Ageing in Welsh Fiction in English, 1906-2012: Bodies, Culture, Time, and Memory

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Abstract

This thesis examines the proliferation of ageing characters to be found in twentieth and twenty-first-century Welsh fiction in English and argues that older people have a special significance in this body of literature. The study employs a mixed methodology, combining close comparative analysis of fictional texts with theoretical perspectives taken from cultural and literary theory, philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies.

The introduction situates my work alongside the fields of literary gerontology and Welsh writing in English, giving focus to strands of research which have synergies with this thesis. Chapter 2 examines the influence of stereotypes of ageing on older characterisations in Anglophone Welsh fiction and argues that writers undermine and complicate these stereotypes. Representations of gossips, burdens, those with dementia, wise older people, inspirational grandmothers, older men and grandfathers, and unmarried women are analysed. Chapter 3 focuses on renderings of older subjectivity, considering protagonists' experiences of physical ageing, alongside tensions between the changing older body and a more constant self within, and texts which represent changes in experiences of time and memory. Writers are argued to give voice to the frail and the marginalised and to reveal the influence of socioeconomic and cultural factors on experiences of ageing. Chapter 4 asserts that intergenerational relationships involving older characters tend to symbolise societal change and to reflect class and linguistic divisions between generations. Ageing characters, particularly older women, are shown to become links to the past and to act as remembrancers of local and national histories. They also signify a conception of Welsh identity grounded in speaking Welsh, devotion to Nonconformist worship, and a stoic determination to survive. These characters often perform the role of storyteller, passing on suppressed knowledge and traditional values. It is argued that, despite their regard for the past, the novels and short stories discussed avoid the dangers of nostalgia through the ambivalence of younger characters to the identities they are bequeathed, the self-reflexivity of several texts, and older characters who are grounded in the present and concerned about the future.

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1 Introduction

It seems that ageing is a preoccupation of our times. Improvements in health and social care throughout the twentieth century have resulted in increased longevity in both rich and poor countries. Coupled with advances in the availability and efficacy of contraception, these developments are changing the demographics of societies across the globe.[1] Somewhat conversely, the dominant Western cultural discourse has been fixated by youth for some time. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick argue that industrialisation valorised the young at the expense of their elders:

> Capitalist industrialization, with its continually revamped technologies of production also led to the transformation of domestic production and consumption. It idealized youth (including the eroticized youthful female body as the universal consumer image of desirability) while fundamentally weakening the value of accumulated life experience, both in itself and as a marker of social status. [...] The work society with its loss of function and income which came with mandatory retirement became bolstered by a consumer culture with its images of youth, fitness and beauty lifestyles which produced a new set of exclusions for older people.[2]

Those who feel the pressures of this idealisation of youthful beauty can now turn to the raft of anti-ageing products which jostle for attention on our supermarket shelves, or to the latest advances in cosmetic surgery. The effects of increased longevity and demographic change are also making themselves known in the political arena. Manifesto promises subjected to particular scrutiny during the 2017 UK General

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[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Ageing 2015* (New York: United Nations, 2015) <www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf> [accessed 17 March 2018].

[2] Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, 'Introduction', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-15 (p. 7).

Election campaign included a Conservative Party pledge to dismantle the 'triple-lock' which guarantees a minimum increase in the state pension annually, and Theresa May's hastily revised plan, dubbed the 'dementia tax', to make older people in England contribute more towards the costs of their social care.[3] Furthermore, analysis of the results of the 2016 referendum on British membership of the European Union has foregrounded generational differences in voting patterns.[4]

Scholars have responded to population ageing by fostering new areas of enquiry, including social and cultural gerontology, which have moved beyond the biological focus of traditional geriatric medicine. This thesis aims to contribute to the developing field of literary gerontology, as well as to the study of Welsh writing in English, by analysing the representation of ageing in examples of Anglophone Welsh fiction from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and by arguing that older characters hold a special significance in this body of work. By way of an introduction to and justification for this undertaking, it is worth noting that older characters play important roles and ageing is a key theme in several influential Welsh texts and in the visual as well as the literary arts. In the early medieval *englynion* cycle *Canu Llywarch Hen* (*The Llywarch Hen Poems*), the titular character (literally 'Llywarch the Old') articulates the physical and social losses of his final years. Jenny Rowland states that 'Llywarch's age is an important factor both in the narrative and the

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[3] Sam Brodbeck, 'State Pension "Triple Lock" to Go: What Will That Mean for Your Retirement Income?', *Telegraph*, 18 May 2017 <www.telegraph.co.uk/pensions-retirement/financial-planning/state-pension-triple-lock-go-will-mean-retirement-income> [accessed 11 December 2017]. Anushka Asthana and Jessica Elgot, 'Theresa May Ditches Manifesto Plan with "Dementia Tax" U-turn', *Guardian*, 22 May 2017 <www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/22/theresa-may-u-turn-on-dementia-tax-cap-social-care-conservative-manifesto> [accessed 11 December 2017].

[4] See, for example, Gabriel Ahlfeldt, 'Every Generation Votes in Their Own Interest. But in an Ageing World, That's a Problem', *London School of Economics and Political Science website*, 22 November 2016 <blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/11/22/every-generation-votes-in-their-own-interest-but-in-an-ageing-world-thats-a-problem> [accessed 11 December 2017].

thematic development of the saga',[5] arguing that sympathy created by the unknown poet's 'virtuoso depiction of old age' provides a balance to the foolish, egotistical aspects of the protagonist's character.[6] Indeed, in 'Cân yr Henwr', the final poem in the saga, Llywarch contemplates his aged existence and the turning of the seasons parallels his physical decline and growing feelings of isolation. Llywarch's meditation takes in his changed physique, capabilities, and preferences, as well as his loneliness and perceived rejection by those around him. Although more than a thousand years separate this poetic cycle from the beginnings of a distinctive body of Welsh writing in English, similar characteristics and preoccupations can be found in more recent representations of ageing. Caradoc Evans's *My People* (1915) is filled with older characters who are targets for sympathy as well as satire. From elderly misers Simon and Beca – 'waiting for Death', cheated out of their hard-earned savings late in life, and worrying about the costs of their coffins – to the devout, decrepit, and visibly decaying Old Nanni – the object of her community's collective judgment and disgust, Evans incorporates caricatures and stock figures of ageing into this contentious yet seminal parody of the village in rural Ceredigion where he grew up.[7]

Contemporary texts which concern themselves with the social and economic circumstances of Wales in the early twenty-first century reflect the country's changing demographics. One of the most prominent Welsh TV dramas of recent years *Hinterland/ Y Gwyll* (2013) includes a significant number of older characters and plays with an iconic image of old age. The opening episode of this S4C/ BBC take on the Scandinavian noir crime genre revolves around the murder of an ageing woman

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[5] Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the 'Englynion'* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), p. 45.
[6] Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 48.
[7] Caradoc Evans, 'The Way of the Earth', in *My People* (1915) (Bridgend: Seren, 1987), pp. 64-72 (p. 64). Evans, 'Be This Her Memorial', in *My People*, pp. 108-12.

whose pious exterior concealed a history of cruelty. Not only does the Welsh setting contribute to the drama's overall character through the inclusion of snatches of Welsh in the English-language version and numerous atmospheric Ceredigion locations, Nonconformist Christianity is at the centre of the murdered woman's life and vandalised reproductions of S. Curnow Vosper's *Salem* (1908) feature throughout. The importance of this painting of elderly Siân Owen attending chapel dressed in Welsh national costume and an elaborate paisley shawl to an understanding of the imaging of Welsh identity in the last century should not be underestimated. Describing it as a 'national icon'[8] Peter Lord explains that, when Lord Leverhulme bought the picture and gave away prints to 'anyone willing to purchase 7 lbs of Sunlight Soap at the local emporium', it 'instantly struck a chord with a wide public and within only a few years was finding its way onto thousands of walls all over the country'.[9] Lord analyses the qualities of Vosper's image which contributed to its elevated status:

> No force other than Nonconformist Christianity could have provided such a broad base for an image of ourselves at the time of its painting. The picture was made in the wake of the Methodist revival of 1904 […]. The revival was initially a phenomenon of industrialised Wales, and it is true that *Salem* is an evocation of quite another place. But when the picture was painted, industrial Wales was less than 100 years old and had a workforce drawn from an older, rural way of life which many could themselves remember and to which most must have had access through the memories of old people or branches of their families left behind. *Salem* evoked that world, left behind but not yet completely separate; and Siân Owen, born in the early 1840s, embodied a perception of its calm rhythms and deep roots.
>
> But above all else this is an unambiguously Welsh picture – the costumes, however much they were the construct of Lady Llanover's romantic imagination, tell us that with absolute clarity. They bind together all the other elements into a core of essential values understood as particular to Wales.[10]

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[8] Peter Lord, 'A National Icon: Peter Lord on S. Curnow Vosper's *Salem*', *Planet*, 67 (1988), 14-19 (p. 17).
[9] Lord, 'A National Icon', p. 15.
[10] Lord, 'A National Icon', p. 17.

In addition to the amalgamation within Vosper's image of several concepts associated with a traditional formulation of Welshness – Nonconformist worship, a rural way of life, and a connection to the past, the painting took on other connotations when viewers noticed the shape of the Devil in the folds of the older woman's shawl. This observation has been taken to imply that Siân Owen is 'the embodiment of the sin of pride', making her an ambiguous figure.[11] The makers of *Hinterland* play on this uncertainty by costuming the older female owner of the aptly-named Devil's Bridge Hotel in a paisley shawl. Furthermore, the fact that two framed prints of *Salem* are found smashed in the course of the action suggests that a traditional vision of Wales or Welsh identity is unsettled within the text. Indeed, in addition to solving a double murder, the detective at the centre of the investigation uncovers a history of abuse at a former children's home. Reminiscent of the North Wales child abuse scandal of the late 1990s and early 2000s, this discovery is part of the undercurrent of social commentary which runs through *Hinterland*, complicating and undermining stereotypical images of devout, close-knit chapel communities.

I will return in the course of this thesis to the themes and concerns suggested by the above brief discussion of *Canu Llywarch Hen*, *My People*, *Salem,* and *Hinterland*. In particular, I will consider the utilisation and undermining of stock older figures by Welsh writers, the presentation of experiences of ageing from the point of view of ageing protagonists, the association of older people, especially ageing women, with certain formations of Welsh national identity, and instances of ambivalence towards the memories of the past and conceptions of Welsh identity which these older characters bequeath to younger generations. Before beginning this investigation, however, it is important to situate my research alongside related fields

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[11] Lord, 'A National Icon', p. 15.

of study, to explain the original contribution which I hope to make to literary scholarship, to outline my methodology, and to give details of the structure of the thesis.

Review of Related Fields of Research

a) Literary Gerontology

Interest in literature concerned with later life has been growing amongst literary critics and researchers in related disciplines since the 1980s. Scholars have suggested various reasons for the burgeoning of this new specialism. In their introduction to the field of cultural gerontology, Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin describe increased interest in the subject of age in the arts and humanities in general as a 'response to demographic shifts and the growing cultural visibility of older people'.[12] Twigg and Martin situate this development in the sphere of cultural criticism alongside the recent 'cultural turn' in the social sciences generally and gerontology in particular, which they argue is a reaction to poststructuralism and postmodernism.[13] Some literary critics also assert that more creative writers are making old age their subject matter.[14] Further, it has been argued that literary texts are particularly well-suited to rendering the complexities of aged experience, making their analysis a profitable contribution to age studies. For example, Sarah Falcus states that:

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[12] Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, 'The Field of Cultural Gerontology: An Introduction', in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, ed. by Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-15 (p. 2).

[13] Twigg and Martin, 'The Field of Cultural Gerontology', p. 1.

[14] See, for example: Barbara Frey Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (New York, Westport, and London: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 2; Constance Rooke, 'Old Age in Contemporary Fiction: A New Paradigm of Hope', in *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*, ed. by Thomas R. Cole, David D. Van Tassel, and Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Springer, 1992), pp. 241-57 (p. 214); and Maricel Oró-Piqueras, 'Narrating Ageing: Deconstructing Negative Conceptions of Old Age in Four Contemporary English Novels', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 27.1 (2013), 47-51 (p. 47).

> It is the ability to accommodate and even thrive on contradiction, incompleteness and possibility that makes literature such a valuable area of study for gerontology. Literature does not – as most literary critics working on ageing are at pains to stress – simply mirror or reflect a social world, but, instead, is part of and complicit in shaping that social world.[15]

Criticism focused on depictions of ageing in literature foregrounds a range of themes and motifs and raises various concerns regarding the representation and treatment of older people. This body of research questions the ways in which texts imagine later life, and asks how they should be imagining it. Critics utilise a number of different theoretical perspectives and engage with the literary elements of texts to varying degrees. On the whole, these studies converge in their belief in the potential of literature to reveal and challenge the ageist discourses that persist in contemporary societies.

This section outlines briefly the shape and key concerns of the field of literary gerontology, paying particular attention to research which has influenced or contains synergies with my own work. For practical reasons, the scope of this survey is limited to criticism of literatures in English, the vast majority of which is concerned with novels and short stories by British and north American writers.[16] Indeed, critics have noted that, as yet, the majority of work in this field is concerned with texts produced in first-world Western nations and should be interpreted within this context.[17] Where it has proved helpful to my own research, I also refer to scholarship concerned with ageing in film.

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[15] Sarah Falcus, 'Literature and Ageing', in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, ed. by Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 53-60 (pp. 53-54).

[16] Notable exceptions include readings of fiction and drama by African, West Indian, Irish, and Antipodean writers included in several essay collections edited by members of the DEDAL-LIT research group at the University of Lleida in Catalonia. See, for example: Maria O'Neill and Carmen Zamorano-Llena (eds), *The Aesthetics of Ageing: Critical Approaches to Literary Representations of the Ageing Process* (Lleida, Catalunya: University of Lleida, 2002); Maria Vidal-Grau and Núria Casado-Gual (eds), *The Polemics of Ageing as Reflected in Literatures in English* (Lleida, Catalunya: University of Lleida, 2004); and Nela Bureu-Ramos (ed), *Flaming Embers: Literary Testimonies on Ageing and Desire* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

[17] Falcus, 'Literature and Ageing', p. 58.

