard's alienation from those who were close to him at the time of his public ruin. According to Williams 'the town is a continuous growth out of the Old Roman settlement'. The narrator tells us, 'it looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome' (MC, 54). The melancholy, impressive Roman amphitheatre is regarded with superstition by the locals partly because for scores of years the town-gallows had been there. One superstition held by some old people was 'that at certain moments in the summer time, the person sitting with a book ... beheld the slopes lined with a gazing legion of Hadrian's soldiery' which would roar their voices and disappear. The legend of the amphitheatre being a sinister place is kept alive by the stories of the older citizens. Williams points out that 'history filters down into the awareness of ordinary people and comes out in a distorted form through their everyday speech (149):

Casterbridge is an old hoary place o' wickedness, by all account. 'Tis recorded in history that we rebelled against the King one or two hundred years ago, in the time of the Romans, and lots of us were hanged on Gallows hill. (MC, 40).

The next speaker says:

We be bruckle folk here, - the best o' us hardly honest sometimes, what with hard winters, and so many mouths to fill, and God-a'mighty sending his taties so terrible

small to fill 'em with. (MC, 40).

This speech occurs on Farfrae's first night in Casterbridge and it is the older ordinary townspeople who provide this first description of the place.

When Elizabeth-Jane and her mother first arrive in town they perceive an 'antiquated borough...untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism' which causes the girl to remark 'What an old-fashioned place this appears to be!' (MC 20). The sense of antiquity being represented by the buildings is also expressed in *Jude the Obscure*. We read of a 'churchyard old as civilisation' (MC 111) and the descriptions of old churches and other buildings is common in *Jude the Obscure*. In doing this Hardy is seeking to link the age of buildings with the activity that they represent. He does this to reinforce his doubts about the validity of religion and other established social orders. The views expressed by characters such as Jude and Tess can be underlined by portraying places of worship as founded in, and belonging to, antiquity. Two other old structures are the two bridges on the road out of Casterbridge, particularly Grey's bridge, with Ten Hatches Weir close by, the place favoured by people such as Henchard who were depressed and contemplating suicide. I discuss the centrality of the theme of antiquity in the *Mayor of Casterbridge* further in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

We can therefore conclude that the themes of older people and ageing form a significant part of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Particularly noteworthy issues are the major contribution to the destruction of Henchard by a disreputable old woman, Lucetta's fear of ageing because of its associated connotation of lost physical beauty and Hardy's exploration of wide age differences in relationships with particular regard to Henchard and Farfrae. The theme of the antiquity of buildings symbolising past institutions is continued in the novel. These themes will be explored further in the next chapter on *The Woodlanders* which also introduces a theme of the antiquity of Nature represented by the ancient forest.

## CHAPTER 5

### **‘His age and infirmities increase’: The Woodlanders**

*The Woodlanders*, Hardy’s eleventh novel, followed *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and was published in 1887. Patricia Ingram notes that while its innocent title suggests a rural idyll harking back to *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) ‘contemporary critics, did not read it in this mild way’. They found it ‘strong meat’: a ‘vivid drama’, ‘his best and most powerful work’ and as ‘disagreeable as it is powerful’ (Introduction, xvi). The novel depicts a secluded community, Little Hintock, coming to terms with the disastrous impact of (modern) outside influences, and clearly deals with one of Hardy’s major themes: the intrusion of the ‘new’ – in terms of technology, medicine, a changing social order and different moral evaluations – on rural life. Ingram notes that other major themes explored in the novel include the implications of evolution, the significance of social class and the nature and future of women in the later nineteenth century, all questions which occupied Hardy throughout his career as a novelist (xviii). The sense of the old established rural life being disturbed by unsettling external factors is evoked in the opening scene as Barber Percomb coerces Marty South into selling her tresses of hair, her only attraction, to Felice Charmond. The village girl is forced through poverty to sacrifice her hair to an outsider, a rich sophisticated landowner. Felice’s wealth, significantly, is the result of a felicitous marriage to an older man who dies leaving her his estate. This makes her one of the ‘new’ monied class who has ‘bought’ status via new money, or in her case, marriage. The sense of external disturbance of the familiar is further magnified in Grace Melbury’s observations of the mysterious nocturnal workings of the sophisticated newcomer Dr Edred Fitzpiers. She sees mysterious colours of light coming from the doctor’s window and is ‘widely awakened by the phenomenon’ because it is ‘strange and new’ (TW 47). As the narrator comments, ‘Almost every diurnal and nocturnal effect in that woodland place had hitherto been the direct result of the regular terrestrial roll which produced the season’s changes; but here was something dissociated from these normal sequences and foreign to local knowledge’ (TW 47-8). This is an early warning that the stability of the community is about to be overturned by something foreign or new.

The concept of a regular terrestrial rhythm tied to local knowledge and community echoes the nocturnal thoughts of Gabriel Oak in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. He regards the roll of the Earth eastward as ‘almost palpable’ and believes ‘the sensation may be caused by a panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects ... or by the better outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind; or by the solitude’ (FMC 9). In Oak’s case the peaceful traditional rhythms are about to be disturbed by the loss of his flock which subsequently makes him dependent on others for employment. In *The Woodlanders* the disturbances are caused by outside forces and have a profound effect upon older people and the long established social mores of the woodland community. The novel is also notable for its representations of older characters who are affected by, and comment on, the changes occurring in society and their impact on traditional rural life. In what follows I discuss John South and Grammer Oliver in depth as they both make significant contributions not only to the plot but also to the development of this central theme. Moreover, both merit detailed study in the context of the psychology of ageing and diseases affecting people in later life. In his portrayal of the behaviours, fears and illnesses of these characters Hardy reveals an acute awareness of the nature and effects of ageing. As I have indicated in my introductory chapters, this is an aspect of Hardy’s work that has barely been touched upon: far too often, elderly characters are disregarded in critical discussion or relegated to the role of comic relief, rural backdrop or ‘choric’ commentary. I contend that their role is far more significant.

Also significant is Melbury, the timber merchant, who is sixty years old and troubled, we learn, by aches. Although not old by today’s standards, he would have been considered so at the time of writing and the narrator refers to him as ‘an old man’ on a number of occasions. His words and actions make for interesting study because of his determination to ‘improve’ his daughter by investing in her education and refinement, and his adherence to the view that improving Grace’s social status will guarantee her happiness. It is clear that both the villagers, and the narrator, regard his goal as foolish. Older village rustics, notably Robert Creedle, John Upjohn and Timothy Tangs the elder, play an important part in commenting on country folklore, traditions and superstitions in *The Woodlanders* as they do in other novels by Hardy and in this way are a vital means by which the ‘older’

rural customs and mores are evoked for Hardy's reader. The symbolic function of ancient buildings, particularly churches, representing a bygone antiquity is less of a feature in *The Woodlanders* than in *Jude the Obscure* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; what emerges instead are descriptions of rural occupations such as logging, spar making and cider pressing, and nature itself (not least the woodlands) as being threatened by modernisation and machinery. As ever, in his representations of these Hardy is ambivalent in his attitude towards both the traditional past and modern 'progress'. There is telling commentary on such traditions such as lifehold leases on cottages and Giles Winterborne's ruin by the loss of his cottage title through the death of John South is the central event which converts a rural tale into a tragedy. We are left with the strong impression that Hardy, via narratorial commentary, considers such leaseholds unjust and in this respect it is not only modernity that is critiqued. These matters are discussed in the present chapter.

The first two chapters of Volume II describe the meeting of Grace Melbury with Dr Edred Fitzpiers, an aspect of plot equal in significance to the loss of the lease of the cottages through the death of old John South. This is their first formal meeting although previously Fitzpiers has watched Grace in a somewhat voyeuristic way and she has observed the strange lights in the windows of his cottage which are the result of his experiments in alchemy. Notably, the meeting results because Grace goes to Fitzpiers' home to intercede on behalf of the family's old servant Grammer Oliver. The old lady has been persuaded by the doctor to bequeath her body to him, after death, for ten pounds for the purposes of medical study. He is a believer in phrenology, the study of the size and shape of the cranium as an indicator of character and mental faculties. In his discussion of *The Woodlanders*, Tony Fincham describes phrenology as a 'serious pseudoscience of the nineteenth century' (100). The feature of Grammer which particularly attracts the doctor is the size of her skull, a 'very large organ of brain' (TW 49). He comments to her that 'a woman's [brain] is usually four ounces less than a man's; but yours is man's size' (TW 49). This myth about the relative brain sizes of men and women was accepted as 'fact' in phrenology, and Fincham notes that this was used by some authorities to counter both nascent feminism and Darwinism, and reassert male

superiority (100). In his negative portrayal of Fitzpiers and his 'science' Hardy can be seen to challenge such 'modern authority'. In all probability Grammer has Paget's disease, a condition affecting the architecture of the skull and long bones described by Sir James Paget in 1877. Although less common today, at the time Hardy wrote the condition affected about 3 percent of the population over the age of 70. As the percentage of people who lived over the age of 70 years was much less than now, the condition would have been relatively rare and of interest especially in someone whose skull was affected asymmetrically. Interestingly hearing loss, which affects Grammer is another symptom of the condition. Hardy's representation of Grammer and her physical appearance again reveals his observational skills.

'An old woman now entered upon the scene' (TW 27) is our first introduction to Grammer, Mr Melbury's servant. On this occasion she is entering the outhouse where Melbury's workers, including older rustics, while preparing to load wagons, are commenting on the wisdom of Melbury's educating his daughter at such great expense which they feel is bound to make her feel superior to her woodland heritage. Grammer, asserts the narrator, possesses 'two facial aspects – one of a soft and flexible kind, which she used indoors; the other with stiff lines and corners which she assumed when bustling among the men outside' (TW 27). The suggestion is that Grammer considers herself the men's superior because of her position in the home. She is evidently well presented from John Upjohn's observation, 'it do my heart good to see a' old woman like you so dapper and stirring, when I bear in mind that, after fifty, one year counts as two did afore!' (TW 27). Her reply is that a man might be offended by his 'scornful meanings' but a woman 'couldn't feel hurt if such smallness were to spit fire and brimstone at her' (TW 27). This exchange allows her to make a comment on the equanimity of women compared to men while putting Upjohn in his place. Grammer's link to a fast-fading rural past is suggested by the fact that she occasionally uses the archaic term 'Ch', instead of 'I' in her speech. This is a shortening of the ancient word 'Ich' and, as Hardy explained in a letter to Edmund Gosse was 'still used by old people in N.W. Dorset and Somerset ... but was dying rapidly' (*Life*, 232). In this respect, Hardy seems to be asserting the validity and veracity of his representations, perhaps in defence of claims of idealisation or

misrepresentation of his rural characters. However, Grammer's assurance when dealing with the local timber workers with whom she has a traditional, social relationship isn't maintained when it comes to dealing with Fitzpiers, the young outsider characterised by his 'new' knowledge, his class and his higher education. Her initial reaction to his admiration of her large head is one of flattery and she readily agrees to the ten pounds 'to have me as a 'natomy after my death' (TW 49). Her arguments are that she has 'no chick or chiel left', 'nobody with any interest in me', that she can be of use to her fellow creatures and that 'I shall keep him waiting many a year yet' (TW 49). There is also the attraction of the ten pounds which she receives as payment for the doctor's desire to perform an autopsy on her (TW 50). But Grammer's demeanour changes when she becomes ill and the prospect of death becomes a possibility. Her bravado disappears and she becomes positively frightened. 'John South's death of fear about the tree makes me think I shall die of this' she explains to Grace, adding that she 'hasn't the face to ask him [Fitzpiers] again to let me off' (TW 122). She puts emotional pressure on Grace to intervene by her comment 'If I were a young lady and could save a poor old woman's skellington from a heathen's chopper ...' (TW 123), implying that she would indeed do so. Her convincing of Grace to intercede on her behalf is described by the narrator as 'artful' (TW 123). Grace then departs for Fitzpiers tearful and with 'great reluctance' (TW 123).