Studies of novels and short stories about growing older often reveal a concern with the trajectories of their protagonists' lives. Traditional conceptions of later life characterised by degeneration and loss have been designated 'decline narratives' and are usually viewed as problematic due to their involvement in the propagation of ageist attitudes and limiting expectations of later life. Margaret Morganroth Gullette critiques such narratives in her studies of literature concerned with midlife and old age, describing the 'narrative of decline-through-aging' thus:

> The body-mind is a time bomb attached to fuses of unknown length (sometimes called telomeres, but the name changes). Although many old people happily seem not to act or speak as if their fuses were lit, decline fiction confirms aging-as-loss through its chosen protagonists or narrative voices. Time – lifetime – is the enemy. Anxiety and dread are the appropriate responses. We are all inevitably victims.[18]

In the late 1980s and early 1990s several critics wrote enthusiastically about the arrival of new fictional genres which challenge such negative trajectories. Gullette, Barbara Frey Waxman, and Constance Rooke all identify alternatives to the traditional bildungsroman and its focus on the struggles and rewards of youth. In *Safe at Last in the Middle Years* (1988), Gullette introduces the concept of the 'midlife progress novel'; she has since argued that decline narratives can be countered by elegies and love stories of later life.[19] Waxman uses the term *reifungsroman* or 'novel of ripening' to describe a group of texts with older female protagonists by women writers, while Rooke's 'new paradigm of hope' is the *vollendungsroman*, the 'novel of completion or winding up'.[20] Waxman's study is of particular relevance to this thesis, as it is one of the very small number of critical works which considers older

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[18] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 205.

[19] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Safe at Last in the Middle Years: The Invention of the Midlife Progress Novel: Saul Bellow, Margaret Drabble, Anne Tyler, and John Updike* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988), and Gullette, *Agewise*.

[20] See Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*, and Rooke, 'Old Age in Contemporary Fiction'.

protagonists' relationships with their cultural or national identities, a subject which I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

Alongside Gullette, Kathleen Woodward has been a key figure in shaping literary gerontology since the 1980s. Woodward has contributed to the area of the field concerned with 'late style', which considers the effects of ageing on the work of individual creative writers, and has provided a number of complex psychoanalytic readings of the experiences and actions of ageing fictional characters.[21] In a similar vein, Amelia DeFalco applies Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny and related works by theorists including Julia Kristeva and Nicholas Royle to recent fiction and film from north America and Britain.[22] These psychoanalytic studies fall into the category of literary gerontology which Anne Wyatt-Brown terms 'The Phenomenology of Aging'.[23] Other criticism which can be classified under this heading includes research focused on aspects of older subjectivity including aged embodiment, experiences of time and memory in later life, and renderings of dementia. The treatment of the older body by writers and critics in their creative and academic works respectively is an issue with political ramifications. Thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of literary and, indeed, cultural gerontology, prevailing currents in the social sciences have influenced the direction of these fields,

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[21] See Kathleen Woodward, *At Last, the Real Distinguished Thing: The Late Poems of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), and *Aging and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). Other examples of criticism on late style include Carolyn H. Smith 'Images of Aging in American Poetry, 1925-1985', in *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*, ed. by Thomas R. Cole, David D. Van Tassel, and Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Springer, 1992), pp. 217-40, David Rampton, 'The Ethical Turn. Ageing in Late Roth', in *Acculturating Age: Approaches to Cultural Gerontology*, ed. by Brian J. Worsfold (Lleida, Catalunya: University of Lleida, 2011), pp. 297-311, and Susan Watkins, '"Summoning Your Youth at Will": Memory, Time, and Aging in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 34.2 (2013), 222-44.

[22] Amelia DeFalco, *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

[23] Anne M. Wyatt-Brown, 'Literary Gerontology Comes of Age', in *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*, ed. by Thomas R. Cole, David D. Van Tassel, and Robert Kastenbaum (New York: Springer, 1992), pp. 331-51 (pp. 338-41).

particularly what Emmanuelle Tulle calls the 'turn to the body in sociology'.[24] Introducing their cross-cutting 1995 essay collection *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, sociologists Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick advocate a greater focus on the body in sociology and social policy,[25] while, in his contribution to this volume, Bryan S. Turner argues that 'the absence of a developed sociology […] of aging is an effect of the absence of a sociology of the body'.[26] Featherstone and Wernick qualify their argument by observing that: 'the aging body is never just a body subjected to the imperatives of cellular and organic decline, for as it moves through life it is continuously being inscribed and reinscribed with cultural meanings.'[27] This recognition of the cultural processes which shape ageing bodies and experiences is also vital to the political aspects of Gullette's literary criticism. She argues that we are 'aged by culture' (the title of her third monograph concerned with ageing), explaining:

> The meanings of age and ageing are conveyed in large part through the moral and psychological implications of the narrative ideas we have been inserting into our heads, starting when we were very young indeed. Artistic and technological products, like the stories we ordinarily tell ourselves and one another, are permeated by the pre-existing inventions of culture. It matters whether a given society […] permits dense, interesting, encouraging narratives about aging […]. Our age narratives become our virtual realities.[28]

Furthermore, Gullette calls for literary representations that acknowledge this phenomenon and avoid a focus on the older body above all else: 'Let writers make the

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[24] Emmanuelle Tulle, 'Theorising Embodiment and Ageing', in *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, ed. by Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 125-32 (p. 125).
[25] Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, 'Introduction', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-15.
[26] Bryan S. Turner, 'Aging and identity: Some Reflections on the Somatisation of the Self', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 245-260 (p. 245).
[27] Featherstone and Wernick, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3.
[28] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 11.

bitterness and perplexity and humiliations of decline real, but not only by describing bodily aging. Some will be laureates of our broader illuminations.'[29]

It seems, then, that creative writing and literary criticism that engage meaningfully with ageing will consider both the biological and cultural circumstances which govern individual experiences of later life. This concern is borne out in recent scholarly work. For example, sociologist Mike Hepworth's *Stories of Ageing* (2000) is enlightening for its use of the sociological perspective of symbolic interactionism and Drew Leder's theory of the 'dys-appearing' body (which I also draw upon in my third chapter), as well as its recognition of the tensions between body, self, and society in the novels discussed.[30] In her analysis of three novels by Pat Barker, Falcus argues: 'The interplay of the cultural and corporeal aspects of ageing in these texts forces the reader to acknowledge the complexities of ageing, unsettling any easy assumptions about the ageing subject.'[31] Similarly, Jeannette King finds in Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991) a novel in which the 'embodied subject' that is older protagonist Dora Chance engages with the discourses which dictate what constitutes female old age 'from an oppositional perspective' so that she can 'construct an identity for herself that is determined neither by the ageing body nor by the discourses that construct it as "ageing"'.[32]

The body of criticism concerned with literary attempts to render the inner lives of older characters also includes a number of analyses which focus upon representations of the operation of memory in ageing subjects. In addition to scholarly

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[29] Gullette, *Agewise*, p. 223.
[30] Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000).
[31] Sarah Falcus, 'Unsettling Ageing in Three Novels by Pat Barker', *Ageing & Society*, 32.8 (2012), 1382-98 (p. 1384). See also Oró-Piqueras' discussion of works by Barker, Margaret Forster, Doris Lessing, and Rose Tremain where 'the body, self and society intermingle and model each other'. Oró-Piqueras, 'Narrating Ageing', p. 48.
[32] Jeannette King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 172-73.

works on novels and short stories which include or are structured around processes of reminiscence, life review, and becoming reacquainted with the past,[33] several critics have written on fictional renderings of the experience of dementia. Núria Casado-Gual, for example, offers a comparative analysis of Alice Munro's 'The Bear Came over the Mountain' (2001) and Sarah Polley's 2006 film adaptation of this story,[34] while Katsura Sako considers Emma Healey and Alice LaPlante's use of the conventions of detective fiction 'to explore the subjective experience of dementia'.[35] Both Casado-Gual and Sako are attentive to the caring and intimate relationships which exist between characters suffering from dementia, their carers, and close family members, as are Gullette and Suzanne E. England in their recent evaluations of dementia narratives.[36] I discuss fictional renderings of older subjectivity by several Welsh writers in Chapter 3 of this thesis. My analysis takes in older embodiment, experiences of time and memory, and also considers the ways in which writers and their protagonists engage with cultural discourses of age.

Falcus observes that 'the prominent content-based study of representations of ageing within fiction […] has been criticized for not paying enough attention to extra-textual factors and to matters of style'.[37] However, recent contributions to the field of literary gerontology include studies which consider individual writers' use of particular genres to render older experience. In addition to Sako's exploration of

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[33] See Waxman on the *reifungsroman* and Rooke on the *vollendungsroman*. Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*. Rooke, 'Old Age in Contemporary Fiction'.
[34] Núria Casado-Gual, 'Unexpected Turns in Lifelong Sentimental Journeys: Redefining Love, Memory and Old Age through Alice Munro's "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and its film adaptation, *Away from Her*', *Ageing and Society*, 35.3 (2015), 389-404.
[35] Katsura Sako, 'Dementia and Detection in *Elizabeth is Missing* and *Turn of Mind*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 10.3 (2016), 315-33 (p. 315).
[36] See Gullette's reading of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) in Chapter 8 of *Agewise* ('The Daughters' Club: Does Emma Woodhouse's Father Suffer from "Dementia"?', pp. 167-82), and Suzanne E. England, 'Private Troubles, Master Narratives: Dilemmas of Dementia Care in a Short Story', *The Gerontologist*, 57.5 (2017), 963-68.
[37] Falcus, 'Literature and Ageing', p. 55.

dementia and detective fiction (discussed above), Falcus herself argues that Michèle Roberts borrows from a range of popular genres in her playful novel of midlife self-discovery *Reader, I Married Him* (2004), while Emma Domínguez-Rué interprets the crime fiction of Carolyn Heilbrun (writing under the pseudonym Amanda Cross) in light of Heilbrun's feminist essays and literary criticism on the subject of old age.[38] Furthermore, in her recent article on memory, time, and ageing in novels by Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing, Susan Watkins integrates analysis of ageing and gender with theorised exploration of genre and form, arguing that 'the three writers under consideration […] take the aging process as a challenge to be addressed in new narrative structures and techniques'.[39] In addition to Gullette's discussion of dementia in *Emma* (1815) by Jane Austen (cited in Footnote 36 above), other scholars have examined cultural constructions of ageing in examples of particular genres from before the twentieth century. Teresa Mangum, for instance, interrogates nineteenth-century British children's literature, Marta Miquel-Baldellou discusses Victorian gothic novels, and Jeannette King analyses New Woman fiction.[40] Moreover, in his study of old age in early modern English literature, Christopher Martin draws on a wide range of sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts, from

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[38] Sarah Falcus, 'Addressing Age in Michèle Roberts's *Reader, I Married Him*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 7.1 (2013), 18-34. Emma Domínguez-Rué, 'Successful Female Aging for Beginners: Carolyn Heilbrun/ Amanda Cross and Perspectives of Gendered Aging in *The Players Come Again*', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 25.1 (2016), 99-110.

[39] Susan Watkins, '"Summoning Your Youth at Will": Memory, Time, and Aging in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 34.2 (2013), 222-44 (p. 225).

[40] Teresa Mangum, 'Little Women: The Aging Female Character in Nineteenth-Century British Children's Literature', in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 59-87. Marta Miquel-Baldellou, 'Aged Females through the Victorian Gothic Male Gaze: Edgar Allan Poe's *Madame LaLande* and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*', in *Aging Femininities: Troubling Representations*, ed. by Josephine Dolan and Estella Tincknell (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 17-26. King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*, pp. 34-38.

Elizabeth I's letters, speeches, and private poetry, to the love poetry of John Donne, William Shakespeare's sonnets, and, of course, *King Lear*.[41]

A significant proportion of the criticism on literature and ageing explores intersections between age and gender, giving particular focus to patriarchal attitudes towards and the societal expectations placed upon ageing women in Western cultures. Introducing a collection of essays on representations of older women in a range of artistic media, Woodward explains that '[f]or women, aging casts its shadow earlier than for men':

> In the West female attractiveness has long been associated with youth, and the older woman has been thought of in disparaging terms as 'menopausal' and 'post-menopausal.' It is thus not an accident that many women around the age of fifty *experience* aging, an experience that does not have the same counterpart in men and thus the same psychological, social, and economic consequences for men. By experiencing aging, I am referring primarily to the internalization of our culture's denial of and distaste for aging, which is understood in terms of decline, not in terms of growth and change.[42]

Like a number of other feminist critics, Woodward also contends that forms of discrimination specific to older women were neglected by second wave feminists and, indeed, that 'ageism is entrenched within feminism itself'.[43] The growing movement to address this omission has been strengthened by a number of studies of literature and ageing, including monographs by Waxman, Sally Chivers, Zoe Brennan, and King, essay collections edited by Woodward, Josephine Dolan and Estella Tincknell,[44] and scholarly articles which attend to issues of older femininity,

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[41] Christopher Martin, *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature, from Queen Elizabeth to 'King Lear'* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).
[42] Kathleen Woodward, 'Introduction', in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. ix-xxix (p. xiii).
[43] Woodward, 'Introduction', p. xi. See also, for example, Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), and Lynne Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).
[44] Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*. Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003). Zoe Brennan, *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2005), King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*. Woodward (ed.), *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies,*

including those by Domínguez-Rué, Falcus, Miquel-Baldellou, and Watkins discussed above. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that a number of literary critics have utilised feminist theoretical approaches in their readings of texts about ageing. Falcus and Miquel-Baldellou employ Judith Butler's conception of identity – particularly gender identity – as a performance. Similarly, Woodward describes the operation of 'the youthful structure of the look – that is, the culturally induced tendency to degrade and reduce an older person to the prejudicial category of old age' in contemporary feature films, apparently taking inspiration from Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze'.[45] Furthermore, a significant number of studies deconstruct stereotypes of older women in literary texts and other artistic works.[46] Several critics have considered the association of older women with domestic spaces,[47] while scholars including Falcus, King, Sylvia Henneberg, and Lynne Segal address the subject of older women's sexuality in their readings of literary texts.[48] Intersections of age and both female and male identity guide my analysis throughout this thesis, beginning with the deconstruction of gendered character types and consideration of older female sexuality in Chapter 2.

Generations. Josephine Dolan and Estella Tincknell (eds), *Aging Femininities: Troubling Representations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

[45] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, 3.1 (October 1975), 6–18 (p. 11). Kathleen Woodward, 'Performing Age, Performing Gender', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 18.1 (2006), 162-89 (p. 164).