Grammer who is shrewd enough to realise it when Fitzpiers becomes besotted with Grace would clearly prefer Grace to be paired with Giles Winterborne. She tries to influence matters on the occasion of the Midsummer Eve ritual that allegedly allowed young women to glimpse their future partners in life (TW 145). She asks Marty South to 'tole' (guide) Giles towards Grace as the girls run down hill to view their intended. At the same time Mrs Melbury is trying to ensure that Grace meets Fitzpiers, unaware that they have already met over the matter of Grammer. Melbury and his wife hope that such a meeting will achieve what has already happened: the doctor's interest in Grace. Employer and elderly servant have a conflict of interest and Grammer identifies more readily with the working folk in contrast with Melbury's desire for someone 'better' for his daughter. But surely she is aware of Marty's feelings for Giles when she asks her to



do this task and knows that it will be upsetting for Marty if it is successful? This is another example of Grammer being caught between the demands of two levels of society, a problem that is shared by George Melbury. Later in the novel Grammer has the chance for some redress of her unwitting role in the pairing of Grace and Fitzpiers, as it is she who finds and produces the antidote for the typhoid Grace catches from Giles. Grammer thus clearly plays a pivotal role in the plot but is also worthy of study as a portrait of physical, behavioural and psychological aspects of ageing.

The death of old John South is another life-changing event in the plot and one that enables Hardy to critique the common tradition of lifehold leases. Here, again, we see an ambivalent attitude to 'old' social practices, one that cuts against the idea that Hardy simply laments the advent of the new. John South lives in one of a group of cottages tenanted under a lifehold lease; Giles Winterborne lives in another. This type of lease limited the tenure to the duration of the lives of specified people (often for three generations). On the death of the last of these the lease on all the cottages lapsed and the property reverted back to the freeholder. Giles' father, a third generation tenant, was one of the named leaseholders, but since he has died Giles relies for his home on the longevity of the last surviving leaseholder, John South. Winterborne senior had the opportunity to extend the lease on his cottages, now owned by Felice Charmond through her inheritance from her husband, but failed to do so. As a result when South dies all the leaseholders are rendered homeless, Giles included. Giles thus loses any realistic opportunity to become Grace's suitor. His appeal for an extension to Felice is denied as he has offended her earlier. So while the newcomer has the means to redress the situation that has arisen as a result of an older, traditional property agreement, she does not do so. Rather she is shown to exert (class) power by insisting on maintaining the outmoded arrangement, to Winterborne's significant detriment.

The circumstances of John South's last days and death are of great interest. They afford Hardy the opportunity to further characterise not only the old man but also Fitzpiers who ministers to him at the end. South has a powerful delusion that a tree planted on his property when he was born is in danger of falling and when that happens he will die. 'At

last it is got too big, and now 'tis my enemy, and will be the death of me' (TW 91) he says. Tony Fincham considers that he is suffering from what has been termed a 'Monomania' (also called a 'Mono-Psychosis'), the principal symptom of which is an 'insane delusion'. This was defined in 1887 by Sir Thomas Clouston, Physician Superintendent of The Royal Edinburgh Asylum for the Insane, as:

A belief in something that would be incredible to sane people of the same class, education or race as the person who expresses it, this resulting from diseased working of the brain convolutions. (Cited by Fincham 99).

As Fincham points out the reference to 'diseased convolutions of the brain' is a 'wonderful piece of pseudoscience' (99) not unlike the phrenology which so absorbs Fitzpiers. The link between these two 'pseudosciences' is suggested when Grace visits Fitzpiers to intercede for Grammer. He shows her a piece of South's brain, obtained post-mortem, under a microscope. Fitzpiers believes that the contours of South's brain will reveal the nature of his delusion just as he believes examination of Grammer's skull will reveal her abnormality. The study of neurohistology was being developed in the late nineteenth century and Alois Alzheimer was to describe the microscopic features of the disease that bears his name in 1911. Hardy, who consulted doctors for background material for his novels, may have been aware of these developments. Fitzpiers, however, is clearly characterised as a dilettante and unlikely to be aware of the special silver stains developed by Nissl required to demonstrate the plaques and tangles in brain matter which characterise Alzheimer's disease. Fitzpiers is unlikely to have discovered anything of relevance down his microscope. We are not told enough about South's memory to make a (retrospective) diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease which can also feature delusions. All we can say is that he has one extremely held fixed delusion which is so powerful that when Fitzpiers orders the felling of the tree as a 'cure' the old man promptly dies. The doctor's reaction to the failure of his cure, 'D – d if my remedy hasn't killed him!' is typically bland and uncaring. It is one of the many instances in which Fitzpiers is negatively characterised through his speech and actions. Indeed the characterisation of Fitzpiers as a selfish, careless pseudoscientist suggests a harsh indictment by Hardy of the new 'medicine' and 'science' being practised by some late nineteenth century doctors.

The episode also provides an example of Hardy's awareness of the capacity for the hazards of psychosomatic illness to be as severe as those of physical illness – a remarkably modern insight. The episode thus paints Hardy as deeply sceptical of the claims of 'modern' medicine and science advanced by some in his day, while at the same time as an acute observer of illness and ageing whose commentary and characterisation of older people and their illnesses accords in interesting ways with more contemporary accounts of the same. Apart from the significance of South's death in relation to the cottage freeholds we are also left wondering whether Hardy saw his delusion occurring because of the fact that South was old.

George Melbury, the timber merchant, is aged sixty years, which would have been considered old by the standards of the time. He is obsessed by the idea of social advancement and seeks to use his daughter Grace as the means to obtain this. He spends large amounts of money on her education and frequently justifies this to his audiences, particularly Grace's stepmother, Giles and his employees. We are told that, 'he decried boasting; yet whenever the subject was Grace, his judgement resigned the ministry of speech in spite of him' (TW 56). The result of her education, at a school outside the village, is that Grace is discontent with the simplicities of rural life and, like Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*, is the victim of an ambitious father who has over-educated her for a secluded rural existence. It is no surprise that several commentators including Ingram refer to Melbury as 'foolish'. But Melbury is also portrayed as scheming and artful. As Ingram points out marrying Grace to Fitzpiers is intended to 'satisfy his vicarious cravings for social advancement' (xxxii) and yet earlier he is prepared to marry her to Giles to atone for stealing Giles' father's betrothed from him. Either way he seeks to use his daughter and manipulate her happiness in pursuit of his own selfish ends. He even compares Grace with his property and investments saying that although her education has cost him as much, 'You'll yield a better return' (TW 88). Grace replies with some upset, 'Don't think of me like that! A mere chattel'. Melbury brushes this off as 'a dictionary word' (TW 88) but in Grace's perceptive comment we see Hardy again raising issues about the role of women and the ways in which their destinies are often controlled and ordained by men – a theme that occurs in many of his novels. Ironically,

for all her modern education, Grace is still trapped by pervasive social gender attitudes – not only those displayed by her father, but also by Fitzpiers.

Interestingly, Melbury's interest in Fitzpiers as a son-in-law who would contribute to Grace's advancement has much to do with the antiquity of the doctor's family. For all his ostensibly progressive attitudes in relation to his daughter's education, Melbury is deeply committed to traditional, hierarchical conceptions of class and social order. As Grammer Oliver tells Grace, Fitzpiers belongs to the 'oldest, ancientest family in the county' although he has 'stooped to make himself useful like any common genius' (TW 48). Melbury tells Grace that 'Mr Fitzpiers' family were lords of the manor for I don't know how many hundred years' (TW 160) while Fitzpiers frankly despises the villagers as evident in his comment:

I dare say I am inhuman, and supercilious, and contemptibly proud of my poor old ramshackle family; but I do honestly confess to you that I feel as if I belonged to a different species from the people who are working in that yard. (TW 179)

While Melbury considers that familial antiquity confers superiority as of right, Fitzpiers is contemptuous of his 'inferiors'. This is a further comment on class differences, one of the important themes of the novel. And yet, in his characterisation of Fitzpiers, Hardy clearly undermines any notion that 'ancient' class heritage confers moral status.

In the early part of the novel Melbury is presented as forthright with sure opinions despite having arthritis in arms, hip and knee joints, almost certainly osteoarthritis derived from heavy physical work. On first meeting we are told:

On many a morrow after wearying himself by these prodigious muscular efforts, he had risen from his bed fresh as usual; and confident in the recuperative power of his youth, he had repeated the strains anew. But the treacherous Time had only been hiding ill results when they could be guarded against, for greater effect when they could not. (TW 31).

Of particular interest is that the narrator and other characters (and indeed Melbury himself) frequently refer to him as an 'old man' *but only after Grace's marriage to*

*Fitzpiers has turned sour because of the doctor's infidelity.* In other words the term 'old man' is used to denote the failure of his plans for his daughter's (and his) social advancement and subsequent disappointment. Despite allusions to Melbury's 'aches and sixty years' (TW 217) there is only one reference to him as 'old' before Chapter XV, Volume II when, having discovered Fitzpiers' infidelity with Felice Charmond, he tells Giles that he should have been his business partner and son-in-law. The only earlier reference occurs when the fox hunter addresses him as an 'old buffer', making Melbury aware of his social inferiority, and feeling himself to be 'a bruised old man' (TW 85). In the latter half of the novel the adjective 'old' is used regularly to describe Melbury at times of stress and adversity. Melbury begins 'I am an old man' when he confronts Felice Charmond about her liaison with Fitzpiers after his marriage to Grace. He is clearly in an uncomfortable position. On one hand he is the aggrieved father protesting at the wrongdoing to his daughter but he is only too well aware of Mrs Charmond's social superiority (itself a result of new social conditions enabling marriage 'out of class'). He says 'but you were within your right as the superior, no doubt' as he mentions her dropping of Grace without explanation after previously suggesting Grace travel with her as a companion to Europe. Grace views her father as having 'inequalities of temper and nervous irritation' while Giles pities 'an extravagant dream of ... his overstrained mind', laments his 'childish enthusiasm' and sees that 'the ageing man must have suffered acutely to be weakened to this unreasoning desire' (TW 277). Towards the end when there is a possibility of a reconciliation between Giles and Grace, she tells Giles 'my father is impatient you know' as 'his age and infirmities increase' (TW 292). He now speaks, the narrator tells us, 'in the weary cadence of one broken down with scourgings' (TW 293). Interestingly, as he succumbs to typhoid fever, Giles is also described in terms of ageing. His gait becomes 'feebler, stiffer, more like the gait of a weary man' (TW 309) and Grace sees him as much older because 'time sometimes did his ageing work in jerks, as she knew' (TW 310). In the description of both men, then, ageing is clearly portrayed as wholly negative and closely aligned with negative circumstances, illness and disappointment. A similar phenomenon also occurs with Michael Henchard after his downfall in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Ignorant of the law relating to marriage, divorce and annulment, Melbury allows himself to be persuaded into a futile attempt to dissolve Grace's marriage to Fitzpiers. In this he is duped by Fred Beaucock, a disgraced law clerk. As in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy is harshly critical of marriage law and its impact, particularly on the lives of women. Grace's marriage to Fitzpiers cannot be dissolved, and she is legally bound to him regardless of his infidelity. The overall impression of Melbury, then, is of a misguided, impetuous man who is quite prepared to use his daughter for his social advancement and who is aged rapidly by the reverses that he encounters. While this seems a fair assessment of him, Hardy's narrator also leaves room for reader sympathy. Melbury, like so many characters in Hardy's novels is trapped in a society based on class distinction in which social advancement brings increased rewards and he genuinely desires the advancement of his daughter despite the crudity of his methods. He thus provides an important study for the purpose of the present work in terms of characterisation, social commentary and the psychology of ageing.