[46] See for example, the essays collected in Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (eds), *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), contributions to Woodward (ed.) *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, Sylvia Henneberg, 'Moms Do Badly, but Grandmas Do Worse: The Nexus of Sexism and Ageism in Children's Classics', *Journal of Aging* Studies, 24.2 (2010), 125-34, and Oró-Piqueras, 'Narrating Ageing'.

[47] See Waxman's conclusion to *From the Hearth to the Open Road*, Maryhelen C. Harmon, 'Old Maids and Old Mansions: The Barren Sisters of Hawthorne, Dickens and Faulkner', in *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 103-14, and Chapter 4, 'Objects, Places and Spaces' (pp. 72-98), in Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*.

[48] Falcus, 'Addressing Age in Michèle Roberts's *Reader, I Married Him*'. King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*. Sylvia Henneberg, 'Of Creative Crones and Poetry: Developing Age Studies through Literature', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 18.1 (2006), 106-25. Lynne Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

Of particular relevance to my research is the emphasis placed upon intergenerational female relationships in several of the feminist studies identified above. King argues that representations of connections between women of different generations found in novels from the 1980s and 90s are concerned with 'bridging the [generation] gap experienced so strongly by second wave feminists'.[49] She also identifies economic status and social class as factors which separate women of different generations, a concept which I take up in reference to both genders in my fourth chapter. Furthermore, King and Chivers argue that grandmothers play an important role in fictional renderings of intergenerational relationships. Building upon Adrienne Rich's discussion of the institution of motherhood within the patriarchy, Chivers argues that grandmotherhood could offer older women a less restrictive role than motherhood, because, unlike mothers and their children, grandmothers are not expected to 'efface' themselves for the good of their grandchildren. Further, relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters are not complicated by 'an antagonism between immediate generations dictated by patriarchal control of motherhood' or the 'matrophobia' – 'the fear of *becoming* one's own mother' – which Chivers associates with second wave feminism.[50] In her readings of contemporary Canadian fiction, Chivers finds grandmothers characterised 'as offering cultural and historical knowledge through an unconditional, loving connection with granddaughters'.[51] Of particular pertinence to my thesis is Chivers's identification of the 'story-telling legacy' passed from grandmother to granddaughter in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) and her analysis of the unlearning and relearning of Japanese by successive generations of the Japanese-Canadian family at the centre of

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[49] King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*, p. 74.
[50] Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), p. 38, emphasis in original.
[51] Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, p. 43.

this text.[52] In a similar vein, King argues that in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), an African-American grandmother and former slave 'provides access to collective memories which both reinforce the horrors of the past and provide a spiritual and emotional framework to make it possible to bear them'.[53] Furthermore, in Morrison's novel, the 'insist[ence] on the power and importance of the matrilineal bond […] becomes a form of resistance'.[54] Correspondingly, in her study of the *reifungsroman*, Waxman argues that 'young-old widows [Waxman's classification for widows aged between sixty and seventy-four]' sometimes find 'self-reaffirmation and growth through relationships with a larger community and a larger collective past'. In particular, these advances 'often' involve 'forging a stronger link to their ancestral past'.[55] Chapter 4 of this thesis maps out the connections between older people and histories of both a personal and public nature in modern and contemporary Welsh fiction, as well as discussing the presentation of intergenerational relationships and the special significance of older women, storytellers, and grandmothers in the field.

There is considerably less criticism on literature about masculinity and ageing than on texts about older female identity. This paucity of scholarly work seems to stem from a gap in research, rather than a lack of cultural products and creative texts worthy of attention. Indeed, sociologist Jeff Hearn's broad discussion of the imaging of ageing men suggests that there are many avenues to be explored. Hearn draws on historical constructions, biographical and autobiographical accounts, and mass media portrayals to identify various cultural images of older men which create an impression of complexity, contradiction, and opportunities to 'subvert dominant constructions of

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[52] Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, p. 51.
[53] King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*, p. 89
[54] King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism*, p. 85.
[55] Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*, p. 120.

men and masculinities'.[56] Some illuminating studies of male ageing in literature do exist, however. Gullette's monograph on the mid-life progress novel, for example, considers male protagonists created by Saul Bellow, John Updike, and Anne Tyler alongside women rendered by Tyler and Margaret Drabble, and Segal has recently written on older male sexuality as represented by Philip Roth, Martin Amis, Updike, and Edmund White. Further, Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker's 1999 edited collection *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective* includes five essays on the representation of older men that consider drama, fiction, and biography spanning the seventeenth to twentieth centuries and employ a range of theoretical approaches. Echoing Chivers's assertion (discussed above) that, because it has fewer restrictive gendered associations, the role of grandmother can offer older women greater freedom than that of mother, in her contribution to *Aging and Identity*, Deats argues that Shakespeare's King Lear and Prospero can both be observed to take on more traditionally feminine qualities in later life. The critic cites sociologist David Gutmann's identification of 'sex-role crossover' 'in the years after parenthood is over' – when men 'develop their passive, nurturing, contemplative qualities (attributes traditionally gendered "feminine"), whereas women discover their assertive, commanding, or adventurous traits (attributes traditionally gendered "masculine")'[57] – and states:

> Ultimately, both Lear and Prospero learn not only to acknowledge responsibility for their actions but also to express their repressed femininity: Lear, tutored by the Fool in the hard lesson of self-knowledge through

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[56] Jeff Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 97-115 (p. 113).
[57] Sara Munson Deats, 'The Dialectic of Aging in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *The Tempest*', in *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 23-32 (pp. 23-24).

> suffering, learns empathy; Prospero, schooled by Ariel, eschews vengeance and forgives his enemies […].[58]

Deats also attends to the effects of retirement on Lear and Prospero and to the relationship between ageing and wisdom, as do Kirk Combe and Kenneth Schmader in their contrasting yet complementary discussion of *King Lear* and *The Tempest* in the same volume.[59] Indeed, wisdom appears to be an important theme in many renderings of masculine ageing. Also contributing to *Aging and Identity*, Philip Sipiora argues that older men in the fiction of Ernest Hemingway often exhibit '*phronesis*' – an ancient Greek term for 'practical judgment' or 'an acute sensitivity to a critical logic of human existence that can be attained only through extensive experience and suffering'.[60] I consider the responses of older men to retirement and the stock figure of the wise older person with reference to both male and female characters in Chapter 2 of this thesis, while knowledge accumulated in the course of long, often difficult, lives is important to my discussion of older storytellers and remembrancers of the past in my final chapter.

Finally, with regard to trends in criticism of literature about ageing, a small number of studies consider the symbolic use of older figures. Carolyn H. Smith, for example, discusses the 'emblematic nature' of ageing characters in the poetry of Robert Penn Warren, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Elizabeth Bishop,

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[58] Deats, 'The Dialectic of Aging in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*', p. 31.
[59] Combe and Schmader, a professor of English and geriatric physician respectively, 'appraise' Lear and Prospero 'from a current gerontological perspective and with the most recent geriatric evaluative procedures'. Their discussion of these characters is presented alongside two real case studies of older patients from the Duke University Medical Center Geriatric Evaluation and Treatment Clinic in Durham, North Carolina. The writers use this approach to argue that Shakespeare's rendering of older characters across his oeuvre reflects the 'heterogeneity' of ageing and to support their recommendation that 'students of geriatrics and gerontology' read such texts. Kirk Combe and Kenneth Schmader, 'Shakespeare Teaching Geriatrics: Lear and Prospero as Case Studies in Aged Heterogeneity', in *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 33-46, (pp. 34 and 44).
[60] Phillip Sipiora, 'Hemingway's Aging Heroes and the Concept of *Phronesis*', in *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 61-76 (p. 62).

suggesting that the older figures created by these writers are symbols of 'mortality and wisdom'.[61] Similarly, in his consideration of *phronesis* in Hemingway's fiction (discussed above), Sipiora argues that the titular character in *The Old Man and the Sea* is 'no ordinary, "realistic" protagonist', instead 'we are in the realm of archetypal myth and Santiago is the stoic exemplar'.[62] Reading Victorian children's fantasy and adventure fiction from a postcolonial as well as an age studies perspective, Teresa Mangum states that, in texts from these genres, 'the bodily idioms of old age' were translated 'into the racialized features that signified black and African in turn-of-the-century British culture'.[63] Further, she argues that, in works such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), monstrous older figures embody late-Victorian fears of 'both class antagonism and the potential for reverse colonization'.[64] Also casting a postcolonial eye over a genre born in the nineteenth century, Maria O'Neill contends that the ageing of aristocratic Anglo-Irish families characterised as sterile, childish, isolated, and financially depleted in Irish 'big house' novels signifies the demise of the Anglo-Irish ruling class.[65] My own research has synergies with O'Neill's findings and my consideration in Chapter 4 of the symbolic importance of upper-class dynasties and ancient family lines in Anglophone Welsh fiction is inspired in part by her essay.

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[61] Smith, 'Images of Aging in American Poetry, 1925-1985', p. 219.
[62] Sipiora, 'Hemingway's Aging Heroes', p. 70.
[63] Mangum, 'Little Women', p. 79.
[64] Mangum, 'Little Women', p. 83.
[65] Maria O'Neill, 'The Ageing of the Anglo-Irish Gentry as Portrayed in the "Big House" Novel', in *The Aesthetics of Ageing: Critical Approaches to Literary Representations of the Ageing Process*, ed. by Maria O'Neill and Carmen Zamorano-Llena (Lleida, Catalunya: University of Lleida, 2002), pp. 97-110.

b) Welsh Writing in English

Like literary gerontology, the study of Welsh writing in English is a relatively new academic specialism. While writers including Anthony Conran, Raymond Garlick, Glyn Jones, Gwyn Jones, Roland Mathias, and John Pikoulis were critiquing Anglophone Welsh literature before the 1980s, the Association for Welsh Writing in English was not established until 1984, with its peer-reviewed periodical – 'the first academic journal to be devoted solely to the study of the English-language writing of Wales' – following in 1995.[66] Perhaps as a consequence of the comparative youth of the field, at present there are no scholarly studies of ageing in Welsh literature in English. While some examples of criticism focused on the work of individual writers consider issues of late style,[67] no comparative analysis of texts concerned with later life exists and possible links between renderings of old age and conceptions of Welsh national identity have not been examined. Despite this gap in existing scholarship, recent criticism on Anglophone Welsh writing suggests that it is a literature which attends to the experiences of isolated and subjugated people in various ways. By mapping some of the key preoccupations of this body of research, I hope to demonstrate how my thesis relates to recent work in the field.

Up until the 1990s, a significant proportion of the scholarship on Welsh writing in English – or 'Anglo-Welsh literature', as it was called at this time – was concerned with mapping this body of literature, even verifying and defending its existence. In their chronological surveys, Raymond Garlick and Roland Mathias outline the historical use of English within Wales and provide extensive lists of 'Welshmen' – the writers discussed are, overwhelmingly, male – working in English

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[66] Tony Brown, 'Editorial', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 1 (1995), 3-4 (p. 3).

[67] See, for example, the final chapter of Tony Brown's monograph on R.S. Thomas. Tony Brown, *R.S. Thomas*, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 90-118.

as far back as the fifteenth century.[68] Both critics begin their explorations with Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal's *Hymn to the Virgin* (c. 1470) and engage with debates over whether writers such as George Herbert, George Meredith, and Edward Thomas should be classed as 'Anglo-Welsh'. Indeed, the question of what makes an Anglo-Welsh writer or text is addressed by Garlick, Mathias, and several of their contemporaries, including Glyn Jones, Gwyn Jones, and Anthony Conran.[69] Considering 'the Anglo-Welsh claim to Edward Thomas' in *The Cost of Strangeness* (1982), for example, Conran judges some of Thomas's poems more Anglo-Welsh than others and, later in the same volume, states that: 'Welsh people can write various kinds of poetry in English that are not properly Anglo-Welsh.'[70] Similarly, Mathias differentiates between a 'first flowering' of Anglo-Welsh literature, including the work of Caradoc Evans, Rhys Davies, Dylan Thomas, Keidrych Rhys, Alun Lewis, and Margiad Evans, amongst others, and a chronologically-overlapping 'second movement' into which he places David Jones, the poet Gwyn Williams, R.S. Thomas, and Emyr Humphreys. Mathias is more approving of the second group than of the first. It is the focus on Welsh subject matter and echoes of the bardic tradition to be found within the second movement which attracts him:

> That this first twentieth-century wave of Anglo-Welsh writing was deep and rich […] cannot be doubted. But its direction was out and away from Wales. Meanwhile, and often concurrently, a less distinguishable ocean swell […] was gathering – a movement much less popular, much more erudite, much less immediately successful or desirous of being so, one which, in emphasising heritage and tradition, was already conscious of the damage to the Welsh way of life which so much exploitation and popularisation had caused. It was […]

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[68] Raymond Garlick, *An Introduction to Anglo-Welsh Literature*, new edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972). Roland Mathias, *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987).

[69] Glyn Jones, *The Dragon has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writing and Writers*, revised edn, ed. by Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001). Gwyn Jones, *Being and Belonging: Some Notes on Language, Literature and the Welsh* (Cardiff: BBC Wales, 1977). Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982).

[70] Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p. 64.

> less self-absorbed, reverting to the older Welsh tradition in which the poet had a duty to his community as well as to his muse.[71]

In contrast, Gwyn Jones rejects ‘the odd notion that an Anglo-Welsh author is a Welshman who writes in English about Wales’, instead classifying Anglo-Welsh literature as simply ‘the poems, novels, short stories, plays, autobiographies and the like, of the English-language Welsh’.[72]

Glyn Jones and Raymond Garlick also have their opinions on the shape and composition of the field. However, beyond these debates, the first generation of critics of Anglophone Welsh writing broke new ground by undertaking research into a relatively recent body of literature which had never before been a subject of academic scholarship. Conran, in particular, wrote on the work of women writers, including Brenda Chamberlain and Lynette Roberts, and maintained that contemporary Anglo-Welsh poetry should reflect and seek to shape the politics of its time: ‘[…] poetry could be the living voice of a political situation – indeed, if it was to have any reality in Wales, it *had* to be the living voice of a political situation, for everything else was either apathy or English.’[73] Furthermore, although some of the scholarship of this period consists of close analysis of poetry in the style of the Cambridge school,[74] in the criticism of Raymond Williams in the particular, there is a recognition that this body of literature is sensitive to the experiences of those who are oppressed or on the peripheries of society.