Felice Charmond, the youngish widow who owns the Hintock House estate, is characterised mainly for her restlessness at having to live in the isolated rural area and by her infatuation and liaison with Fitzpiers. As F.B. Pinion (*Hardy Companion* 1968) records, her main preoccupation is to preserve her womanly attractiveness as she gets older (274) and because of this she engages Barber Percomb to buy Marty South's hair to be made into a wig for her. She has a fixation about ageing and desires to prevent it (or at least mask its effects). On her first meeting with Grace the conversation includes a discussion on whether the newcomer Fitzpiers is an 'old man', and Felice is reassured when Grace says he isn't. As Grace is leaving a significant event occurs:

Just before Grace's departure the two chanced to pause before a mirror which reflected their faces in immediate juxtaposition, so as to bring into prominence their resemblances and their contrasts. Both looked attractive as glassed back by the faithful reflector; but Grace's countenance had the effect of making Mrs Charmond appear more than her full age. There are complexions which set each other off to great advantage, and there are those which antagonise, the one killing or damaging its neighbour unmercifully. (TW 62)

This incident echoes a similar one in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as Lucetta seeks assurance from Elizabeth-Jane that she will not lose her attractiveness (MC 135). Felice and Lucetta share some similar personality traits, not least superficiality, flightiness and a belief that physical attractiveness is the premier virtue a woman should possess. This is unsurprising, of course. In the nineteenth century (and perhaps still today) great value was placed on a woman's youth and beauty, not least as a means of securing a good marriage. Rather than being 'shallow', both Felice and Lucetta are fully aware of the social importance of youthful beauty. Felice had intended to engage Grace as her companion both at Hintock House and overseas but the threat of Grace making her appear older, and so less attractive, makes her abandon the arrangement. Later when Fitzpiers teases her about her false hair it causes a quarrel serious enough to end their relationship. Felice, although relatively young, is an example of someone who is fearful of ageing because of the threatened loss of physical attractiveness which she, like her society, regards as being a woman's most important characteristic. This fear causes the end of her relationship with Fitzpiers as he taunts her about buying Marty South's hair. Shortly after the relationship ends she is murdered by a former lover suggesting that her fear of ageing has literally led to her premature death. Paul Almonte emphasises that Hardy 'takes great pains to demonise Felice' and that this is done to stress her role as a 'manipulating' *femme fatale* in contrast to the 'previously sylvan wood' (79). Her fear of ageing might also be related to a potential loss of power.

A feature of *The Woodlanders* shared in common with Hardy's other novels and short stories is the contribution made by older rustic characters. Apart from characterisation, they often provide the reader with insights into motivation and behaviour. They also function as repositories of history (a history clearly flagged as passing) and offer commentary about the events occurring around them. In this regard they often reveal much about the society of the time at which Hardy wrote, and the changes that were occurring, although, as discussed in Chapter 2 we need to have an open mind as to whether Hardy is portraying the 'real' or 'ideal'. The older characters in *The Woodlanders* are no exception. We first meet them as a group of itinerant workers in

Melbury's outhouse. Robert Creedle is an old man who has worked for both Giles and his father. As he says to Melbury when Giles dies:

Well, I've knowed him from table-high; I knowed his father – used to bide about on two sticks in the sun afore he died! – and now I've seen the end of the family, which we can ill afford to lose, wi' such a scanty lot of good folk in Hintock as we have got. And now Robert Creedle will be nailed up in parish boards 'a b'lieve; and no-one will glutch down a sigh for he. (TW 326)

He ends up as assistant to Marty South who has inherited Giles' cider press which promises to provide continuity to his life's work.

Creedle wears military clothes under his smock-coat including a 'cast-off soldier's jacket that had seen hot service', 'top boots he had picked up by chance' and also 'chronicles of voyaging and shipwreck, for his pocket knife had been given to him by a weather-beaten sailor' (TW 26). The items are clearly not his as he 'carried ... these silent testimonies of war, sport and adventure, and thought nothing of their associations or their stories' (TW 26). From this we realise that he wears the attire out of habit rather than through association. On another occasion he is described as 'a swaying collection of old clothes' (TW 66). He seems more at ease when talking of the past to a boy rather than his peers. As they prepare for Giles' ill-fated party, intended to impress Grace, the boy quizzes Creedle:

'I s'pose the time when you learn't all these knowing things, Mr Creedle, was when you was in the militia?'

'Well, yes. I seed the world that year somewhat, certainly, and mastered many arts of strange dashing life.' [Creedle answers]

'I s'pose your memory can reach a long way back into history, Mr Creedle?'

'Oh, yes. Ancient days, when there was battles, and famines, and hang-fairs, and other poms, seem to me as yesterday. (TW 74)

Shortly afterwards Robert splashes Grace with hot sauce and, worse still, serves her a salad with a snail on it. He is more concerned 'that a *live* snail should be seed on any plate of victuals that's served by Robert Creedle' (TW 79) than the fact that there is a snail there at all. The aged Creedle with his rustic mannerisms is juxtaposed with the young, educated, semi-sophisticated Grace. Instead of being embarrassed, he lays the



blame on her education, 'she ought to hob-and-nob elsewhere. They shouldn't have schooled her so monstrous high ...' (TW 79). In this respect, Creedle is concurring with the other older workmen who believe that Melbury was at fault for getting the best possible education for his daughter. The men are united in their view that Melbury has wasted his money and in doing so has courted 'trouble'. They are unconvinced by his arguments to the contrary. Creedle is equally forthright in his condemnation of Felice Charmond for having bare arms at the meal table, confirming his clear adherence to the customs and practices of the past. When the tragedy has played itself out, Giles is dead and Grace is back with Fitzpiers, the men reflect on events concluding that the main cause was Grace's education 'above her station'. Creedle observes that this is a consequence of modernity:

Ah, young women do wax wanton in these days! Why couldn't she ha' bode with her father, and been faithful. (TW 364).

Echoing his concern about modern times and its influence on gender roles, the unnamed hollow-turner then observes, 'What women do know nowadays! You can't deceive 'em as you could in my time' (TW 364). Upjohn feels that women have not become cleverer and then goes on to explain his 'five climates of courtship'. Creedle also foreshadows the impending tragedy that will occur with old John South's death (MC 89). The older rustics are thus being used to comment on both past attitudes and customs, and new, changing ones, and in this respect their disdain for modernity supplements similar commentary by Hardy's narrator.

A notable feature of *The Woodlanders* is the powerful use of the imagery of ageing and death in the narrator's description of the woodland environment. This largely replaces the allusions to the antiquity of buildings, particularly churches, which is a feature of many of Hardy's novels and has been discussed in this thesis in relation to *Jude the Obscure* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. In these novels, old, often ruined or disintegrating buildings are suggestive of a lost, decayed or fading past. In *The Woodlanders*, however, it is the ancient trees in woods that are dying, or portrayed as diseased and deformed – strangled or deformed by more vigorous forms of growth. As

Ingram comments the narrator 'decodes death and decay in the woodland and translates it into human terms' (xxviii). A resonant example is the early description of the woods in which the destruction of trees by fungal growth is compared with the 'depravity' of post-Industrial city slums:

On older trees still than these huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (TW 52)

Ingram goes on to suggest:

The opening of this passage accepts a reworking of the idea of the 'undeserving poor' to give it an evolutionary tinge which had some currency in the 1880s and 1890s. It alludes to the argument that the existence of a 'lower' level of poor, which had been part of a class ideology since the 1850s, was the result of interference with the evolutionary process by medical and social improvements. (xxix)

In Chapter Two I make mention of Roger Lowman's view that Hardy ascribes to the idea of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor and this passage may provide some evidence for this. The imagery of the ancient forest is continued as Fitzpiers walks through it to visit Felice:

... where slimy streams of fresh moisture, exuding from decayed holes caused by old amputations, ran down the bark of the oaks and elms, the rind below being coated with a lichenous wash as green as emerald. They were stout-trunked trees, that never rocked their stems in the fiercest gale responding to it entirely by crooking their limbs. Wrinkled like an old crone's face, and antlered with dead branches that rose above the foliage of their summits ... (TW 197).

This imagery is juxtaposed with young, modern Fitzpiers' despondency at having to live in the woodland and Felice's protestation 'Oh! why were we given hungry hearts and wild desires if we have to live in a world like this?' (TW 197). Thus two people with modern ideas feel trapped in the ancient woodland. Ironically those that love the forest are also trapped by the disadvantages of their social class and that entrapment is clearly

figured in the imagery of (evolutionary) invasion as new forms of life corrode the ancient trees.

When Grace and her father go searching for Fitzpiers who has not returned from an assignation with Felice they halt beneath ‘a half-dead oak, hollow, and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading out like claws grasping the ground’ (TW 211). This can be regarded as a clear echo of the roots of the old yew in the graveyard in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (Canto Two). Tennyson evokes this image to represent the transitory nature of life symbolised by the yew tree’s roots grasping at the bones of the ‘underlying dead’. Hardy uses a similar image in *The Woodlanders* to symbolise the death of Grace and Fitzpiers’ marriage.

Grace and Felice comfort each other whilst lost in the woods in a night-long embrace reminiscent of a scene involving Cytherea Graye in Hardy’s first novel *Desperate Remedies*. The scene has quasi-lesbian overtones and occurs despite the two women’s rivalry for Fitzpiers. The background forest scenery is of funeral trees rocking and unceasing dirges (TW 240). In each of these incidents images of death and antiquity are used as a counterpoint to dramatic events in the plot, and underscore the thematic concern with the clash of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’.

In summary, *The Woodlanders* can rightly be regarded as being a rich representation of the issues being discussed in the present thesis. The study of older people (and young people fearing age or ageing prematurely) in relation to the issues of class and gender throw further light on Hardy’s critical attitudes towards the constraints faced by women and those of the lower classes in Victorian England. Moreover, the descriptions of Nature are replete with symbolic reference to ageing and antiquity, suggesting the incursion of the ‘new’ in ways that unsettle, disturb and even ‘kill’ the natural and traditional rhythms of rural life. Characters in the novel provide interesting comments on the medical and psychological aspects of ageing and Hardy, via his narratorial asides and characterisation, reveals a perceptive eye for the same. These issues feature in many of Hardy’s other novels and the links will be discussed further in the next chapter on *Two on*

*a Tower*, a work in which the age disparity between the major protagonists is of significance in terms of both the plot and the development of thematic concerns.