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[71] Mathias, *Anglo-Welsh Literature*, p. 98.
[72] Gwyn Jones, *Being and Belonging*, pp. 4-5.
[73] Conran is critiquing Mathias’s editorship of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* here, which he felt was divorced from contemporary politics, particularly language politics. Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p. 297.
[74] See, for example, John Pikoulis: ‘The Two Voices in Alun Lewis’s Poetry 1940-1942’, *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 1 (1995), 40-51.

Williams identifies 'a specifically Welsh structure of feeling' to be found in Welsh industrial novels,[75] arguing that this quality was fostered by the hardship of the Great Depression and the fact that the texts 'are, in majority, written from *inside* the industrial communities'.[76] Williams explains: 'The privileged distances of another kind of fiction, where people can "live simply as human beings", beyond the pressures and interruptions and accidents of society, are in another world or more specifically in another class.'[77] Writing more recently and also considering issues of form and marginalisation, Tony Brown notes that '[a]fter poetry' the short story is the 'major form of expression' of English-language Welsh writers and links this trend to Frank O'Connor's observation that the form 'characteristically articulates the experience of […] "submerged population groups" […] the marginalized, the isolated, the lonely'.[78] Brown points to Wales' position on the fringes of British society – 'for centuries geographically but (more importantly) politically and culturally away from the centers of power' – and, in particular, to the peculiar linguistic position of Welsh writers working in English, who, because they do not generally speak Welsh, are 'aware of the rich and continuing cultural heritage in the Welsh language' but 'shut out from it'.[79] Furthermore, the field features a large number of texts with child protagonists and narrators. In her analysis of two such short stories by Kate Roberts and Dylan Thomas, Jeni Williams similarly connects the writers' situation of being 'excluded from the centre of cultural power' to their placing of children at the heart of their narratives, arguing that 'it is unsurprising that they should be attracted to

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[75] Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979), p. 11.
[76] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, p. 7, emphasis in original.
[77] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, p. 12.
[78] Tony Brown, 'The Ex-Centric Voice: The English-Language Short Story in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 1.1 (2001), 25-41 (pp. 25-26).
[79] Brown, 'The Ex-Centric Voice', p. 27.

children – peripheral figures, like themselves, removed from the centres that control power and legislate meaning'.[80] Focusing on the decision of 'so many English-language Welsh male writers' to employ boy protagonists, Stephen Knight makes a similar observation: 'This is not only male narcissism. The isolation and powerlessness the authors feel […] find an objective correlative in a character subject to forces beyond personal control'.[81]

In recent years, critics have also engaged with experiences and representations of traditionally marginalised groups in Anglophone Welsh writing by focusing on issues of gender and sexuality. Scholars and publishers have sought to recuperate texts by some of the significant number of Welsh women writers whose work was out-of-print and largely forgotten. Working with literary critics, Honno, the independent Welsh women's press, and, to a certain extent, Parthian and Seren have published scholarly editions of neglected texts by the likes of Dorothy Edwards, Margiad Evans, Menna Gallie, Eiluned Lewis, and Allen Raine, rendering their work accessible to a new generation of readers.[82] Furthermore, feminist critics including Jane Aaron and Katie Gramich have begun the task of addressing the gap in research produced by the neglect of literature by women through both comparative studies and research on individual writers.[83] Representations of masculine identity have also

[80] Jeni Williams, 'The Place of Fantasy: Children and Narratives in Two Short Stories by Kate Roberts and Dylan Thomas', *Welsh Writing in English*, 6 (2000), 45-66 (p. 45).
[81] Stephen Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 28.
[82] See, for example, Jane Aaron (ed.), *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850-1950* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), Dorothy Edwards, *Winter Sonata* (1928), ed. by Clare Flay (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2011), and, Margiad Evans, *The Old and the Young* (1948), ed. by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan (Bridgend: Seren, 1998).
[83] As well as being illuminating in their own right, Aaron and Gramich's wide-ranging monographs on writing by women in Wales in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively serve to demonstrate the wealth of literature by Welsh women which is out of print and has yet to receive significant scholarly attention. Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007). Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007). See also, Michelle Deininger's unpublished thesis on short fiction by Welsh women and, for examples of research into individual writers, work by various scholars on Margiad Evans. Michelle Deininger, 'Short Fiction by Women from Wales: A Neglected Tradition' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff

received recent critical attention, for example, in Aidan Byrne's reading of *How Green is My Valley* (1939) by Richard Llewellyn and Sarah Morse's discussion of Ron Berry's *So Long, Hector Bebb* (1970), which utilises work on boxing by scholars concerned with the cultural theory of sports in its analysis of Berry's presentation of male bodies.[84]

Responding to wider developments in literary and cultural criticism, research into Welsh writing in English has also examined renderings of gender and sexual identities as unstable, fluid, or performed. In Meic Stephens's edited collection on the fiction of Rhys Davies, for example, Gramich examines the performance of gender in a number of the writer's short stories, giving particular focus to acts of cross-dressing, while M. Wynn Thomas argues that Davies possesses 'an androgynous imagination', given his frequent adoption of a female point of view when writing about heterosexual encounters.[85] In a similar vein, Tony Brown relates the preponderance of uncanny elements in Glyn Jones's fiction to the writer's feelings of marginalisation and 'inauthenticity' due both to class anxieties and to 'unresolved and probably unrecognized sexual impulses' suggested by homoerotic descriptions in his early fiction, while Bohata examines lesbian imagery in the fiction and personal writings of

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University, 2013). Kirsti Bohata and Katie Gramich (eds), *Rediscovering Margiad Evans: Marginality, Gender and Illness* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

[84] Aidan Byrne, '"The Male Shoutings of Men": Masculinity and Fascist Epistemology in *How Green Was My Valley*', *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, 1 (2013), 167-90. Sarah Morse, '"Maimed Individuals": The Significance of the Body in *So Long, Hector Bebb*', *in Mapping the Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 271-87.

[85] Katie Gramich, 'The Masquerade of Gender in the Stories of Rhys Davies', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 205-15. M. Wynn Thomas, '"Never Seek to Tell thy Love": Rhys Davies's Fiction' (1998), in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, pp. 260-82 (p. 263).

Margiad Evans with reference to Terry Castle's discussion of the ghostly lesbian in literary history.[86]

As Brown's discussion of marginality in the Welsh short story suggests, issues of cultural and political colonisation are fundamental in the work of many Anglophone Welsh creative writers. As such, a number of literary critics draw on postcolonial theory in their interpretation of Welsh writing. Bohata's 2004 monograph *Postcolonialism Revisited* is a major contribution to this area of the field, while critics including Steve Hendon and Diane Green utilise postcolonial approaches in their detailed explorations of the work of individual writers.[87] I draw upon Bohata's work in the final chapter of this thesis. In a related strand of research, Daniel G. Williams offers new perspectives by drawing illuminating comparisons between Welsh culture and that of African Americans and by reading Welsh texts through the lens of theories of ethnicity. In *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945* (2012), for example, Williams adopts a comparative, transatlantic approach to nineteenth and twentieth century cultural productions and political movements including the 1847 Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales (aka 'the Treachery of the Blue Books'), abolitionism, blackface minstrelsy, the campaign for female education in Wales, and the racial uplift movement in the US.[88] Relatedly, in his contribution to Stephens's edited collection on Rhys Davies, the critic compares attitudes to race, particularly Celtic ethnicity, to

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[86] Tony Brown, 'Glyn Jones and the Uncanny', *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 12 (2007-2008), 89-114 (pp. 111-12). Kirsti Bohata, 'The Apparitional Lover: Homoerotic and Lesbian Imagery in the Writing of Margiad Evans', in *Rediscovering Margiad Evans*, pp. 107-28.

[87] Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004). Steve Hendon, '"Everything is Fluid in Me": A Postcolonial Approach to Alun Lewis's *In the Green Tree*', in *Mapping the Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 131-61. Diane Green, *Emyr Humphreys: A Postcolonial Novelist?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009).

[88] Daniel G. Williams, *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

be found in texts by Davies and D.H. Lawrence with Matthew Arnold's views on the subject.[89]

Scholars working on Welsh writing in English have also responded to current developments in literary criticism by pursuing research which can be classified as ecocriticism or literary geography, thus reflecting the recent spatial turn within the discipline. Gramich, for example, explains that her monograph on twentieth-century Welsh women's writing (subtitled 'Land, Gender, Belonging') analyses literary works using an 'approach […] derived from cultural geography, which concerns itself with examining the structural forces that shape human experience'.[90] The critic states:

> From the beginning of the century, Welsh women writers have been engaged in a process of appropriation and reappropriation of the native place, against a background initially of imperialism and latterly of globalization. Literary topographies are important because they are implicitly political and not static; in turn, they inform people's views of Wales and even change what it means to live here.[91]

In a similar vein, Matthew Jarvis terms *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry* (2008) a work of 'literary geography', choosing not to classify the study 'ecocriticism' because his 'agenda here is far more to do with Welsh cultural identity than it is to do with "green" politics'.[92] Moreover, Bohata and Andrew Webb explore literary engagements with the afforestation of Welsh land and the building of reservoirs respectively: two appropriations of Welsh land which have come to symbolise the exercise of colonial and capitalist power in the country.[93] Webb in

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[89] Daniel G. Williams, 'Withered Roots: Ideas of Race in the Writings of Rhys Davies and D.H. Lawrence', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. by Meic Stephens (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2001), pp. 87-103.
[90] Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales*, p. 5.
[91] Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales*, pp. 209-10.
[92] Matthew Jarvis, *Welsh Environments in Contemporary Poetry*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 6.
[93] Bohata, 'The Battle for the Hills: Politicized Landscapes and the Erasure of Place', in *Postcolonialism Revisited*, pp. 80-103. Andrew Webb, 'Socio-ecological Regime Change: Anglophone Welsh Literary Responses to Reservoir Construction', *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English*, 1 (2013), 19-44.

particular embraces the ecocritical approach, employing Jason W. Moore's concept of 'socio-ecological regime change' – 'the reorganization of the people and environment within a particular locality in order to facilitate the accumulation of capital elsewhere' – in his reading of poetry by Ruth Bidgood, Gillian Clarke, R.S. Thomas, and Harri Webb.[94]

It should be noted that a number of the examples of recent criticism cited above do not focus solely on texts in English, but instead attend to writing in both national languages. Given that *Black Skin, Blue Books* by Daniel G. Williams is underpinned by comparative analysis of texts from the cultures of two different nations, it is fitting that the critic draws on works in both English and Welsh. Similarly, as Bohata's *Postcolonialism Revisited* is concerned with issues of cultural colonisation, its bilingual scope is illuminating. Aaron and Gramich's surveys of writing by Welsh women are also rendered more authoritative by the fact that they compare works written in English and in Welsh, while, in *The Literature of Wales* (2017), Dafydd Johnston manages to provide an introduction to Taliesin and Aneurin, contemporary works by Owen Sheers and Angharad Price, and many writers in between in one informative volume.[95] Furthermore, in the first generation of scholars of Anglophone Welsh writing, Glyn Jones, Anthony Conran, and Gwyn Jones all attempted to bridge the gap between the literatures of Wales's two languages by translating Welsh poetry and prose into English.

Perhaps the most recent development in the study of Welsh writing in English and the area of research with the most synergies with my own work is the growth in critical interest in the representation of disability. Acknowledging research into

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[94] Webb, 'Socio-ecological Regime Change', p. 19.

[95] Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales*, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017).

disability in postcolonial fiction, Knight states that various twentieth and twenty-first-century Welsh novels 'bring forward to consciousness the images of disability that have had a covert presence in the post-war imagination'.[96] The critic describes a common trope in which disability comes to symbolise the frustration, disempowerment, and social decay of deprived communities in post-industrial novels, as well as discussing novelists who 'work[…] in a more directly narrative way on the same theme […] [c]ombining dark social realism with symbolic views of human possibilities'.[97] Michelle Deininger also finds positive possibilities in Bernice Rubens' 'rewriting' of disabled identities in *I Sent a Letter to My Love* (1975), arguing that 'it is the text's persistent undermining of the negative connotations of disabled bodies that is perhaps the most radical aspect of the entire novel'.[98] Furthermore, in her recent thesis on disability in contemporary Anglophone Welsh writing, Georgia Burdett contends that socioeconomic and historical factors particular to Wales have given images of disability a special significance in the country's literature:

> […] contemporary Welsh writing in English has been particularly perceptive in its development of the representation of disabled subjectivities. Oppressed and deprived social locations create identities and perspectives, embodiments and feelings, histories and experiences that stand outside the powerful ideologies that enclose them. Historical circumstances have meant that Wales has been more ready than many other areas to acknowledge disability as part of the life-course for the vast majority of its population. Consequently, writers of Welsh literature in English have much to say on the matter of disability, illness and well-being.[99]

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[96] Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 185. Bohata and Alexandra Jones argue that the foregrounding of disability is also a characteristic of earlier fictional representations of heavy industry by Welsh women writers. Kirsti Bohata and Alexandra Jones, 'Welsh Women's Industrial Fiction 1880-1910', *Women's Writing*, 24.4 (2017), 499-516.
[97] Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 184.
[98] Michelle Deininger, '"It Was Forbidden, Strictly Forbidden": Contesting Taboo in Bernice Rubens's *I Sent a Letter to My Love* (1975)', in *Mapping the Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 289-308 (p. 305).
[99] Georgia Burdett, 'Filling the Void: Representation of Disability in Contemporary Welsh Writing in English' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Swansea University, 2014), p. 3.

Given the affinity with those who are oppressed, isolated, or on the peripheries of society which Burdett, Brown, Raymond Williams, and others have observed to be a particular characteristic of Anglophone Welsh writing, it is unsurprising that older characters have played significant roles in Welsh fiction written in English since the emergence of this body of literature. I hope that the focus in the above survey on the ways in which critics have explored such issues of marginality in Welsh literature in English gives an indication of a key direction within the field, alongside which I situate my own research.

Original Contribution to the Field(s)

As noted above, there are no scholarly studies of old age in Welsh fiction – or, indeed, Welsh literature – written in English. Beyond contributing to addressing this gap in research at a time when interest in ageing is growing across the humanities and social sciences, this thesis adds to the body of literary criticism which considers marginalised, isolated, and disempowered identities in the field of Anglophone Welsh writing. Furthermore, my analysis includes readings of a number of under-researched novels and short stories. Thanks to the relatively new availability through Parthian's Library of Wales series, Honno, and Seren of various previously out-of-print texts, I have considered Glyn Jones's *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956), Menna Gallie's *The Small Mine* (1962), works by Hilda Vaughan and Eiluned Lewis, and some of Margiad Evans's less well-known short fictions. This thesis also explores recent texts by contemporary writers which have yet to receive significant scholarly attention, such as *The Book of Idiots* (2012) by Christopher Meredith, *Remember Me* (2004) by Trezza Azzopardi, Rachel Trezise's *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000), and short

stories by Emyr Humphreys, Glenda Beagan, and Siân James. Moreover, I hope that the theoretical models employed and the comparisons drawn between texts which have not been considered together in the past bring new insights to more familiar novels and short stories. For example, in Chapter 4, I apply Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to Kate Roberts's *Feet in Chains* (1936), Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960), and *On the Black Hill* (1982) by Bruce Chatwin, while Chapter 3 presents a comparative analysis of formally and stylistically contrasting texts by Kate Roberts, B.S. Johnson, and Trezza Azzopardi.

As well as adding to knowledge in the field of Anglophone Welsh fiction, this study also contributes to the discipline of literary gerontology. My thesis covers new ground by considering ageing alongside issues related to cultural, national, linguistic, and class identities. As discussed above, Waxman discusses older protagonists' relationships with their cultural or national identities briefly in her monograph on the *reifungsroman* or 'novel of ripening', while Chivers and King explore such issues in individual novels. However, my research takes in a greater number of primary sources than the criticism that has come before and also establishes a theoretical framework for its examination of ageing and national identity. Like the feminist critics discussed above, I consider intersections between ageing and gender. Older women prove particularly important in Welsh fiction in English; however, I also address the representation of older male figures and, as such, my work contributes to research in this leaner body of criticism. My thesis bolsters an emerging area of interest in literary criticism about female ageing by examining texts which explore the powerful potential of intergenerational relationships between women. Like Chivers, I discuss the capacity of fictional grandmothers to provide inspirational imaginings of later life, but my work also expands on what has gone before by considering Welsh texts and

the cultural specificity of Welsh grandmothers. Chivers and King both observe the connection between older women, storytelling, and the transmission of knowledge from the past, especially knowledge from communities which are marginalised or in the minority for reasons of race, language, or geography. I investigate such links in Welsh fiction in English, analysing a range of novels and short stories and also finding examples of male storytellers and remembrancers of the past.

Structure, Methodology, and Theoretical Approach

This study examines an as yet unexplored aspect of Welsh fiction in English and seeks to establish the special significance of older characters in this distinctive body of literature. As such, the thesis is broad in both the number of primary sources it considers and the timespan which these texts encompass (the earliest work cited is Allen Raine's *Queen of the Rushes* (1906) and the most recent is *The Book of Idiots* (2012) by Christopher Meredith). My review of the field of literary gerontology suggests that fictional representations of old age can be analysed from a number of different perspectives and that such critical activity will shed light on various aspects of the ageing process – including bodily, psychological, and social ageing, and on creative and cultural processes more generally. Therefore, this thesis employs a mixed methodology and each chapter takes a different approach to the subject of ageing.

My mixed methodology comprises close comparative analysis of a range of novels and short stories, underpinned by theoretical perspectives taken from the fields of cultural and literary theory, philosophy (including phenomenology), sociology, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies. In keeping with the change of approach which comes with each chapter, the theoretical models also vary. It is not possible to

describe in detail all the theories applied within the confines of this introduction. Instead, this section outlines the main concepts in brief, giving an indication of the ends to which they are employed. Individual theoretical works are then discussed in the necessary level of detail within the main analysis.

The examination in Chapter 2 of this study of Welsh writers' renderings of the stock figure of the older female gossip is informed by Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994), a cultural history of fairy tales and the women who fostered their oral transmission. I draw on Warner's examination of the gossip's etymological links to the older woman's traditional role as a godparent, midwife, or guest at christenings and also on the critic's investigation of the figure's relationship with the characters of Mother Goose and Mother Stork. Of particular importance to my discussion is Warner's recognition that the knowledge of these older female storytellers and characters, like fairy tales themselves, was often held in uncertain regard. Further, the critic states that the negative associations of the gossip grew out of patriarchal attempts to stem the spread of powerful female knowledge. I also employ Warner's observations on the women who passed on fairy tales in Chapter 4 as part of my wider exploration of older women storytellers and custodians of the past.

Chapter 2 is also underpinned by the work of a founding figure in the field of literary gerontology, Kathleen Woodward. Examples of inspirational grandmothers are analysed with reference to Woodward's assertion that 'the older woman is a missing person in Freudian psychoanalysis'.[100] Woodward argues that the Oedipal structure of nuclear familial relations, based on two generations and privileging sexual

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[100] Kathleen Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Ageism', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 79-96 (p. 86).

differentiations above all others, is not the most helpful way of describing the psychological growth of girls. Instead, she suggests a linear, tri-generational structure of formative relationships concerned with the developing child, the mother, and grandmother. As with Warner's observations on female power and older women's voices, I return to Woodward's findings in my discussion of matrilineal legacies and the positive potential of intergenerational relationships between women in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Finally, with regard to the theoretical basis of my consideration of stock older characters, I consider the metaphor which conflates old age with childhood in my analysis of representations of playful older men. In discussing works by Dylan Thomas and Glyn Jones, I turn to Jenny Hockey and Allison James's theorisation of the operation of this imagery, especially their demonstration of its power to 'obscure' the 'adult status' of older individuals.[101]

Chapter 3 turns to representations of the experience of ageing as viewed by older protagonists themselves. As is the case in most scholarship on this subject, this investigation is informed by the work of Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir's assertions that we discover our own ageing in the faces or our contemporaries and that older visions of ourselves constituted by the cultures in which we exist are 'Other' within us are important to my analysis. Moreover, both de Beauvoir and Bryan S. Turner describe a disjunction between the individual's ageing body and their more constant self within. This disconnection between self and body can be observed in two of the frail older characters examined in Chapter 3. My discussion of renderings of bodily ageing and the interrelationship between physical health and social constructions of ageing is informed by the work of physician and philosopher Drew

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[101] Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 'Back to Our Futures: Imaging Second Childhood', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 135-48 (p. 137).

Leder. I draw on Leder's critique of the continued influence of Cartesian dualism in modern medical practice in my reading of B.S. Johnson's *House Mother Normal* (1971). In addition, Leder's discussion of the phenomenon of bodily 'dys-appearance' is employed in relation to Trezza Azzopardi's *Remember Me* (2004). Leder argues that, although the state of being human is necessarily an 'incarnated' experience, in the course of everyday life, one's body largely disappears as a focus for thoughts and actions.[102] However, during times of illness, pain, discomfort, or changes such as adolescence or old age, the body becomes more present. This is 'dys-appearance':

> It is characteristic of the body itself to presence in times of breakdown or problematic performance. […] At moments of breakdown I experience to my body, not simply from it. My body demands a direct and focal thematization. In contrast to the 'disappearances' that characterize ordinary functioning, I will term this the principle of dys-appearance.[103]

Finally, my discussion of renderings of older subjectivity takes in the experience of time with reference to Henri Bergson's theory of duration. The philosopher's conception of time as non-linear and his rejection of the neat divisions between the past and the present which we employ in our everyday lives has implications for ideas about identity and its existence over time. Further, Bergson's work suggests that our experiences of time are highly subjective. Both these conclusions prove helpful in interpreting Welsh fiction about old age.

Raymond Williams's *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (1979) provides a starting point for the final chapter of this study, recognising, as it does, Welsh writers' use of the family as a device for presenting the shifts in the circumstances and experiences of the Welsh working class:

> The immediate family can be seen, from much attested experience, as the local bonding, of love and care, against the general hardship. But then, in one powerful form, what happens to this family, as not only industrial

[102] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 1.
[103] Leder, *The Absent Body*, pp. 83-84.

> development, and not only industrial conflict, but now industrial depression, at once unites it in a common condition and then pulls it this way and that, dividing or even breaking it, in the struggle for survival.[104]

Guided by Williams's observation, this thesis explores writers' utilisation of relationships between older characters and members of younger generations to represent social change, class dynamics, and Wales' past, particularly the country's working-class history. Chapter 4 also refers to theories of national identity and postcolonial theory in its exploration of older storytellers and custodians of the past. I draw upon Benedict Anderson's theorisation of the development of 'languages-of-power' and linguistic hierarchies within nation states in my consideration of linguistic difference in the fiction of Kate Roberts. Further, my examination of older characters, memory, and Welsh identity is informed by Anderson's discussion of the ideological acts of remembering and forgetting required of populations in order that they can imagine themselves as nations. I supplement my use of Anderson's theories with Prys Morgan's work on the rediscovery and reinvention of Wales' 'past, historical, linguistic and literary traditions' for patriotic reasons in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[105] Finally, with regards to theoretical perspectives on processes of recollection, Kirsti Bohata's application of postcolonial theory to Welsh literature also informs my investigation. Bohata cites bell hooks and Milan Kundera when she argues that a number of Welsh poets seek to preserve memories of places lost due to the appropriation of Welsh land by the British government. Their creative work can thus be read as a form of resistance to such acts of colonisation:

> each writer […] is writing *against* the loss of a culture, against the loss of memory of a place; so, in (re)populating the places that have been both portrayed as empty and actually emptied by the policies of central

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[104] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, pp. 13-14.

[105] Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 43-100 (p. 44).

> government, these writers seek to re-member past and place and so to change the present and future of Wales.[106]

Having established the methodology of this thesis and the main theoretical concepts informing it, the final section of this introduction gives a brief summary of each chapter, outlining their main arguments, structure, and the writers under consideration.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 begins my exploration of representations of ageing in Anglophone Welsh fiction by examining several older character types which recur across the field, some of which can be classed as stereotypes. Starting with what are superficially the most negative of these stock figures, I undertake close analysis of examples of gossips and burdens, cantankerous older people, and those who are forgetful or suffering from dementia in short stories and novels by Caradoc Evans, Margiad Evans, Dylan Thomas, Allen Raine, Rhys Davies, Glenda Beagan, and Kate Roberts. However stereotypical their ageing characters, all these writers encourage empathy in the reader at the very least. A small number of the texts considered do reinforce some of the negative aspects of the stereotypes upon which they draw; however, in most cases the writers complicate and undermine them. It becomes apparent that many of these stereotypes are gendered. Indeed, some of the most thought-provoking presentations of ageing stereotypes in the field are those which upset traditional conceptions of femininity and older sexuality. Furthermore, texts by writers including Margiad Evans, Glenda Beagan, and Kate Roberts create an awareness of the socioeconomic

[106] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 102, emphasis in original.

circumstances which limit their older characters or foreground the discourses which stereotype them.

My discussion moves on to contemplate more positive older character types, including wise men and women, inspirational grandmothers, playful older men, and single ageing women, in texts by Hilda Vaughan, Gwyn Thomas, Glyn Jones, Rachel Trezise, Dylan Thomas, Christopher Meredith, Margiad Evans, Rhys Davies, and Trezza Azzopardi. These renderings are not without their problems, however. The stock character of the wise old man or woman can be seen to conceal the extent to which experiences of ageing are shaped by socioeconomic forces, while my discussion of older male characters interrogates the metaphor that views old age as a second childhood. This section on ageing men also explores the effects of retirement on male characters, alongside the use of humour in their representation. Furthermore, several remarkable grandmother characters are discussed with reference to the figure of the Welsh Mam, and one of the main arguments of this thesis is introduced: that older people in general, and ageing women in particular, symbolise an embattled Welsh identity in a significant number of texts. The chapter ends with analysis of portrayals of older unmarried women – spinsters, lesbians, and widows. In several of the examples considered, musical talent operates as shorthand for active sexuality and a level of personal and emotional complexity which contradicts stereotypical images of ageing spinsters. These women are some of the most radical renderings of old age to be found in Anglophone Welsh fiction. In addition to utilising theoretical works by Warner, Woodward, and Hockey and James, as outlined above, the interpretation of literary texts in this chapter is informed by anthropologist Haim Hazan’s theorisation of cultural representations and stereotypes of old age in *Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions* (1994), feminist critic Lynne Segal’s recent treatment of these

subjects in *Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing* (2013), and Maryhelen C. Harmon's illuminating analysis of 'Old Maid' characters in the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Dickens, and William Faulkner.

Following on from my investigation in Chapter 2 of ageing characters viewed by the reader from the outside, in Chapter 3 I turn to representations of older people seen from within, considering texts which portray protagonists' experiences of later life. This chapter analyses renderings of the experience of physical ageing and conceptions of the self in old age and explores the interactions between these two aspects of older subjectivity. Given the observation by a number of scholars in the field that such experiences are always culturally constituted, my examination takes in the social interactions of older characters and their effect in shaping identity. The experience of time in later life and the operation of memory are also considered. For the most part, this chapter is focused on texts by three writers with contrasting formal and stylistic approaches to their fiction: short stories by Kate Roberts (published between 1929 and 1969); B.S. Johnson's late-modernist novel *House Mother Normal* (1971); and *Remember Me* by Trezza Azzopardi (2004).

These novels and short fictions include some of the bleakest imaginings of old age to be found in Welsh fiction in English, focusing on those at the frailer end of the ageing spectrum and, in many cases, on individuals who are limited by their lack of financial resources. To give as representative a picture as possible of the state of old age in the field, I supplement my discussion of these texts with brief examination of a motif which appears in several recent short stories and provides a contrast to the fears, physical difficulties, losses, and regrets portrayed by Roberts, Johnson, and Azzopardi. Glenda Beagan and Emyr Humphreys have both written about widowed women who find themselves returning to places from their childhoods and developing

personally and politically after losing their husbands. Of particular interest for this thesis is the fact that the protagonists in Beagan and Humphreys's short fictions reengage with their Welsh identity as they build new lives in widowhood. Furthermore, the idea of home is a stabilising force for the central characters in both texts, as it is in fiction from across the chronological scope of this thesis including Allen Raine's 'Home, Sweet Home' (1908). Chapter 3 draws upon a number of theoretical works, including Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny' and Simone de Beauvoir's *Old Age* (1971), as well as Drew Leder's work in the field of the philosophy of medicine, Henri Bergson's theory of duration, and Bryan S. Turner's identification of the disjunction between the changed older body and the more constant self within.