## CHAPTER 6

### **‘Wambling pins’ and ‘dim minds’ : Two on a Tower**

In her Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Two on a Tower* Sally Shuttleworth says ‘the novel describes an arc across the horizon of the late nineteenth-century social and cultural concerns: sexuality, class, history, science and religion’ (xvi). Swithin St Cleeve’s study of astronomy forms the background to the novel which Shuttleworth further describes as ‘a drama of human passion set against the background of stellar space’ (xvi). *Two on a Tower* is one of Hardy’s lesser known and regarded novels. Nevertheless I have chosen to write a chapter on it as it offers several useful lines of study for the present thesis and also provides links with some of the themes and characterisation developed in the other novels under discussion. The subjects of marriage and the Church again come under negative scrutiny as well as the issue of relationships between people of significantly differing ages. The latter topic appears to have a particular fascination for Hardy and also features in both *Jude the Obscure* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. It was explored in detail in *The Well-Beloved* or *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1897), his penultimate novel. As F.B. Pinion states, ‘in *The Well-Beloved* the central figure is an artist who pursues the perfect form in woman and sculpture. The idea that beauty is a subjective experience, the creation of an individual’s fancy, is a commonplace’ (*A Hardy Companion* 1968, 50). The result is that the main protagonist in *The Well-Beloved*, Jocelyn Pierston unsuccessfully tries to marry three generations of women from the same family over a period of forty years as well as pursuing many other women in his quest for ‘the ideal’. In respect of his fascinated search for the ideal woman, Pierston is not an unusual Hardy character. Tony Fincham notes the similarities between Pierston and Dr Edred Fitzpiers of *The Woodlanders* given their displays of the characteristics of what he terms ‘The Fitzpierston Syndrome’ which is characterised by a man’s relentless pursuit of ‘the ideal woman’, principally through a visual fascination. He notes that rural and romantic isolation are important precipitants as well as a rapid loss of interest once the ‘ideal’ becomes attainable (163-4). Further features include extinction of all love with marriage and a powerful reincarnation of passion if the beloved

dies (164). As Fincham points out, Hardy himself fulfils a number of features of the syndrome.

*Two on a Tower* also deals with these themes but with a female as the main protagonist. The novel deals with relationships between people of differing ages acted out through the sexuality of Viviette Constantine. Viviette, who claims to be in her late twenties (about which there is some doubt), is a passionate and frustrated woman and I find it quite remarkable that she doesn't warrant a mention, much less a chapter, in Rosemarie Morgan's *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1988). Viviette is trapped in a loveless marriage to an older man, Sir Blount, who is in Africa on a supposed expedition which, in reality, is a prolonged big game hunt. She meets Swithin St Cleeve, an Adonis-type youth who is using a tower on her property to pursue the study of astronomy. She makes the innocent youth sexually aware and, believing her husband to be dead, a secret marriage follows. This has to be annulled when it transpires that Viviette's first husband was in fact still alive when the marriage took place. When Sir Blount's later death is definitely confirmed Viviette releases Swithin from a fresh marriage until he is aged twenty five so that he may benefit from an inheritance bestowed by an elderly misogynist bachelor uncle. This uncle has stipulated that the inheritance depends on Swithin pursuing his studies and remaining unattached until his twenty fifth birthday. Swithin leaves to pursue astronomy in the Southern Hemisphere unaware that Viviette is pregnant with his child. Viviette, under heavy pressure from her brother Louis Glanville, saves her financial situation and her good name by marrying the Bishop of Melchester, twenty years her senior, who is unaware of her pregnancy. This cynical resolution of her problems drew heavy criticism from the novel's contemporary critics who viewed it as yet another example of Hardy scorning the Church. The *Saturday Review* termed it a 'most repellent incident', while *The Spectator* found Viviette's passion for Swithin, with its 'mingling of passion, religion and false self-sacrifice' equally 'repulsive', and *The St James Gazette* stated that the marriage to the Bishop was a 'studied and gratuitous insult aimed at the Church' (Cox 100,102, quoted in Millgate 2004). To be fair, Kegan Paul told Hardy that it was 'a marvellously comic touch' that the victim was a Bishop, although as Paul was a former Anglican clergyman himself he

may have harboured some bitterness towards the Church (*TH A Biography Revisited* 2004, 213). Viviette shares similarities with a number of Hardy's female characters, including Lucetta in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Felice Charmond of *The Woodlanders*. Sally Shuttleworth also finds a parallel between Viviette and Eustacia Vye of *The Return of the Native*: 'Both are ardent or in Hardy's term, "perfervid", women, with "Romance" or Southern blood in their veins, trapped in an uncongenial environment' (xxv). These issues will be discussed in more detail in the present chapter.

*Two on a Tower* is yet another Hardy novel in which older villagers are worthy of study because of their psychologically astute characterisation, commentary on social issues and influence on the development of theme and plot. Swithin's innocence about Viviette's intentions, for example, is removed because he overhears the speculation of the older villagers about Viviette's feelings towards him. Of particular interest are the interchanges between Swithin's grandmother and her elderly housekeeper, Hannah. Each woman regards the other as having begun to fail in her faculties, although there is little evidence, for Hardy's reader, of this being so in either case, and each expresses this view of the other's decline to other people when she is absent. These exchanges are not only amusing but also highlight the common observation that ageing is often easier to see in others than in oneself. Also of interest is Rev Torkingham. Although of uncertain age he is portrayed as elderly when Swithin returns from the Southern Hemisphere at the end of the novel. He is significant because he represents and articulates 'older values', particularly those of the Church, which are shown to be quite oppressive, particularly where women are concerned. As in many of his other novels these are not attitudes that Hardy endorses, and his critique of them is evident in his characterisation of Torkingham. Also critically characterised is Bishop Helmsdale of Melchester who is aged fifty years when he dies after three years of marriage to Viviette. This makes him at least twenty years her senior (if her claim to her age is to be believed) and their (more conventional) age difference is fraught with as many difficulties as that between her and the younger Swithin. In what follows each of these issues will be discussed in more detail and related to similar themes in other works by Hardy.

The tragedy of the love affair between Viviette and Swithin stems in great part from their age difference, specifically the fact that she is older than him. Although the gap is a mere eight to ten years (albeit there is some doubt as to her veracity when she confesses to being twenty eight), the difference in their psychological ages and maturity is much greater. She has been married and is sexually aware while he has a youthful enthusiasm solely for studying the universe. Viviette emphasises their differences with her words to him on his return from his explorations in the Southern hemisphere, with a particular emphasis on age: 'I belong to an earlier generation than you, remember', and 'now I am an old woman, and you are still a young man' (TT 260). There are multiple references to Swithin's youth throughout the novel. Even late in the book when he is in Cape Town and has undergone maturing life experiences such as marriage, separation and the news of the marriage of his lover to another man, we are told that he moves his telescope 'with a child's simple delight' (TT 249). When Viviette first sees him he is revealed as a 'beautiful youth' (TT 7). His 'schoolboy temperament which does not see' (TT 224) is coupled with his scientific temperament which makes him interpret what he hears literally. As a result he does not act independently to stop his separation from Viviette but takes her words and actions at face value. An older more experienced man, or one who was Viviette's social equal, perhaps would have had a better idea of how to direct events.

There is a transformation in Swithin after he realises the true position regarding Viviette's emotions for him. Despite this he retains a youthful naivete. Before his realisation of the older woman's intentions he is entirely besotted by the Universe but this also has a melancholic aspect to it. He would like to be Astronomer Royal but asserts 'perhaps I shall not live' (TT 10). Viviette is 'greatly struck with the odd mixture in him of scientific earnestness and melancholy mistrust of all things human' (TT 10). He is also prepared to die when he learns that someone else has pre-empted the discovery that was to establish his fame. He lays down on the heath in the rain hoping for his life to end. He develops pneumonia, complicated by delirium, and is unresponsive to Viviette's loving attention and kisses (admittedly bestowed before he was aware of her true feelings). The doctor's remedies are equally futile and Swithin's recovery is effected



only when the old servant Hannah tells him about the arrival of a new comet (TT 66). At this news he immediately becomes aroused:

The strenuous wish to live and behold the new phenomenon, supplanting the utter weariness of existence that he had heretofore experienced, lent him a new vitality. The crisis passed; there was a turn for the better; and after that he rapidly mended. The comet had in all probability saved his life. (TT 67).

As this episode occurs before ‘the scales fell from Swithin’s eyes’ about Viviette, one cannot agree with Tony Fincham’s assertion that ‘Lady Constantine had no place in his inner being’ and that ‘to the young man she is a useful outlet for bodily functions – no more’ (138).

Swithin’s realisation of Viviette’s feelings towards him is dramatic and results in a reordering of his priorities and a new capacity to dissemble and perform:

St Cleeve’s sudden sense of new relations with that sweet patroness had taken away in one half-hour his natural ingenuousness. Henceforth he could act a part. (TT 83)

His ‘awakening’ suggests the narrator, is due to tardiness as the ‘result of his inexperience, combined with devotion to his hobby. But like a spring bud hard in bursting, the delay was compensated by afterspeed’ (TT 84). In particular:

Lady Constantine, in being eight or nine years his senior, was an object even better calculated to nourish a youth’s first passion than a girl of his own age, superiority of experience and ripeness of emotion exercising a peculiar fascination over young men in their first ventures of this kind. (TT 85).

Swithin’s awakening has a slightly sobering effect on Viviette as it makes her more conscious of their age difference. As soon as she realises that ‘St Cleeve had become a man’ (TT 86), she becomes less sure of herself. Addressing him tearfully as ‘my dear young friend’ she seeks reassurance from him that ‘you will never despise me, when you get older, for this episode in our lives’ (TT 88). This is when she reveals her age to him but in terms that suggest she may not be being truthful. Swithin takes umbrage when she describes their relationship as ‘an interlude’. At this stage he seems more firmly

committed than she and it is also the first of several occasions in which she seeks assurance that he will not lose interest in her as she ages echoing the fears of Lucetta Farfrae and Felice Charmond discussed in chapters 4 and 5. This is repeated when she leaves for Pumpminster to fulfil the requirements for their marriage licence, a task which in her opinion should have been the man's (TT 103). Her words, alluding to a time, 'when perhaps you may not love me so warmly as you do now' (TT 104) grimly foreshadow the novel's ending when he returns from an extended absence to find she has aged to such an extent that he cannot immediately recognise her (TT 259). Viviette's insecurity about her ageing mirrors that expressed by Lucetta to Elizabeth-Jane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Felice Charmond in *The Woodlanders* discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. In all three novels the suggestion is that the women believe their physical appearance is their most important attribute and when it is lost they will be seriously devalued. Such an attitude seems particularly surprising in Viviette's case considering her social superiority over Swithin and yet clearly accords with social responses to female ageing given the persistence of this concern across Hardy's novels. Viviette's brother Louis plays upon her fear of ageing as he pressures her to marry the Bishop. He says:

You are not as young as you were. You are getting on to be a middle-aged woman, and your black hair is precisely of the sort which time quickly turns grey. You must make up your mind to grizzled bachelors or widowers. Young marriageable men won't look at you; or if they do just now, in a year or two they'll despise you as an antiquated party. (TT 169).