Chapter 4 argues that the prevalence of older characters in the field of Anglophone Welsh fiction is related to the political, social, and cultural changes of the last 120 years or so, especially the upheavals of the twentieth century. It asserts that Welsh writers use older characters and their relationships with younger generations to represent these changes and to symbolise certain formations of Welsh national identity. Friction between generations is discussed with reference to *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956) by Glyn Jones, Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960), and *Feet in Chains* (1936) by Kate Roberts. Class mobility is argued to be an important factor in creating divisions between generations in all three texts, with linguistic differences also featuring in Roberts's novel. Older characters are also shown to act as links to and remembrancers of the past, particularly working-class histories. They are argued to symbolise a conception of Welsh identity grounded in this understanding of the past, in the Welsh language, and Nonconformist belief, amongst other qualities. Chapter 4 explores the symbolic use of upper-class older

characters to represent the decline of aristocratic family lines in short stories by Eiluned Lewis and Emyr Humphreys. Drawing on Mikhail Baktin's theory of the chronotope, it also examines a recurrent trope in which family portraits symbolise the pressure exerted on younger generations by a sense of duty to one's ancestors. I discuss the legacy of propriety which some older characters attempt to bequeath their descendants, asserting that this concern with proper behaviour is connected with older women in particular and is linked to the wider association of ageing characters with religious observance in Welsh fiction in English.

The penultimate section of Chapter 4 demonstrates that many of the older remembrancers of the past to be found in Welsh fiction in English are storytellers who pass on narratives and knowledge to younger generations, using examples from the work of Kate Roberts, Margiad Evans, Jack Jones, and Glenda Beagan. These characters tell stories about the places where they live; they are often associated with the preternatural, with ancient and pagan knowledge, and with unofficial oral histories. The chapter's final section asks what it is about Welsh literature and culture which prompts so many writers to include these older storytellers and custodians of the past in their work, with reference to works on the formation of national identity by Benedict Anderson and Prys Morgan. The representation of older characters is shown to be important to engagement with memories of working-class struggle and postcolonial debates over the ownership of Wales. Finally, Chapter 4 investigates the fact that so many of the field's older custodians of the past are women. Here the discussion draws on Marina Warner's study of the older women who were major creators and recounters of fairy tales, as well as Kirsti Bohata's application of postcolonial theories of domestic space and resistance to the Welsh language and her analysis of the figure of Dame Wales. Literary works – and, indeed, scholarly theses –

which engage with the value to be found in an awareness of the past carry with them a problematic potential for nostalgia. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the writers and texts selected for inclusion in this study avoid the temptations of sentimentality.

2 Unsettling Assumptions: Older Figures and Character Types in Anglophone Welsh Fiction

Critics and commentators have turned their attention increasingly in recent decades to the roles that the dominant Western cultural discourse offers to elderly people, the behaviours it expects them to exhibit, and the stereotypes it forces upon them. Haim Hazan, for example, describes characteristics commonly attributed to older people including one of the 'most deeply rooted stereotypes': 'that they are conservative, inflexible and resistant to change […] incapable of creativity, of making progress, of starting afresh.'[1] This 'general image of infertility and inertia' is manifested in 'the perception of the aged as devoid of sexuality' and as possessing an 'inability to learn – to store and process information'.[2] Further, older people are assumed to be both 'senile' and 'supernaturally wise', dependent and powerless, but also 'disturbing and threatening'.[3] The contradictory aspects of these assumptions do not lessen their power. Rather, Hazan argues that flexibility is a key component in the operation of stereotypes of elderly people:

> The information received about old people is often ambiguous, and because of this the stereotype overrides our perception of them even in face-to-face interaction. […] A stereotype is presumed universally applicable, without regard to interpersonal differences. It is enormously flexible and therefore useful in handling variegated and changing situations […].[4]

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[1] Haim Hazan, *Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 28.
[2] Hazan, *Old Age*, pp. 28-29.
[3] Hazan, *Old Age*, pp. 30-31.
[4] Hazan, *Old Age*, p. 28.

Lynne Segal observes that stereotypes are applied differently to older men and older women, and that ageing women have been particularly vilified. Discussing attitudes to old age from ancient Greece to the present day, Segal states:

> […] however much old men have been lampooned for their ugliness, witless infirmities, or ageing lechery, especially when marrying much younger women, it was elderly women who aroused the most terrifying degrees of horror. Throughout world literature and across historical time down to the present, ageing women have been depicted as dangerous and destructive creatures when seen as having power, or else as feeble and repellent objects of pity or contempt, when seen as needy and dependent.[5]

The danger of these stereotypes for older individuals and society more widely makes them an important concern for any study of representations of ageing. Segal observes that the 'denigrating caricature of the elderly' has resulted in both 'routine cruelty' and 'overwhelming acts of brutality', citing early modern witch-hunts where 'around three-quarters of the tens of thousands of victims who were tried, tortured and executed as witches in central Europe were older women'.[6] With regard to the present day, Hazan argues that stereotypes 'are useful for camouflaging the social arrangements which we impose upon the aged members of our society',[7] while Kathleen Woodward finds a 'youthful structure of the look' – 'the culturally induced tendency to degrade and reduce an older person to the prejudicial category of old age' – in recent American popular cinema.[8]

A survey of English language fiction by Welsh writers uncovers numerous older characters, both protagonists and more minor players, performing various social and narrative roles. Several character types recur across a range of novels and short

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[5] Lynne Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 42.
[6] Segal, *Out of Time*, pp. 42-43.
[7] Hazan, *Old Age*, p. 32.
[8] Kathleen Woodward, 'Performing Age, Performing Gender', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 18.1 (2006), 162-89 (p. 164).

stories. These figures can be seen to be born out of and to respond to the common assumptions about older people and stereotypes which are identified and interrogated by Hazan, Segal, Woodward, and others. In this chapter, I will explore Welsh writers' treatments of stock older characters including burdens, gossips, cantankerous elderly people, those with dementia, wise older people, beloved grandmothers, grandfathers, and spinsters. My analysis will include consideration of the gendering of a number of these figures and the differences in the treatment of older men compared to that of older women.

Burdens and Dependants

Caradoc Evans's 'Be This Her Memorial' (1915) is perhaps the best known work of Welsh fiction dealing with the life of an elderly character, coming as it does from the writer's seminal and provocative collection *My People*.[9] One of several texts which represent the treatment of older people as burdens on their communities, the short story follows the decline of an ageing resident of the village of Manteg, Evans's satirical rendering of Rhydlewis in Ceredigion, and is part of the wider critique in *My People* of the hypocrisy and cruelty of the Nonconformist religious elite which the writer perceived in the village where he grew up. The tone is savagely sardonic and *My People*'s archaic language and peculiar syntax – which is both pseudo-biblical and reminiscent of Welsh sentence structure – are in evidence.[10] Devoted to the local

[9] In his examination of responses on both sides of the border to the publication of *My People*, John Harris acknowledges that, although the press in England 'praised the book in the highest terms and welcomed Evans as a writer of outstanding gifts', '[i]n Wales things were rather different'. The critic writes of the Welsh reaction: 'No book, before or since, has remotely provoked such an uproar and for almost two years Caradoc's name regularly made the headlines.' John Harris, 'Introduction', in *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 1987), pp. 7-47 (p. 37).

[10] Belinda Humfrey argues that in *My People* Evans's 'strength is in his style', asserting: 'The simple, ponderous biblical style is, of course, ironic, given its evil usage in Caradoc's peasant community. It is

minister, protagonist Old Nanni is persuaded by an unscrupulous salesman to spend her Poor Relief on an illustrated bible – a gift for the 'Respected Josiah Bryn-Bevan' before he leaves his congregation for a new calling.[11] She also spends days walking the surrounding countryside to hear the minister preach before he departs, angering her neighbours in the process.

It appears that Nanni should be respected by the people of Manteg. Her advanced age means that 'she remembered the birth of each person that gathered in Capel Sion', making her an important repository of memory for the congregation (108).[12] Furthermore, she has played a role in raising the community's minister, having 'helped to bring Josiah into the world' (109). However, Nanni is held in low regard. The arrogant officer for Poor Relief expects humble gratitude for the little she receives from 'him and God' (108), while other villagers believe this charity buys them the right to make her labour in the fields. When she deteriorates physically as she struggles to afford the bible, her fellow worshippers reject her:

> […] Nanni came to Capel Sion with an ugly sore at the side of her mouth; repulsive matter oozed slowly from it, forming into a head, and then coursing thickly down her chin on to the shoulder of her black cape, where it glistened among the beads. […]
>
> 'Old Nanni', folk remarked while discussing her over their dinner-tables, 'is getting as dirty as an old sow.' (111)

The likening of the protagonist to an animal here suggests that she is othered in the eyes of the villagers, as does Evans's utilisation of the common stereotype which

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destructive because it is mixed with an atmospheric, caricatured rendering of Welsh-English and its idiomatic inversions, together with Evans's grotesque translations of the Welsh. The latter reveal Manteg's mental reduction of divinity: as heaven becomes a place of "white shirts" and God becomes the "Great Male" or "Big Man".' Belinda Humfrey, 'Prelude to the Twentieth Century', in *Welsh Writing in English*, ed. by M. Wynn Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 7-46 (p. 44).

[11] Caradoc Evans, 'Be This Her Memorial', in *My People* (1915), (Bridgend: Seren, 1987), pp. 108-12 (p. 109). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

[12] The role of older people, particularly older women, as storytellers and custodians of their communities' histories will be explored further in Chapter 4.

designates troublesome older women witches when a neighbour observes that 'from within [Nanni's house] there issued an abominable smell as might have come from the boiler of the witch who one time lived on the moor' (111). Marina Warner discusses the branding of inconvenient elderly people as witches, particularly those who are vulnerable and have been subjected to abuse:

> In England, in 1624, a law against cursing was passed, and its targets were not only men who swore, but women who could conjure. Victims identified as witches in league with the Devil by inquisitors and prickers were often only poor old folk who might use swearing and vituperation to retaliate against maltreatment or neglect in default of other means of defence.[13]

Nanni's weeping sore is a difficult-to-ignore visual manifestation of the poverty she suffers, which has, until this point, been intimated to the reader through references to her 'mud-walled' cottage, 'crooked, wrinkled, toothless' appearance and 'blackened gums' (108-09). These suggestions culminate in the text's last, arresting image of Nanni's body being devoured by the rats which had served as her food source. This scene finally reveals the community's cruelty and neglect, hidden for so long by the trappings of piety.

'The Wicked Woman' (1933) by Margiad Evans shares its subject matter and some tonal aspects with 'Be This Her Memorial', and also condemns the treatment of its oldest character. The story relates the chaos that ensues one dark night when 'Old' John Morgan is found stuck in a boggy pond, apparently having been pushed in by his

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[13] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 39. For a discussion of witches in Welsh fiction, see Chapter 5, entitled 'Witches, Druids and the Hounds of Annwn', of Jane Aaron's *Welsh Gothic*. Although the witch is 'a global phenomenon in folklore', the critic argues that 'there are unexpected and distinguishing aspects to the history of Celtic witches'. The number of people executed as witches in Wales, Ireland, and the Scottish Highlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in comparison to other parts of the British Isles suggests that 'Celtic communities showed greater reluctance than elsewhere to hand their witches over to the authorities'. Furthermore, Aaron discusses the two Welsh words for witch – '*gwrach*' and '*gwiddon*' – explaining that the latter term 'includes within it the concept of knowing, of being one who knows […]. And fictional accounts of witches in Welsh literature characteristically strongly emphasize her knowingness.' The critic also argues that rebellion against the patriarchal order and rigid conceptions of gender is key to the representation of witches in a number of novels and short stories. Jane Aaron, *Welsh Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 139-40 and 148.

son or daughter-in-law, the 'wicked woman' of the title. John's neighbours act quickly and work together to save the elderly man's life. Where the language of Caradoc Evans's text and the opening aphoristic statement that 'Mice and rats, as it is said, frequent neither churches nor poor men's homes' suggest a parable or fable (108), Margiad Evans's story similarly feels like a cautionary tale when the first sentence contrasts the titular character's outward goodness with the fact that 'she was like Satan inside'.[14] Furthermore, where Caradoc Evans's story culminates with the revelation of the consequences of Manteg's hidden cruelty, Margiad Evans also creates a sense that unkind acts are being concealed by emphasising the darkness under which John's fall and rescue take place. Like 'Be This Her Memorial', 'The Wicked Woman' reflects traditional character types. Margiad Evans's depiction of 'wicked woman' Florence Morgan echoes old fears about younger wives banishing their husbands' parents from the family home. Warner argues that, as many tellers of fairy tales were older women, the frequent disappearance of mothers in their narratives reflects the 'fear [the older woman storyteller] feels, the animus she harbours against her daughter-in-law or daughters-in-law'. The critic explains that, in the past, '[a] mother-in-law had good reason to fear her son's wife, when she often had to strive to maintain her position and assert her continuing rights to a livelihood in the patrilineal household.'[15] While Warner views this experience as more common to women than to men, her discussion suggests that ageing fathers-in-law were also at risk:

> English wills of the seventeenth century show that widowed parents were customarily cared for in the household of their eldest child: the continuing right to shelter, to a place by the family hearth, to bed and board, was granted

[14] Margiad Evans, 'The Wicked Woman' (1933), in *The Old and the Young* (1948), (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 19-23, p. 19. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[15] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 227.

> and observed. However, as *King Lear* reveals, even in the case of a powerful king the exercise of such a right could meet ferocious resistance and reprisals.'[16]

While both short stories condemn the treatment their older characters receive, their critiques operate in quite different ways. Where Caradoc Evans's satire alludes to and undermines the stereotype of the bent, ugly, witch-like old woman, Margiad Evans creates sympathy for John by emphasising his humanness. There is great kindness in John's rescuers' actions as they bring the 'dark mass on the ground' back to life, seemingly shaping this rejected being back into human form: 'The two men [..] began pulling and jerking it into erratic life. Frenziedly, and then more rhythmically, they raised and lowered the arms. They rubbed the heart.' (21) Furthermore, the writer's description of John being moved in a wheelbarrow, his legs scraping the ground, 'jolting stiffly like a new-born lamb's' (22), suggests vulnerability and innocence, which make John's son and daughter-in-law's murderous actions seem all the worse. However, despite his betrayal by his family, the reaction of the older man's neighbours to his plight offers an imagining of a community which cares and takes responsibility for its senior citizens, therefore providing a contrast to Caradoc Evans's Manteg.

[16] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 228. See also 'A Bundle of Life' (1915) by Caradoc Evans, in which elderly Silas and Nansi are cast off their land by their violent son-in-law. Despite being the dominant partner in the marriage, speaking abusively to his wife and forcing her to perform most of the heavy work on their farm, Silas is treated as badly as Nansi by the family's new patriarch Abram Bowen. In a symbolic turn of events, the couple are sent to live in the cottage previously inhabited by Old Nanni of 'Be This Her Memorial'. Caradoc Evans, 'A Bundle of Life' (1915), in *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 1987), pp. 127-33.

Gossips

The gossip is a particularly feminine stereotype which is connected to a long history of misogynistic condemnation of women who seek to make their voices heard. In her study of fairy tales and those who tell them, Warner charts the development of the gossip from her etymological roots as a godparent, midwife, or female friend invited to christenings, via the chattering wives whom husbands and wider society demonised and sought to silence, to the figure of Mother Goose, teller of fairy tales and sometime character within them.[17] Gossips are not only specifically female, but frequently elderly. For example, Warner refers to fairy tales' origins in the stories told by older nurses or grandmothers to the children in their care (hence the term 'old wives' tale') and to specific instances of such women, including many of the Grimm Brothers' sources. The fact that the value of fairy tales has been much debated – they have been defended as conveying 'the ancient, pure wisdom of the people from the fountainhead […] old women, nurses, governesses', but the use of 'fairy tale' 'as a derogatory term, implies fantasy, escapism, invention, the unreliable consolations of romance' – suggests that the speech of the older women who told them was not always held in high regard.[18] Furthermore, Warner traces the condemnation of older women's talk back as far as the First Epistle to Timothy and explains that widows (who are often elderly) are viewed as particularly dangerous in this text.[19] It was not just the act of speaking, but also the possible subject matter which resulted in anxiety around the old wives' or gossip's tale. Mother Goose is a variation on Mother Stork and these names

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[17] Warner illustrates this demonization of speaking women through discussion of a range of texts and artefacts including the 'branks or scold's bridles' to be found in England and France in the seventeenth century: 'contraptions like dog muzzles designed to gag women who had been charged and found guilty of blasphemy and defamation.' Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 39. For Warner's full discussion of gossips and fairy tales, see chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this text.
[18] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 19.
[19] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, pp. 29-30.

are associated both with the noise she makes – 'her clatter, her chatter'[20] – and with the stork as a symbol 'of rich complexity, edifying and bawdy at once'.[21] The connotations of the goose and the stork encompass knowledge about medical treatment and cures, in particular gynaecology, obstetrics, contraception, and 'female sexual knowledge and power, as well as the implied deviancy which accompanies them'.[22] Attempts to control the spread of particularly female knowledge fuelled the negative stereotype of the gossip in the first place. Warner writes of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe:

> The control of fertility and mortality, through skills like midwifery, and the direction of attitudes and alliances and interests through gossip exist in close relation to each other in the unofficial networks of the social body; informal speech and exchanges are 'a catalyst of the social process', which can produce harmony and conflict [...].
>
> Gossipy gatherings of women together were the focus of much male anxiety about women's tongues in Reformation as well as Catholic Europe [...].
>
> Typical meeting places for women alone, like public laundries and spinning rooms, were feared to give rise to slander and intrigue and secret liaisons. Of all the professions, official and unofficial, those which allowed women to pass between worlds out of the control of native or marital family seemed to pose the greatest threat to apparent due order. Prostitutes, midwives and wetnurses occupied no fixed point in the structure of society, as they physically moved between worlds [...].[23]

Not only were midwives likely to be older women, but it follows that the widows identified as subversive influences in the First Epistle to Timothy would also have been both elderly and threatening due to being 'outside the control of native or marital family'.

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[20] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 64.
[21] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 58.
[22] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 65. Indeed, the association of troublesome older women with obstetrics is apparent in 'Be This Her Memorial', where Old Nanni seems to have acted as the village midwife.
[23] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, pp. 34-6.

The influence of the figure of the older, female gossip is often detectable in Welsh fiction. Writers' treatments of the character type vary from the stereotypical to the sympathetic and are complicated by other associations. Dylan Thomas's 'Old Garbo' (1940) includes a stereotypical representation of a group of gossipy older women who have assembled in a bar to commiserate with their friend Mrs Prothero following the death of her daughter in childbirth. The importance of gossip for this group is evident in the fact that it is second-hand news which has led to Mrs Prothero's grief and that this information is eventually proven to be false. In addition, the text's narrative feels voyeuristic in itself, related as it is by narrator and young writer Thomas, who is recalling a drunken night out and treats social excursions as an opportunity to gather material. Thomas's rendering of the women incorporates some of the bawdiness which Warner identifies as being associated with gossips, particularly with Mother Stork. Their drinking to excess in a dockside pub might be judged indecorous by some and their talk is reminiscent of the intimate medical knowledge associated with the gossip in her role as midwife:

> In low voices the women reviled Mrs. Prothero, liar, adulteress, mother of bastards, thief.
> 'She got you know what.'
> 'Never cured it.'
> 'Got Charlie tattooed on her.'
> 'Three and eight she owes me.'
> 'Two and ten.'
> 'Money for my teeth.'[24]

Finally, the fact that the above exchange is about Mrs Prothero herself, that it takes place almost immediately it is discovered that her daughter survived, and is in marked contrast to the kindly treatment afforded to her earlier in the evening, sheds a negative light on this group of gossips. They appear spiteful and duplicitous.

[24] Dylan Thomas, 'Old Garbo' (1940), in *Collected Stories* (London: Phoenix, 1992), pp. 206-18 (p. 216).

Although both men and women gather to exchange gossip in the village of Tregildas in Allen Raine's *Queen of the Rushes* (1906), it is an older female character who is given the role of lead gossip and is a source of disorder throughout this novel. Nelli Amos is the originator of accusations that Raine's hero Gildas Rees has murdered his wife and that his unwillingness to confess his sins publically is preventing the 'Spirit' from visiting the chapel of Brynzion. [25] Raine's descriptions of Nelli are othering, suggesting physical mutation, animal characteristics and a generally sinister force. She is described initially as 'a strange, weird figure' (81) and appears on the beach one evening 'crouched behind a rock counting […] fish', suggesting a crab, insect, or other being of subhuman status, and also a scheming force, concealing herself and eavesdropping in the half-light (138). Like Nanni in 'Be This Her Memorial', Nelli remembers the village's earlier generations, but, unlike Evans's character, she uses these recollections for harm, accusing Gildas of 'turning [his] back upon the chapel where [his] parents worshipped before [him]' (138). Nelli's malignancy is strengthened by the enjoyment she appears to gain from spreading bad news. For example, when a body assumed to be that of Gildas's wife is washed ashore, the opportunity to inform and blame Gildas reinvigorates her:

> And he saw, as the line of moving figures advanced, that they were headed by Nelli Amos, who seemed to have regained the agility of youth, as she outstripped the others and came down the harvest-field, her grey hair blown about by the sea wind, her eyes flashing, her finger pointing at Gildas. (245)

Katie Gramich states that '[t]he speaking voice is the central metaphor' of *Queen of the Rushes* and explores Raine's contrasting of the headstrong, vocal Nance with the more restrained, obedient and, significantly, mute Gwenifer.[26] The critic

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[25] Allen Raine, *Queen of the Rushes* (1906), (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1998), p. 80. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[26] Katie Gramich, 'Introduction', in *Queen of the Rushes* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1998), pp. 1-23 (p. 15).

reads Nance’s fate as an implicit criticism of women like her and states that Gwenifer’s behaviour is ‘being held up as an example to female readers’.[27] Thus, vocal self-expression is related to proscribed expressions of femininity within the novel. As the leader of such hearsay, the character of Nelli Amos can be seen to reflect the historic misogyny towards women who speak, identified by Warner as key to the development of the figure of the gossip. However, Raine’s ageing female gossip is not just a reworking of the standard stereotype. Towards the end of the novel, younger characters and the reader have reason to feel pity for Nelli, in part due to some of the effects which old age has upon her. The elderly woman’s loss of her position as chapel-keeper comes as such a blow that she takes to her bed. This severe reaction suggests that Nelli does not have many other pleasures in her life, and Gildas himself detects that she is ‘lonely’ (300). Although it is a suspected act of arson which causes Brynzion’s deacons to dispense with Nelli’s services, they make excuses including that ‘she didn’t keep the chapel so clean as she used to’ (294), which suggests that the community has little sympathy for the effects of ageing on her ability to carry out manual work. Indeed, Will Jones refers to her aged physique in derogatory terms when he tells Gildas of her downfall, describing her as ‘shrivelled up, a bag of bones’ (293).

The gossip circulating in a small rural community in the early years of the twentieth century is also important to Rhys Davies’s *The Black Venus* (1944) and, like Raine, Davies makes an older woman the centre of such conversations in his fictional village. However, where Raine’s text is a conservative, romantic yarn, Davies’s novel is lighthearted, progressive in its exploration of marriage, and can be read as a coded

[27] Gramich, ‘Introduction’, p. 20.

text in which gender and sexual identities become fluid.[28] Lizzie Pugh shares a number of characteristics with Nelli Amos.[29] She is aggressive and manipulative and causes problems for the protagonist, Olwen Powell, by spreading rumours and stirring up resentments in the local community. Also like Nelli, her physical appearance is othering: she is small, 'scuttling' and hunchbacked and dresses in an eccentric fashion. [30] Further, there is a sinister element to her activities of manipulation which Davies emphasises through frequent use of 'malign' and 'malicious' to describe her actions and also through an oblique allusion to a witch's hovel and cauldron: 'Sometimes she lamented the loss of her little sooty cottage by the mill wheel where many a pot of mischief had been brewed.' (178) However, the writer generally creates humour around Lizzie's curious appearance where Raine would inject drama and suspicion.

Davies's rendering of Lizzie includes traditional elements of the gossip as described by Warner. The main subject of her gossip is modern, proto-feminist Olwen's decision to use the practice of 'courting in bed' in her search for a husband

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[28] Considering the effect of Davies's concealed homosexuality on his fiction, M. Wynn Thomas identifies homoerotic and homosexual subtexts in the writer's work and describes him as possessing 'an androgynous imagination', given his frequent adoption of a female point of view when writing about heterosexual encounters. Katie Gramich examines the performance of gender in a number of the writer's short stories, giving particular focus to acts of cross-dressing, and argues: 'Rhys Davies sets out to destabilize gender positions for the sake of it. […] to blur the rigid gender divisions which must have made his own life, as a firmly closeted homosexual, such a tediously repeated performance of repression.' M. Wynn Thomas, '"Never Seek to Tell thy Love": Rhys Davies's Fiction' (1998), in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 260-82 (p. 263). Katie Gramich, 'The Masquerade of Gender in the Stories of Rhys Davies', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, pp. 205-15 (p. 213).

[29] While Davies never describes Lizzie specifically as old, I view Lizzie as middle-aged or older at the beginning of *The Black Venus* and well into her old age by Part 3, set fifteen years after the main narrative. On her first appearance at chapel, she is described as 'ageless' because she has never graduated from the seats in the gallery usually reserved for younger people to the 'pens of the settled and elderly', apparently due to her unmarried status (45-46). At home, she is surrounded by the 'diligent garnerings of a lifetime', suggesting a significant number of years spent collecting (48). Furthermore, the assistance which she eventually gives to Olwen is not bestowed freely, but in the expectation that the younger woman will care for her in her old age. Lizzie's concern for the practicalities of her deeper old age implies that this stage of life is not too far in the future, and she has moved from her cottage to Olwen's home by Part 3.

[30] Rhys Davies, *The Black Venus* (1944), (London and Toronto: Heinemann, 1944), p. 111. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

with whom she can build an intellectual as well as a sexual relationship. Involving as it does a woman's bedroom, romantic affairs and thinly veiled sexual conquest, this topic is reminiscent of the secret female knowledge held by the gossip through her association with midwives and godmothers, and with the 'naughty claptrap of Mother Stork': 'This folklore does not belong in the classical tradition of myth; it grew up at the childbeds, the lyings-in, the bedrooms and nurseries of more recent history […].'[31] Lizzie also encapsulates the lewd and bawdy aspects of the gossip in her frequent belching, blunt discussion of matters sexual, and lack of concern for dominant social rules. Significantly, she is the owner of the black Venus of the title, an ancient statue which operates as an overt symbol of female sexuality throughout.

What is interesting about Davies's presentation of Lizzie is the fact that, although she shares many of the same aspects of the figure of the gossip as Raine and Thomas's characters, she is judged less harshly in the moral world of the text. The novel ends happily, with Olwen creating a non-traditional marriage and family for herself. That Lizzie is part of this harmonious household implies that the character deserves a reprieve and a comfortable ending to her days despite her behaviour appearing amoral at times. Throughout the text, her gossiping hinders and helps the heroine in equal measure, and her behaviour towards the younger woman swings alarmingly between spite, flattery, blackmail, and advice. It is stated that Olwen allows Lizzie to live with her in her old age out of 'pure charity' (172), but, when she can find it amongst the manipulation and misdirection, this intelligent young woman also appreciates Lizzie's straight talking. The reader learns that 'she could not help liking the erratic little hunchback who respected no one, saw the world in plain fact and roundly despised it and all its contents' (111) and recognises that Lizzie is 'giving

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[31] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 64.

her satisfaction' when she speaks honestly of Olwen's wealth in comparison to her own poverty (109). Furthermore, Lizzie actually gives Olwen helpful advice when she is considering marrying Rhisiart Hughes, explaining that he would happily marry the heroine, but will never be a 'proper husband' who equals her intellectually, a prediction borne out by later events (150). Thus, in Davies's text, the elderly gossip who speaks her mind is valued as well as made a figure of fun or mistrust. The fact that Lizzie intends to leave the black Venus to Olwen when she dies and that, despite the heroine's protests to the contrary, coincidence ensures a place for it at her home, suggests that Lizzie is passing on to Olwen some of the gossip's frankness and powerful female knowledge. By the end of the text, the heroine is a respected local councillor with a progressive agenda who has 'broken into the male sanctuary of the council on the strength of her old reputation in the matter of courting in bed' (171) and is tipped to become the first woman magistrate in the area. This development suggests that the outspokenness of the gossip has a part to play in the progress of women into positions of greater equality with men.[32]

Cantankerous Older Characters

Related to the figure of the gossip is the common stereotype of the cankerous older person who vocalises his or her dissatisfaction incontrovertibly. This character type features frequently in Welsh fiction in English. In some cases, its presentation is wholly negative. For example, in Menna Gallie's *The Small Mine* (1962), the character of Old Enoch sits alongside several more balanced renderings of older people, but in itself has no sympathetic features. However, Welsh writers usually offer

[32] I return to *The Black Venus* later in this chapter in the section on older, unmarried women.

a more complicated view of this angry, complaining older person. In *Queen of the Rushes*, Gildas's elderly uncle n'wncwl Sam is similar to Raine's gossip Nelli Amos in his initial unpleasantness. He is short-tempered and disapproving of his nephew's decision to offer a home to the orphaned Gwenifer. Moreover, it is later implied that his complaints over his living arrangements are unfounded:

> 'That's what I say,' interrupted n'wncwl Sam, who ever since he had been saved by his nephew from the penury of his home, was hankering after it, or persuading himself that such were his sentiments. 'Nothing will make up for the loss of a home'.
>
> Gildas's black brows contracted as he turned to the discontented old man. 'Why talk nonsense about it though?' he asked. 'You know very well you would not like to go back to yours.' (62)

However, the narrative is sensitive to the reasons behind this crotchety behaviour. Sam's longing for his old home despite its impracticality is mirrored in the feelings of Gwenifer, one of the novel's compasses of moral behaviour, while his outspokenness over Gildas's decision to give the girl a home is rooted in his perceived loss of power with his move to his nephew's household: 'For although Gildas often sought and followed his advice in matters of farming experience, yet he felt that he was generally controlled and dominated by his wilful nephew, and he consoled himself for this by systematically objecting to everything the younger man proposed.' (37) Segal writes that there are 'noisy collective ways of observing the present, feeling one's age and challenging the social marginalization of the elderly', and identifies both gossip and 'ageing truculence' as tools of 'relatively powerless' older people.[33] Thus, Sam's cantankerousness can be read as an attempt to hold on to some of the influence he feels that he has lost.