This is important social comment which strongly plays on the stereotypical idea, internalised by Viviette as with Lucetta and Felice, that a woman's primary value is her youth and physical attractiveness which equates with her marriageability. Louis also plays the age card when trying to persuade Swithin to take up his uncle's bequest and travel overseas. His description of himself as 'One nearly old enough to be your father' (221) is a gross exaggeration as their age difference is about twelve years, but Louis' message is that his seniority allows him to direct the younger man. A case can be made for Swithin being equally as ardent as Viviette once his feelings have been awakened. However his constancy begins to be tested as soon as difficulties arise. Ultimately he is

sad to have to leave for the Southern Hemisphere, but not heartbroken. As Sally Shuttleworth says, 'although Swithin's emotional entanglement might threaten initially his career as astronomer, the text makes clear that, of the two, Viviette is certainly the more evolved human being' (xxi).

Swithin's Church confirmation is a crucial event in the plot. Viviette first raises the issue with him describing his unconfirmed state as 'shocking neglect' (TT 130) but it must be emphasised that he makes the decision to go through with the ceremony abruptly in response to the older villagers' observations on the subject. Viviette pushes him along with comments such as, 'do be a good *boy*, and observe the Church's ordinances' (TT 130: my emphasis). She also suggests that, 'perhaps it would be advisable for you to give up this astronomy till the confirmation is over, in order to devote your attention exclusively to that more serious matter' (TT 143). He remains reluctant as his comment, 'I still wish it was not advisable', attests. The preparation for his confirmation and the service itself introduces the Bishop of Melchester, the pompous Helmsdale, to the plot. He is immediately besotted with Viviette and he also castigates the recently confirmed Swithin whom he mistakenly believes is adulterous, little suspecting the identity of his lover. The confirmation sequence is thus important in providing further commentary on the characters and their relative ages, as well as offering critique of Church doctrines and clerics.

The tragic climax of the novel occurs when Swithin encounters the older Viviette on the Tower after his years overseas. The narrator relates that 'He was shocked at her worn and faded aspect' (TT 259) and he sees her as 'another woman', the description of her greying hair recalls her brother's earlier comments:

Her cheeks had lost for ever that firm contour which had been drawn by the vigorous hand of youth, and the masses of hair that were once darkness visible had become touched here and there by a faint grey haze, like the Via Lactea in the night sky. (TT 259).

He recoils from her as she had earlier predicted he would. As he 'was hopelessly her junior' he is unable to realise 'the chastened pensiveness of her once handsome features

revealed more promising material than ever her youth had done' (259). Having revealed his shock at her aged appearance he once again reveals his lack of emotional acuity and takes her request to leave at face value:

He was a scientist, and took words literally. There is something in the inexorably simple logic of such men which partakes of the cruelty of the natural laws that are their study. (TT 260).

When he changes his mind and returns to her she drops dead from shock and the tragedy is played out. As she dies in his arms Swithin can see Tabitha Lark from his vantage point on the tower. In his view she is a 'bright spot of colour and animation' (TT 262), clearly implied to be a more fitting mate in evolutionary terms. The contrast between the age of Viviette and the youth of Tabitha and the fact that the vital Tabitha is visible at the time presents a cruel irony. The episode recalls the conclusion of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with its clear implication the despite the intensity of the tragedy the male protagonist will not lose much time in seeking an alternate mate.

The pressure on an unmarried pregnant woman of the time to 'save her good name' would have been immense, particularly considering Viviette's social position. Her initial impulse is to intercept Swithin before he sails but when this fails, as discussed, she acquiesces to her brother's plan of a hasty marriage to the older unsuspecting and besotted Bishop. Although the age difference between Viviette and the Bishop is twice that between her and Swithin, the notion of marriage between a woman and an older man somehow seems more acceptable than the reverse, and to a lesser extent the same is still true today. Relationships between women and younger men have only become common since the mid to late-twentieth century and can be associated with changed ideas about sexuality and women's roles in society. The Bishop's bombastic nature means that the reader develops little sympathy for him as a dupe. On first appearance he is described as:

A bachelor, [who] rejoiced in the hard-headed period of life that fills the tract of years between the time of waning impulse and the time of incipient dotage, when a woman can reach the male heart neither by awakening a young man's passion nor an old man's infatuation. He must be made to admire, or he can be made to do nothing. (TT 148).

It is easy for Louis to deceive him because of the flaws in his character. We read that 'the Bishop had personal weaknesses that were fatal to sympathy for more than a moment' (TT 238) and that 'he disclosed a mind whose sensitive fear of danger to its own dignity hindered it from criticism elsewhere' (TT 238). He also describes himself as 'Heaven's gift, not to be despised' (TT 243) although totally unaware of the irony of this comment. Viviette is prepared to accept the older man as a last resort solely to avoid the social opprobrium of a pregnancy in a single woman. Swithin's reaction to Viviette's suggestion that the Bishop might have romantic ideas about her is noteworthy because of the negative descriptions of ageing he employs. Swithin initially considers the Bishop 'an opinionated old fogey' (TT 174), but when he hears of the Bishop's offer of marriage he calls him 'an impertinent old man' (TT 192). Swithin dismisses the Bishop as 'old' because of his seniority and 'by definition' old means being incapable of sexual feeling. In doing this he is ascribing to one of the great myths about ageing namely that 'older people are past sex' (Kleinplatz 2008).

The interplay between Swithin's grandmother, Grammer Martin, and her housekeeper Hannah makes for an interesting study in self perception in old age and again reveals Hardy's psychological acuity. Grammer is described as 'a woman of eighty, in a large mob cap, under which she wore a little cap, to keep the other clean' and, the narrator tells us, she 'retained faculties but little blunted' (TT 14). She can quietly 're-enact in her brain certain of the long chain of episodes, pathetic, tragical and humorous, which had constituted the parish history for the last sixty years' (TT 14). Hannah, comments the narrator, 'revealed herself to be nimbler and several years younger than granny, though of this the latter seemed to be oblivious' (TT 14). Despite her seniority Grammer comments negatively on Hannah's age saying she is not to be trusted with such things as cooking as she is 'becoming so childish' (TT 14). On the other hand when a storm collapses the cottage roof, Hannah says to Swithin of Grammer:

It's a mercy that your poor grammer were not killed, sitting on the hearth poor old soul, and soon to walk wi' God, - for 'a 's getting wambling on her pins, Mr Swithin as aged folks do. (TT 101)

The collapse of the cottage roof assumes extra significance as Swithin stays to help the two old women rather than fulfil the conditions for a marriage licence, a task he delegates to the reluctant Viviette. Each woman considers that the other is old and thus showing physical or cognitive losses, yet neither considers the possibility in herself. A further exchange occurs when Lady Constantine visits the cottage after Swithin's departure and finds the two women tidying his room. Grammer is tearful as she is 'over four score years' and her 'junketting days are over' and feels she will never see Swithin again. At this comment all three women begin to cry and Hannah tries to restrain Grammer, at the same time whispering to Viviette:

Her years be so great, your ladyship, that perhaps ye'll excuse her for busting out afore ye? We know when the mind is dim, my lady, there's not the manners there should be; but decayed people can't help it, poor old soul! (TT 231)

Shortly afterwards Hannah leaves the room and Grammer confidentially remarks to Viviette about Hannah:

Such a charge as she is, my lady, on account of her great age! You'll pardon her biding here as if she were one of the family. I put up with such things because of her long service, and we know that years lead to childishness. (TT 232)

In addition to each woman regarding their companion as old while failing to recognise ageing in themselves, each uses language that links ageing with decrepitude. Their conversation is replete with expressions such as 'wambling pins', 'decayed', 'poor old soul' and 'dim minds'. A younger person using such expressions could be accused of 'ageism'. The point of interest is not only the failure of these elderly women to recognise ageing in themselves but their own negative perceptions of older people and of what it is to be old when observed in others.

The inability to recognise ageing in oneself while observing it in others is a phenomenon that has often been described by sociologists and psychologists. In *The Ageless Self* (1986), anthropologist Sharon Kaufman describes how the majority of her research informants still felt 'young inside' and were shocked when confronted by their own

ageing in evidence such as photographs or the comments of others. On the other hand they regarded others as old and as having limitations, including people who were their chronological juniors. Kaufman's research was based on detailed interviews with sixty people aged between 70 and 97 years. The majority emphasised the continuity of the sense of an ageless self amid changes across the life span. The older people did not view old age as a distinct period of life and they did not conceive of themselves in the context of ageing. Rather they dealt with specific problems, changes and disabilities as they arose, just as they had throughout their lives, and they interpreted these changes and problems in the light of themes they had established earlier in life. Although Kaufman's research was carried out amongst Californians in the early 1980s I contend that Grammer Martin and Hannah represent a similar outlook towards their ageing. Each reacts to situations as they had learned to do throughout their lives and neither can concede age changes in themselves. In their portrayal Hardy again reveals his fine capacity as a social commentator and observer of human psychology.

Ultimately Grammer Martin outlives the younger Hannah. When Swithin returns from his extended journey he learns that Hannah, 'that ancient servant' had been 'gathered to her fathers about six months before' (TT 255). Grammer is 'perceptibly smaller in form' and 'could see less distinctly' (TT 255) but during his sojourn it was his grandmother's 'rambling epistles' written in her 'old-fashioned penmanship' and 'seventeenth-century handwriting' that had kept him informed of Viviette's activities. Grammer 'in spite of her great age, still retained a steady hold on life' (TT 251).

A crucial turning point in the novel occurs when Swithin realises that Viviette's romantic interest in him far transcends her interest in his astronomical studies which he had hitherto thought was the sole attraction. Significantly this realisation occurs because he overhears the conversation of the elderly village labourers. We read that 'the scales fell from Swithin St Cleeve's eyes as he heard the words of his neighbours' and 'how suddenly the truth dawned upon him; how it bewildered him...' (TT 80). It is the words of Haymoss (Amos) Fry, Sammy Blore and Hezzy Biles that enlighten him even though this occurs after Viviette's kiss and tenderness when he was delirious and apparently

dying from pneumonia. Here, as in other Hardy novels, the ostensibly idle gossip and exchange between elderly characters has significant import for the development of the plot.

The older village labourers feature in several other significant events. We first meet them at the choir practice held at Swithin's grandmother's house. Their 'elderly' status is stressed: Fry complains of his 'jints' (joints), Biles observes that 'a man's a fool until he's forty' and Blore has 'the additional weight of experience' (TT 18-19). Their diction, musicality and attitudes annoy the Rev Torkingham. They disrupt the first tune explaining that they had not been given time to 'hawk', or clear their throats, and object to being made to sing tonic sol-fa. Their interchange is not only a clash of old versus modern but is also an example of class division. It is reminiscent of the disagreement between Parson Maybold and the quire, the traditional musicians, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Maybold resolved that dispute by replacing the older musicians with a modern harmonium. Even more significantly the rustics provide the stimulus for Swithin's abrupt decision to seek confirmation. This occurs after they encounter Swithin, disguised in the late Sir Blount's overcoat, walking home late at night (TT 135). Their immediate reaction is that they have seen Blount's ghost, particularly as Swithin remains silent when questioned. Hurrying to Swithin's grandmother's house they relate their story, their countenances instead of wearing the 'usual knotty irregularities [having] a smoothed-out expression of blank concern' (TT 136). The discussion about a ghost is short lived as the memory of Sir Blount quickly brings them to the subject of the forthcoming confirmation, the first in the village for twenty years. They recall that in the previous instance Haymoss was refused confirmation because when the parson examined him on the articles of his belief he had answered, at the instigation of Sir Blount, 'Women and Wine'. They comment that confirmation was different in past times because the Bishops didn't 'lay it on so strong as they do now', as they run their 'fingers over our row of crowns as off-hand as a bank gentleman telling money' (TT 137) compared with the formal laying on of hands. It is at this point that Swithin announces that he will be confirmed this time. Hardy's juxtaposition of talk of confirmation to the Church occurring so soon after the rustics have apparently seen a ghost is not accidental. It



seems to be an example of what Joe Fisher discusses in *The Hidden Hardy* (1992). Fisher's work explores the subversive ideas concerning class and gender (and in this case superstition and religion) which he finds partly hidden yet firmly embedded within Hardy's novels.

Robert Schweik, in his essay 'The influence of religion, science and philosophy on Hardy's writings', considers that Rev Torkingham in *Two on a Tower* is portrayed with greater sympathy than other clerics such as Bishop Helmsdale and Rev James Clare in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (57). Nevertheless Torkingham displays some disagreeable personality traits. He is quite impatient with the shortcomings of the older people in the choir and he is very rigid in the advice he gives to Viviette. He is quite clear that she should be 'bound by her promise' (TT 23) to Sir Blount despite the fact that he has been cruel to her and that she is only asking whether it is acceptable to attend social functions in his absence. Dissatisfied, she no longer seeks his advice preferring that of Swithin. We don't know Torkingham's age but he is portrayed as elderly at the end of the novel when Swithin returns. He walks slowly and the hair below the brim of his hat is white (TT 253). Despite the rigidity of his advice to Viviette and his impatience with the older choristers he reveals a perceptive analysis of the Bishop's character:

He was not a Ken or a Heber. To speak candidly, he had his faults of which arrogance was not the least. But who is perfect? (TT 253)

Torkingham expresses surprise at the death of the bishop noting that, 'pale death knocks at the cottages of the poor and the palaces of kings with an impartial foot' (TT 253). Torkingham is an elderly establishment figure with old fashioned views about class and gender issues but Schweik is probably correct in his analysis that he has a softer side as well.

One particularly significant episode linking distant past with the present occurs on the morning of Swithin and Viviette's wedding day. Swithin prepares himself for the wedding in the cabin at the base of the tower on Rings-Hill Speer, site of an ancient Roman camp. The narrator suggests that, 'embedded under his feet were possibly the

rude trinkets that had been worn at bridal ceremonies of the early inhabitants' (TT 110). Then follow bleak comments about marriage that mirror those in other novels by Hardy:

Little signified those ceremonies today, or the happiness or otherwise of the contracting parties. That his own rite, nevertheless, signified much was the inconsequent reasoning of Swithin, as it is of many another bridegroom besides; and he, like the rest, went on in his preparations in that mood which sees in his stale repetition the wondrous possibilities of an untried move. (TT 111)

The mood of this narratorial comment is the same as the negative commentary on marriage before the wedding of Jude Fawley and Arabella Donn in *Jude the Obscure*. No sooner has Swithin completed his preparations than he receives the letter from his uncle outlining the provisions of his will which forbid Swithin's allowance unless he remains single until the age of twenty five. His long accompanying letter is scathing about the distraction a woman would make to Swithin's scientific purpose and about Viviette in particular. He expresses general derogatory remarks about women, advising his nephew to 'avoid her and every one of her sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing' and 'eschew all of that sort for many a year yet' (TT 114). He then proceeds to denigrate Viviette principally on account of her being 'much older' and 'impoverished'. He goes on:

To care to be the first fancy of a young fellow like you shows no great common sense in her. If she were worth her salt, she would have too much pride to be intimate with a youth in your unassured position, to say no worse. She is old enough to know that a liaison with you may and most certainly would be your ruin... (TT 114).

After a few further comments impugning Viviette's lack of 'honourable feelings' he returns to comments on womanhood in general noting that 'women's brains are not formed for assisting at any profound science: they lack the power to see things except in the concrete' and that 'a woman waking your passions just at a moment when you are endeavouring to shine intellectually, is like stirring up mud at the bottom of a clear brook' (TT 115). Hardy clearly doesn't endorse such sentiments as suggested by the narrator's description of him as 'a bachelor and hardened misogynist of seventy-two' (TT 115). He is also a doctor of medicine which makes him a man of middle class. It is likely that his views were not atypical of such a person and in his portrayal of the man,

Hardy appears to be critiquing such views and values. Swithin, to his credit, is prepared to ignore the letter and the provisions of the will but the same letter has devastating consequences when read by Viviette. The contents of the letter shock her into letting Swithin go. In true Hardy tradition the reflections on the antiquity and validity of marriage are accompanied by the seeds that will undermine the present one. It is not coincidental perhaps, that the messenger is an elderly establishment figure, Jocelyn St Cleeve.

Although *Two on a Tower* is one of Hardy's less well known works it is a rich source of material about ageing and older people. It shares qualities with and explores themes that feature in Hardy's other fiction such as the roles of older characters and village rustics in contributing to plot and providing social commentary. A particularly important issue, as discussed, is the age difference between the two main protagonists. Given the common acceptance of sexual relations between older men and younger women in the nineteenth century, as it still is today, a theme also explored by Hardy in *The Well-Beloved*, it is hard to understand why a reversal of gender roles should be remarkable, then or now. In this respect, Hardy's foregrounding of seemingly arbitrary social opprobrium is still relevant today. Much is made of the inexperience and youth of Swithin compared to the worldly-wise older woman with the implication that she has taken advantage of him and diverted him from his true course of study. Clearly as I have suggested, however, Hardy does not subscribe to this dual standard, rather he is questioning why it exists.

## CHAPTER 7

### Discussion

In this chapter I will draw together the discussions that have emerged from the four novels considered in detail in Chapters 3 to 6, extending my consideration to some other works by Hardy that contain similar themes, issues and characterisation. My thesis considers not only older people but also the issues associated with ageing in its broadest sense including age differences in relationships and also antiquity as represented in buildings and institutions in the novels. My starting hypothesis was that the issues of older people and ageing play a hitherto underestimated role in the fiction of Thomas Hardy.

My consideration of Hardy's representation of older people has raised a number of interesting issues. Among these are his astute observations of character, evident in his portrayal of older people. This not only contributes to our understanding of the psychology of ageing but also can be seen to support ideas and theories about the elderly that have been advanced in gerontological accounts written many decades after the time in which Hardy wrote. Also of importance is his use of the words and actions of older people to subtly, and at times unsubtly, challenge the values and assumptions of Victorian society, paradoxically both in the name of progressive ideals and in order to lament the passing securities of traditional ways of living and behaving. At the same time we need to be aware of the debate as to whether Hardy is portraying older characters, particularly rustics, in a 'real' or 'idealised' way as discussed in Chapter 2. With this qualification in mind, I will discuss these issues in more detail.

Throughout, I have contended that Hardy shows a strong interest in and awareness of the psychology of ageing in his portrayal of older characters. In *The Woodlanders* Grammer Oliver observes:

Ay, one can joke when one is well, even in old age; but in sickness one's gaiety falters; and that which seemed small looks large; and the grim far-off seems near.  
(123)

In saying this she is articulating a concept commonly observed in contemporary accounts of the psychology of ageing, namely that it is ill-health and disability and, for some, the prospect of death, rather than age itself, that creates most anxiety in older people. Christopher Gilleard and Paul Higgs discuss this in *Cultures of Ageing: Self, Citizen and the Body* (2000). Here they consider issues related to the cultures of ageing in the postmodern world noting in particular the rise what some writers call the 'third age', a time of life occupied by fit, usually just retired, older people. Such people are physically, intellectually and sexually active and seek to utilise their freedom from work and family responsibilities to travel and seek new opportunities. This is in contrast to the 'fourth age' which is characterised by ill-health, disability and dependence on others. But as Gilleard and Higgs point out these 'third age' activities might be viewed as a denial of the ageing process and are increasingly accompanied by 'age defying' activities such as cosmetic surgery. They suggest that 'third-agers, while acknowledging old age, are likely to prefer to live at a considerable physical and psychological distance from it' (45). They go on to argue that 'while the third age is emerging as an increasingly important area where power, status and citizenship can be played out, those in the fourth age or deep old age seem excluded from such a role' (162). While Gilleard and Higgs are clearly discussing facets of ageing in our contemporary era, their account of the differences characterising the 'third' and 'fourth' ages can be usefully applied to the characters portrayed in Hardy's fiction. Grammer Oliver's statement appears congruent with these arguments as, indeed, it is only when her health fails that she confronts the possibility of death and realises the implications of the bequest of her body to Fitzpiers, with significant implications for the plot. Grammer Oliver can be considered (and probably considers herself to be) a 'third-ager' while she is fit and well but the advent of sickness threatens to make her a 'fourth-ager'. In this respect, Hardy's representations of her changing attitudes accord with more recent psychological accounts of ageing.

The concept of ageing 'well' or 'successfully' has attracted a great deal of discussion in gerontological literature, so much, in fact, that Edward Folts and colleagues have published an entire book entitled *Ageing Well: A Selective Annotated Bibliography*. They conclude that:

Ageing well is not a new concept. Over the years writers have used different terms to describe what we mean by ageing well. These terms have included: successful ageing, productive ageing and a variety of discipline specific language ... Ageing well can be the result of at least two conditions; individuals who maintain a general state of wellness as they age and equally important those individuals who are ageing well in a sociological or psychological sense, even though they may be suffering from physical or mental impairments, or a variety of social losses (8).

As well as the maintenance of good physical health it appears, in this and other accounts, that one's own personal attitude is a powerful determinant of ageing successfully or otherwise. In *The Ageless Self*, discussed in Chapter 6, Sharon Kaufman describes her study participants thus:

All research participants made it clear to me that ageing per se is not a substantive issue in their own lives. They do not, now that they are over 70, conceive of themselves in a context of *ageing* and act accordingly. Rather, they deal with specific problems, changes, and disabilities as they arise, just as they have been doing throughout their lives, and they interpret these changes and problems in the light of established themes. It appears that the concept of ageing is too abstract, too impersonal to be an integral part of identity (161).

It has to be noted that Kaufman recruited subjects that were relatively physically fit and articulate and who would definitely be considered 'third agers' for her study.

Given Hardy's often pessimistic view of life it is somewhat surprising that in the novels considered, and in his fiction more generally, older characters are often portrayed as ageing successfully, that is, they still appear to be relatively physically active and mentally alert. Arguably this is in contravention of the conditions and circumstances of elderly people in later nineteenth century England. In this respect, Hardy might be seen to extend the 'idyllic' or pastoral portrayal of Wessex, discussed in my second chapter, not only to rural characters, but to elderly ones as well. Grammer Martin and her domestic Hannah in *Two on a Tower* are a case in point. Both are portrayed as having

aged successfully, even though the former is an octogenarian, and living well into one's eighties, particularly in rural conditions, would have been a considerable achievement at that time. The main point of interest in these two is their assessment of the other; each regards the other as 'aged' and showing frailties that they don't see in themselves. Widow Edlin in *Jude the Obscure* is another example of a character who has maintained her physical and mental health as she has aged. She is portrayed as able to adapt to new ideas about an institution as socially embedded as marriage and to challenge her social superior Phillotson when she realises the agony that it is causing in Sue Bridehead. Widow Edlin is physically capable and intellectually adaptable and, as argued, a key agent of social critique in the novel.

Despite the number of successfully aged characters in Hardy's work, he also portrays a number of older people who can be considered to have aged 'unsuccessfully' particularly with regard to poor adaptation and depression. Again Hardy's acuity in such representations is noteworthy, not least for the clinical symptoms that these characters sometimes manifest. Jude Fawley's Aunt Drusilla is an embittered old woman who is completely antagonistic to any form of romantic or sexual liaison by family members and, as discussed in Chapter 3, fulfils many of the criteria for a diagnosis of clinical depression. Also in the category of 'unsuccessful agers' is Old John South in *The Woodlanders*. He makes for an interesting study because of his fixed delusion about the tree which he believes will cause his death if it falls. Such a strong delusion raises the possibility that he might have Alzheimer's disease or a similar dementing illness although there is little corroboratory evidence. What we do know is that the delusion is so strong as to be self-fulfilling. John South is also interesting because he is the only old person in the novels considered in detail in this thesis to be significantly physically limited, although we are not told the reasons for the loss of physical strength in the old shepherd of the 'hiring-fair' scene in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. John South spends most of the time confined to bed or, at best, a chair but the nature of his physical incapacity is unstated. If he has no physical illness it speaks volumes for the power of psychosomatic conditions such as delusions – and of Hardy's astute observation of the effects of these. Early gerontological study saw the concepts of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' ageing

mainly in biomedical terms. This is true to some extent. If an old person has a major stroke or extensive arthritis then clearly their ability to participate in activities and social engagement may be restricted and they can be considered to have aged ‘unsuccessfully’. What is also clear, as noted in more recent gerontological accounts, is that sociological and psychological factors can have equally, and sometimes more powerful, influences on a person’s adaptation to ageing. Indeed, at least one study has found that positive self-perceptions of ageing can increase longevity (Levy, Becca et al 2002). Hardy’s portrayal of old John South and Aunt Drusilla compared with Widow Edlin, Hannah and the Grammers Oliver and Martin make for interesting study on the subject of positive ageing.

In preceding chapters I have also discussed the fear that several characters share about growing old. Felice Charmond, Lucetta Farfrae and Viviette Constantine for example, all worry deeply about how long their physical looks will last. There is more to this than mere vanity. Traditionally women have more to lose by the effects of physical ageing than men; this would have been more pronounced in Hardy’s time where a successful marriage (premised on one’s attractiveness) was one of the few ways in which women could secure their futures. As discussed in Chapter 4, Christopher Gilleard and Paul Higgs consider the differences for men and women with respect to getting old. They observe:

As many writers have been at pains to point out, older men can still command sexual goods; can still be presented as ‘attractive’ partners and can still play the role of lover, both in the hyperreality of films as well as in ‘real-life’ in a way that is still culturally acceptable to most, if not all, sections of the community. Masculinity, in short, is less compromised by social ageing. As a result, more women than men choose to disguise their age ...’ (49).

Gilleard and Higgs discuss this in regard to the huge proliferation of the cosmetic and ‘anti-ageing’ industries in recent decades, which consume vast amounts of money in the quest of delaying or preventing ageing. The advertising that promotes these industries further stereotypes old age in negative terms. While such cosmetic interventions were not available in Hardy’s time, Felice Charmond’s purchase of Marty South’s hair to



supplement her own thinning locks is clearly relevant and has significant implications for the novel's plot.

However it is not only Hardy's female characters who fear ageing. Michael Henchard worries about becoming dependent on others and views ageing as representing his final loss of power. Indeed the novel stresses his relative age in comparison to the younger Farfrae who does, indeed, usurp the former's power and position. Henchard also represents old entrenched views compared to those advanced by the younger, progressive Farfrae.

In addition to the fear of ageing it is also noteworthy that a number of Hardy's characters appear to experience accelerated ageing in response to tragedy or reversal. I discuss this in relation to George Melbury in Chapter 5. He is portrayed as decisive and vigorous when he is running his business and managing his affairs at the start of the novel, but as his plans for his daughter unravel he is portrayed as stooped and ancient with overt references to him as 'old' on the part of the narrator. In Chapter 4 I discuss the representation of Michael Henchard undergoing a similar ageing metamorphosis as his tragedy unfolds (see MC 243) and Jude Fawley also rapidly ages in response to tragedy and thwarted ambition (see JO 288). In each case the ageing induced by setbacks and thwarted ambition renders them vulnerable to physical illness.

On the subject of psychological responses to ageing Helen Small discusses the 'narrative unity of lives' (89-118). She asserts that 'many modern writers hold that our lives make sense to us only in so far as they are seen to possess the temporal logic of a narrative' (89). She observes that 'most of us have a deeply entrenched need to understand our lives, and the lives of others, not just instantiated in the moment but as accruing their meaning with the passage of years' (93). This often results in life review or reflection in late life with a person asking themselves, 'Has it all been worthwhile?' A consequence of this reflection is that an old person may seek to repair fractured relationships or redress perceived prior wrongdoing, to 'put things right' before they die as it were. This forms the basis for Hardy's short story 'For Conscience' Sake' in the short story volume *Life's*

*Little Ironies*. In the story Millborne, a retired banker, regrets as he ages his jilting of the fiancée who had borne him a daughter. In reviewing his life he is saddened by his loneliness and resolves to repair his wrongdoing stating, 'I want to remove that sense of dishonour before I die' (FCS 308). Hardy draws on the psychological concept of life reflection and wanting to redress wrongs in developing the story. In true Hardy tradition it all goes wrong as Millborne's marrying his former fiancée compromises his daughter's matrimonial prospects, and the situation can only be resolved by Millborne deserting again and renewing his lonely existence. Whereas formerly he was oppressed by a bad conscience he then becomes deeply depressed and seeks recourse in alcohol. The story provides another good example of Hardy's understanding of the psychology of ageing.

It is a central contention of this thesis that Hardy's keen observation of character, often noted in critical discussions of his work, extends also to a portion of the population that is often overlooked in literary analysis: older people. But observation of his portrayals of older characters has greater significance I have argued throughout this thesis. Older characters also contribute vital observations and critical commentary on social issues explored in the fiction

In Chapter 2 I referred to Joe Fisher's contention in *The Hidden Hardy* that there are 'partly concealed patterns in the fabric of Hardy's prose fiction' (1) and that these are often 'subversive' (19). He makes this claim as part of the articulation of his argument against the 'realism' of Hardy's portrayal of rural life, suggesting that beneath the 'pastoral' veneer of the Wessex novels (in particular) there are elements of contradiction and critique that unsettle a surface reading of the rural idyll. Fisher argues his case with particular reference to recent Marxist and Feminist critical interpretations of Hardy and I would argue that a consideration of the representation of elderly characters would further extend such claims: older people are also used as a vehicle for the 'subversive' critical strategies that Fisher detects in the novels. Some of the examples I have identified are neither hidden nor subtle. Mrs Goodenough's unmasking of Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is as overt and as dramatic as it is possible to get. She ensures that her denouncement causes maximum damage. The significance of her denunciation

arises from her social inferiority to her victim due to her class, gender *and age*, as manifested by her filthy disreputable and markedly aged appearance, which is repeatedly stressed by the narrator. She and her (often elderly) colleagues of Mixen Lane are equally unsubtle in staging their ‘skimmington ride’ that destroys Lucetta Farfrae. Each is an example of a triumph of class revenge in which older protagonists play an active and significant part. There are examples of a more subtle undermining of the established order by older people, but before discussing these I would like to make reference to Hardy’s less well known short story “Old Mrs Chundle” which I think emphasises Fisher’s point – and my own - well.

“Old Mrs Chundle” is somewhat unusual insofar as it is a story specifically about an older person as the title suggests. It was probably intended for inclusion in *A Group of Noble Dames* (1890) but was omitted (Pinion *Hardy Companion* 83). It was finally published in the *Ladies Home Journal* (Philadelphia 1929), after Hardy’s death, by permission of Florence Hardy. The story involves the aged Mrs Chundle and her interactions with the new village curate. Mrs Chundle is an object of fun in the village because of her deafness which results in her speaking her thoughts out loud. Due to her deafness she has not gone to Church for thirteen years making her ‘a wicked old woman’ (OMC 9) in the eyes of the rector of the parish. The curate tries to overcome her difficulties by constructing a pipe from the front row of the nave of the Church to the pulpit so that she can hear the sermon. The plan is undermined because of the foul smells of onions and pickled cabbage coming up the tube to meet the curate. To counter this he blocks the tube which results in a disturbance as she tries to blow it clear repeatedly exclaiming ‘The pipe’s chokt!’ (OMC 17-18). A final huge breath on her part clears the tube, much to the amusement of the choir boys, but the discomfiture of the rest of the Church. The tube idea is abandoned, Mrs Chundle goes to Church no more and shortly afterward dies leaving her meagre estate to the curate who, on hearing the news, ‘went out, like Peter at cock-crow, and wept’ (OMC 27). On the surface this reads like a simple story at the expense of a poor old deaf woman who becomes a figure of much fun for the village or about a young, inexperienced, slightly arrogant but well-meaning young curate. But we can read beneath this to intuit ‘hidden’ subversive social challenge as Fisher

suggests. The actions of Mrs Chundle in providing the curate a meal for which she will accept only twopence instead of the shilling offered, her not eating with him as 'one of her betters', and her leaving him her humble possessions are the result of a misguided view that he was showing her kindness. For Hardy's reader, ironically aware of her misinterpretation, this only serves to underline the defects in the curate, a man whose actions are self-serving rather than charitable (as the reference to Peter suggests). It is yet another example of Hardy making a pointed criticism of the character of the clergy; and he uses the words and actions of an old woman to make the point. In *Jude the Obscure*, Widow Edlin is not as poor and humble as Old Mrs Chundle but she is Phillotson's social inferior. Despite this she is not afraid to challenge him about his remarriage to Sue Bridehead. It is her tolerance and adaptability to change, evident in her actions and words, in contrast to his inflexibility and adherence to societal 'norms' that serves to undermine him. Interestingly, in this regard, she is portrayed as more youthful, in attitude at least, to the younger man, although, as discussed, his relative youth is undercut by the narrator's descriptions of him as elderly.

Hardy's older people often hide their wisdom under a cloak of rustic simplicity. Indeed, their rural 'backwardness' can be read as a foil that masks their often pointed and pertinent social critique. Sir William de Stancy in *A Laodicean* is an example. He dresses scruffily and talks in 'the tone of clever childishness which characterised him' (L 245). He observes that it is 'better to be poor and politic, than rich and headstrong; that's the opinion of an old man' (L 245). F. B. Pinion considers his 'clever childishness' to be 'reminiscent of Polonius and Micawber' (*Hardy Companion* 297) and Sir William continually gives advice to the younger generation but is also wise enough to recognise the failings of his family members. The older villagers in *The Woodlanders* and *Two on a Tower* provide further examples of elderly rustics contributing to the development of 'partly concealed patterns' which are 'potentially subversive'. The villagers in both books are aware of their social position and at times are used as a source of fun that ostensibly undermines the sharpness of their social commentary. Old Robert Creedle in *The Woodlanders* would be devastated if a *dead* snail was found in the cabbage he serves his socially superior guests and the elderly choristers provide problems for Rev.

Torkingham in *Two on a Tower* Notwithstanding their apparent naivete, however, their conversations provide reflective commentary on such establishment institutions as the Church, their social superiors, rich landowners (including the nouveaux rich), lifehold leases on cottages and a number of other issues that are central to Hardy's social critique in the novels. In this respect they follow a long line of older Hardy rustics who, for all their simplicity and apparent standing as 'light relief', similarly challenge social convention and raise questions about class, gender and religion, starting with the Church band in the early *Under the Greenwood Tree* and their stand-off with Rev Maybold over his replacement of them with a modern harmonium. This is another example of village rustics being used to undermine a clergyman, albeit within the context of a gentle rural story. As discussed the older villagers in *Two on a Tower* make shrewd observations about the relationship between the youthful Swithin St Cleeve and the older experienced Viviette. Relationships between people of widely differing ages clearly fascinated Hardy and it is to that subject that I will now turn.

In Chapter 6 I discussed the fascination that Hardy appears to have for relationships between people of disparate ages and what Tony Fincham refers to as the Fitzpierston syndrome which Hardy himself might be considered to display. The entire plot of *Two on a Tower*, for instance, turns on the clash between the older, infinitely more experienced Viviette and the youthful Swithin. Ironically, circumstances result in Viviette turning to a much older man, Bishop Helmsdale, to salvage her honour. In *The Well-Beloved* Jocelyn Pierston unsuccessfully courts three generations of Avice Caro in his quest for idealised perfect womanhood. His appetite continues unabated despite the fact that the third Avice sees him as a kindly old man and is very unsettled when he becomes amorous and marriage is suggested. This causes her to elope with her lover who is the same age as she. This episode highlights the situation where sexual desire continues well into late life with a person feeling young internally but being oblivious to the fact that they appear old and 'past it' to others. (Kaufman 161). Another twist on the theme of age differences in relationships is seen in a less well known Hardy novel *The Hand of Ethelberta*. Ethelberta Chickerel, the daughter of a butler, marries a young man her own age who is socially superior. She is soon widowed and seeks a new spouse. The

'obvious choice' is a young music teacher, Christopher Julian to whom she has previously been romantically attached. The problem is that if she marries him she will revert to her former lowly social position. Spurning Julian she receives the attentions of three others Ladywell and Neigh, two older, public school-educated, men who treat the courtship as a game or competition, and the very much older Lord Mountclere. She eventually marries Mountclere under circumstances of both inducement and entrapment. Hardy's portrayal of Mountclere is significant. As F.B. Pinion (*Hardy Companion* 1968, 30) suggests he can be seen as 'belonging to the world of farce' with his feigned poor memory, eccentricity and trademark 'hee-hee'. On the other hand, he is also scheming and self-serving and has been described as 'sinister'. Hardy's portrayal of the aristocratic Mountclere clearly exposes an upper class the members of which are untrustworthy because of their innate snobbery and cynical manipulation of their subordinates. Their great age difference worries Ethelberta deeply but ultimately she feels she has no choice but to be manipulated into marriage as Mountclere has tricked her in a position of potential compromise. Ethelberta, like Viviette Constantine, solves her dilemma by marrying a much older man. There is an important difference however, Viviette and her brother cynically manipulate an unwitting clergyman whereas Ethelberta is duped by an aristocrat who pretends to be simple. In both cases Hardy uses the two older men to highlight human frailties and to offer a critique of social ambition, class snobbery and the power possessed by older men not least in relation to women requiring the protection afforded by a secure marriage.

In addition to overt social critique and more subtle challenging asides in conversation the older characters in Hardy's work provide a regular source of wise and considered comment about social mores and traditions. They are also repositories of superstition and folklore as represented by 'conjurors' or soothsayers and are treated ambiguously, or even negatively, by the novelist in such roles. Michael Henchard consults Conjuror Fall for advice about weather patterns with disastrous results. Fall appears to be aware of Henchard's visit before it happens and appears to possess supernatural powers – but to little or no avail for the central protagonist. Fall, who also appears in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was thought to be a good prophet at one time, but his reputation declined

rapidly in later years (Pinion *Hardy Companion* 1968, 324); ‘he’s as rotten as touch wood now’ said Jonathan Kail (TD 133). In the short story “The Withered Arm”, Gertrude Lodge consults Conjuror Trendle about her progressively withering forearm. His suggested ‘cure’ involves her laying her arm across the bruise on the neck of a recently hanged man. Yet again the conjuror’s advice has disastrous consequences for the person consulting him. The two conjurors’ failure to provide credible advice raises an interesting question: does Hardy set limits to the wisdom that he attributes to his older characters? On one hand he appears to use superficially simple older characters to espouse wise observations about societal issues and mores but on the other he appears critical of the advice given by elderly sages with apparently mystic powers. We are left to ponder whether Hardy’s portrayal of the old soothsayers and their advice is another example of the innate conservatism that Roger Lowman and Joe Fisher, amongst others, attribute to Hardy.

Having discussed Hardy’s representation of older people as a rich source of insight into the psychology of, and adaptation to, ageing and social commentary I will now turn to his use of images and symbols of antiquity. This is represented principally in the descriptions through his narrators of buildings, institutions, former civilisations and natural phenomena. Each of the works considered in this thesis shares with Hardy’s other fiction a multiplicity of allusions to antiquity. When Jude Fawley first arrives in Christminster the narrator makes a particularly apposite observation about the buildings that Jude encounters:

It seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers (JO 67).

Jude, having finally arrived in Christminster, is overwhelmed with enthusiasm and expectation but the narrator is already sounding the warning of the bitter disappointment to follow and making the association between ancient buildings and customs and a barrier to progressive thought. As discussed in Chapter 3 throughout *Jude the Obscure* the narrator makes a continuous association between the ancient buildings and the traditions of Church and University and decay, prejudice and the stifling of modern thought. A

major part of Jude's bitter disillusionment stems from the fact that he is unable to attain access to the institutions but his work as a stone mason ironically helps to sustain them, physically, at least. The theme of ancient churches is encountered in other works by Hardy such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* when Elizabeth-Jane first meets Lucetta under mysterious circumstances in a 'churchyard as old as civilisation' (MC 111). But the starkest description of a malignant old church arguably occurs in Chapter XLV of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Here waterspouts from gargoyles on the corners of a fourteenth-century Gothic church wash the flowers and topsoil from the grave of Fanny Robin who has died in the workhouse after producing an illegitimate baby to Sergeant Troy. We read that 'the persistent torrent from the gargoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave' (FMC 276). The symbolic church is as unsympathetic to Fanny's misfortune and downfall as was the clergyman who refused to baptise Tess Durbeyfield's infant and disallowed him burial in consecrated ground. In each of these examples the Church as an institution is being portrayed as not only old but also hidebound, judgemental and redundant.

In *Two on a Tower* Swithin St Cleeve prepares for his clandestine wedding on the site of an ancient Roman camp. This allows the narrator to reflect on the customs of the earlier inhabitants and to comment on the transitoriness and superficiality of the institution of marriage. This is in line with a negative perception of marriage which is common to many of Hardy's works and which is commented on by Aunt Drusilla and Widow Edlin in *Jude the Obscure* and which becomes the standpoint of the disillusioned George Melbury in *The Woodlanders*.

The theme of ancient civilisations is also invoked in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* when Michael Henchard chooses the old Roman Ampitheatre as the place to meet his estranged wife. His choice arises because it is the safest place from observation (MC 55). The narrator describes the spot as 'melancholy, impressive and lonely' and then goes on to detail the incredible acts of cruelty that have occurred there and to speak of the townsfolk's fear and superstition regarding the place. In doing this Hardy, through the narrator, is sustaining the association of old civilisations and institutions with



obsolescence and the evil use of power. In a recent essay entitled “Excavating the Empire of Dust in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*”, Andrew Radford describes the novel as the most overtly archeological of Hardy’s novels. Radford notes the striking image of the ‘remains’ of a dead Roman soldier appearing ‘like a chicken in its shell’ (MC 54) saying that this ‘hints not just of inert moribund matter, but a spectral presence in the process of becoming ... to impact in potentially surprising ways in the modern moment’ (50). Radford’s essay highlights the crucial and intricate relationship between antiquity and the events of the present.

Hardy’s depiction of the ancientness of the forest and natural phenomena generally, in *The Woodlanders* discussed in Chapter 5, is more sympathetic. In contrast to the associations that he makes when detailing old buildings, institutions and civilisations when describing the ancient forest he invokes a sense of familiarity and security for the woodland inhabitants. Nevertheless the ancient forest and its dwellers are under threat from outside modern influences, as rural Wessex is in so many of the novels, and this is emphasised in images of new growth ‘strangling’ the old, ‘eating the vigour of the stalk’ and the woodland’s ‘decay’. In Chapter Five I have outlined the clash of modern influences with the secure, apparently timeless woodland way of life.

Hardy often combines antiquity with his interest in the supernatural and macabre. We see this in a number of his short stories such as “A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork” and “What the Shepherd saw” from the collection *A Changed Man and other Stories* (18). In the first story an elderly antiquarian with ‘grey old-fashioned whiskers cut to the shape of crumb-brushes’ and with ‘no sense of anything but his purpose’ (CM 137), is prepared to break the law and undertake illicit archeological exploration. Hardy uses the story to show the extent to which a quest for knowledge may compromise a scientist’s moral sense. In the second story an ancient Druid trilithon on the downs is the scene of a witnessed murder and retribution years later when the murderer, a Duke, now aged is about to be exposed. We can therefore conclude that portrayals of antiquity in its multiple manifestations play an important role in the development of Hardy’s themes that

are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.. This has been demonstrated with respect to the novels discussed in this thesis but the themes are common to many of Hardy's works.

I started this thesis with the hypothesis that 'older people and ageing play a central role in the discussion of vital themes in the fiction of Thomas Hardy'. This is a role which, in developing the research question, I assert as 'underestimated'. While the themes of ageing and older people feature prominently in Hardy's poetry hitherto they have not been regarded as major ones in his fiction. In this thesis I submit that I have made a solid claim to substantiate the original hypothesis and that older people and ageing can be viewed as playing a substantial role in the Hardy canon. In summary, the significance of elderly people in Hardy's fiction can be considered in at least four major ways: through close consideration of social issues as expressed in the (often critical) words and actions of older people; attention to the author's careful scrutiny of older people which anticipate much later discussions of the psychological adaptation to ageing; the investigation of relationships between people of disparate ages which highlights issues of ageing, their effects and social perceptions of these; and the use of the symbolism of antiquity represented particularly in buildings, institutions and civilisations to amplify the changes brought about by modernity.

In conclusion, I submit that my consideration of the subjects of older people and ageing, concentrating on four novels in particular, has demonstrated that these issues perform an important part of Hardy's fiction. I further contend that these issues have been underestimated in Hardy criticism because of the concentration on what are considered his 'major' themes as outlined in Chapter 2. The area is worthy of further detailed study to include Hardy's poetry as well as his fiction.

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