The changes and difficult decisions involved in ageing also feature in Margiad Evans's rendering of an angry older woman in 'The Old Woman and the Wind'

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[33] Segal, *Out of Time*, pp. 210-11.

(1948). In a landscape populated by elderly people, Mrs Ashstone lives alone on an exposed hill where she is vexed by the havoc wreaked by the incessant wind and jealous of her neighbours' peaceful lives in the valley below. Fantastical episodes such as the anthropomorphisation of the wind, which speaks to the protagonist and carries out her angry instruction to destroy the village, invite an allegorical reading of the short story. If the wind is an emblem of destruction, one might view Mrs Ashstone's anger with it and her efforts to save the crocuses in her garden (representative of life through their association with spring) as symbolic of a fear of and attempt to hold back the changes that come with of ageing. Indeed, the character blames the windy location for her ageing, commenting that if she 'could get away from here [she] shouldn't get old so fast', and the narrative reveals that '[w]ind more than age was dwindling her sparrow frame'. [34] In addition, the turning of the wind on Mrs Ashstone's neighbours could be a physical embodiment of the jealous anger she directs at them. However, in classical literature and romantic poetry, the wind has other connotations of which Evans, who had an interest in romanticism, would undoubtedly have been aware.[35] It is associated with life, breath and inspiration, particularly poetic inspiration, complicating Mrs Ashstone's desire to escape it.[36]

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[34] Margiad Evans, 'The Old Woman and the Wind' (1944), in *The Old and the Young* (1948), (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 35-43 (p. 35). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

[35] For a discussion of the influence on Evans's work of the neo-romantic movement of the mid twentieth century, see Clare Morgan, 'Exile and the Kingdom: Margiad Evans and the Mythic Landscape of Wales', *Welsh Writing in English*, 6 (2000), 89-118.

[36] According to Michael Ferber, in Greek and Roman writings the west wind is 'usually seen as gentle or favourable' and 'is most often the spring wind that revives the land'. Furthermore, there is a similarity between the wind and breath which is 'inscribed deep in both the symbolism and the common vocabulary of Hebrew and Western literature'. Breath itself is a metonym for life and is also linked etymologically and artistically to ideas around spirit, soul, and inspiration. For poets of the Romantic era, the wind symbolised 'the inspiration of the spirit of nature', hence Percy Shelley's calling on the west wind to 'Drive [his] dead thoughts over the universe/ Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!' in the final stanza of 'Ode to the West Wind'. Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 2nd edn (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 236-37. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820), in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th edn, 2 vols (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1993), II, pp. 676-78, ll. 63-64.

Thus, when the older character longs to escape her battered hilltop for the warmer valley beneath, she is considering giving up on life or elements of it. Exhaustion is her dominant experience as she goes about her daily business – perhaps suggesting that she is tired of living – and, tellingly, the relentless wind is associated with a surfeit of breath: 'She turned to face the valley. The soft sound of it was going underground, but up here it was coming a gale. She could feel it in her heart. Every breath seemed too big for her.' (36) At the text's climax, the protagonist experiences a moment of inclusion by the villagers she usually spurns, exhibits a desire for closeness to them, and is invited to stay in the valley. However, she turns down this offer, instead choosing to remain with her 'friend' the wind 'that do know where [she] was born' (42). That the ageing woman shakes herself as she makes this decision 'as you might shake a clock that is stopping' implies that her return to the hill is a process of waking up and living more actively, not of giving up and preparing for death (42). The knowledge of her past held by the wind suggests self-knowledge and understanding not unlike the inspiration which it often symbolises. Therefore, the protagonist appears to conclude that she prefers a life lived to the full, in her case alone with her thoughts and fears, to a more comfortable end of life in the peaceful setting below.[37]

In a similar vein to his unusual treatment of the figure of the gossip in *The Black Venus*, Rhys Davies plays with and confounds expectations of the stereotype of

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[37] Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan states that the text 'undoubtedly reflects [Evans's] experience of living on a hill-top in a cottage often buffeted by gales.' One might speculate that Mrs Ashstone's wavering between the desire for community and the benefits of a more isolated life reflects Evans's own need for both company and the solitude required to write, required for the creative inspiration symbolised by the wind to reach her, perhaps. Indeed, Lloyd-Morgan describes Evans's time at Potacre – the hill-top house in Llangarron where she was often alone when her husband was away during the Second World War – as follows: 'Despite the sadness and worry his absence brought her, […] these years at Llangarron inspired some of her finest and most mature writing. […] Ellen Saunders became a kind and thoughtful friend […]. Her drawback was her fondness for chatting. Like many of the other neighbours, she could not understand that Margiad, despite her own keen appetite for gossip, often needed periods of peace and solitude for meditation and writing.' Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, *Margiad Evans* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998) (pp. 101 and 78).

the cantankerous older person in his later short story 'The Chosen One' (1967). Reclusive landowner Audrey Vines has 'famous tempers', is purported to have abused her servants verbally and physically, and has lost two long-suffering husbands in mysterious circumstances.[38] The elderly woman's anger, judgmental nature, and blunt style of expression are revealed through the brusque eviction letter received by her long-term tenant at the beginning of the text. In the space of two paragraphs, she not only questions Rufus's status as a human being, but also brands his fiancée a 'hussy' and a 'screeching, Jazz-dancing slut in trousers and bare feet', ending her communication with the unambiguous instruction to 'Get out' (250). Davies gestures to the stereotype of the witch in his rendering of this disagreeable character. We learn that she lives alone in her ancient house with no company except for five spoilt cats and a beloved bulldog. These pets are all female, any male kittens having been drowned soon after birth. This weeding out of males suggests a dangerous feminine power similar to that associated with gossips and adds weight to speculation that Audrey killed her husbands.

However, there is another, bleaker side to this character which undercuts the dislike that she first prompts in the reader. The text includes a detailed depiction of Audrey's days alone in her dusty, neglected mansion. It becomes apparent that she is an alcoholic and is not caring for herself properly, sustaining herself with 'meagre snacks' washed down with champagne (260). She has become so isolated that every clock in the house has stopped and she marks her days by the passing of trains on the railway. The effect is one of loneliness and of a person who has given up on life, as Mrs Ashstone seems on the verge of doing in 'The Old Woman and the Wind'.

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[38] Rhys Davies, 'The Chosen One' (1967), in *Collected Stories*, 3 vols (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996-1998), II (1996), pp. 250-77 (p. 253). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

Further sympathy is evoked by the story's climactic twist, when it is revealed that Audrey's insults towards and persecution of Rufus are not just motivated by anger with the world around her or an apparent dislike of men. She plays on her reputation and uses 'demented goading' (275) to manipulate the young man into killing her, as is revealed in their final 'instant of mutual recognition':

> He stopped and looked down at her. Something like a compelled obedience was in the crouch of his shoulders. Her right hand moved, grasping the tablecloth fringe into a tight fistful. She made no attempt to speak, but an articulation came into the exposed face that was lifted to him. From the glaze of her eyes, from deep in unfathomable misery, came entreaty. He was the chosen one. He alone held the power of deliverance. (276)

The reader is left feeling uncomfortable. Audrey's desperation undoubtedly incites pity, but the final image of Rufus entering a police station prompts questions about the effect which his response to her calculated provocations will have on the rest of his life. Thus, Davies's nuanced presentation of the figure of the cantankerous older person relates the loneliness which can be a feature of old age to the wider community.[39] Indeed, given their shared preoccupation with their cankerous characters' living arrangements, *Queen of the Rushes* and 'The Old Woman and the Wind' also prompt one to ask what our society should do to assist individuals in finding a place in which they can be content in later life. I will return to the emotive subject of home in later chapters.

[39] I return to the 'The Chosen One' below in the section on unmarried women, discussing Davies's presentation of older female sexuality and the sexual tension between Audrey and Rufus.

Dementia

The ageing of populations nationally and internationally has resulted in a rise in the number of people with dementia. Consequently, this condition has become a priority for politicians and policy makers in recent years.[40] Research into treatments and debates over how best to care for vulnerable sufferers are also the focus of news headlines on a regular basis. Unsurprisingly, the field of Welsh fiction in English includes a proliferation of what some literary critics term dementia narratives. Examination of such short stories and novels from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries suggests that memory loss and changes in behaviour have been associated with growing old since before the ageing of our population became a recognised phenomenon.

Margiad Evans's 'Thomas Griffiths and Parson Cope' (1945) explores the fear of cognitive degeneration which can come with old age. Elderly gardener and protagonist Thomas Griffiths worries that he will end up like his employer Parson Cope, whose unreasonable behaviour seems to stem from dementia. Presented as he is from the central character's perspective, Evans's rendering of the parson provides insight into Thomas's response to his employer's condition. For example, the writer's descriptions of Cope's 'attacks'– wild rages over domestic insignificancies – have an air of the supernatural and unexplained about them:

> […] but if a wheel so much as grazed the lawn Parson Cope had an 'attack'. When this happened, resurgent noises, apparently detached from the parson, tumbled about the hollow house. Sobs in the attics – but the parson was in the

[40] For example, in December 2013 the UK hosted a summit of health leaders from the G8 group of countries to discuss dementia. To coincide with the event, the then prime minister David Cameron announced that UK funding for dementia research will double by 2025 and stated that an international strategy similar to those developed for HIV/AIDS and cancer in the past will be required if the disease is to be beaten. Haroon Siddique, 'Dementia Research Funding to Be Doubled by 2025, says David Cameron', *Guardian*, 11 December 2013. Available at: www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/11/dementia-research-doubled-david-cameron-alzheimers-nhs [accessed 24 January 2018].

> conservatory. Cries and lights, buckets swilling, rags being wrung – but the parson was sitting lampless in his owly study.[41]

The source of these sounds of crying and cleaning is later revealed to be the parson's maid, who is a target for his anger and must clear up in his wake. However, despite this logical explanation, the ghostly manner in which the attacks are described suggests terror at this behaviour on Thomas's part. The protagonist's fear of mental degeneration is also evident in his reaction to the look on the parson's face as he quizzes Thomas about the garden: 'He was grave for hours after thinking of it, lest he himself should at times wear that same shocked and lonely expression of trouble.' (28) There are indications throughout the text that Thomas is indeed in danger of developing the same condition as the parson. His behaviour echoes that of his employer when he dozes off at his work while the parson is also asleep. Furthermore, he is left with a 'sense of blame and unease' which suggests unconscious agreement when his neighbour intimates that Thomas is turning 'queer' like Parson Cope (26). Evans encourages sympathy for Thomas's plight when the character accidentally puts a lighted match in his mouth instead of his pipe and realises that he has forgotten to prepare his supper. These mistakes force him to admit that he too is being affected by his age: 'Daft you be. If anybody had seen you do that them 'ood *know* it. Time tha was owld Thomas. Time to stop, time to stop […].' (33, emphasis in orginal) It is the character's shame at his situation that is most affecting. Recalling his neighbour's mockery, he tells himself he is 'best [to] 'ide it while [he] can', implying both the pipe which was involved in his lapse in concentration, and his forgetfulness itself (33). However, Thomas's illogical act of burying the pipe is, sadly, not a long term solution to his situation. He has earlier observed that the parson is lucky to have staff to enable

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[41] Margiad Evans, 'Thomas Griffiths and Parson Cope' (1945), in *The Old and the Young* (1948), (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 24-34 (p. 27). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

him to remain in his own home and that a poorer man like himself would not be so fortunate: ‘If him was a poor man him ’ood be in an ’ome already. A man like me would. Ay! Be a lucky thing the parson be daft and not tha, Thomas Griffiths-the-Mill, a rare lucky thing it be.’ (32) Thus, as Evans depicts the fear of mental degeneration in old age, she also touches on the issue of the provision of care for older people affected by dementia, a concern which is the subject of debate to this day.

Theorists suggest that it is when senile that older people are most othered by the societies in which they live. For example, Hazan explains that in some societies ‘a third category intervenes between the categories of the living and the dead’:

> This category, which may be termed the ‘living dead’, is represented by aged persons who are mentally inept. One response to such persons is witchcraft accusations against them; others are separation from the community, expulsion from the tribe, or simply abandonment. Even if the old are allowed to remain within their community, as in our society, their status as human beings remains ambiguous. Avoidance, separation and charitable and patronizing protectiveness are all manifestations of this ambiguity.[42]

Similarly, examining the treatment of elderly people in tribal societies, Simone de Beauvoir observes that many societies ‘respect the old so long as they are clear-minded and robust, but get rid of them when they become senile and infirm’.[43] Welsh writers seem aware of the tendency to dehumanise those who have suffered cognitive degeneration due to their age, but on the whole do not participate in this othering. In ‘Narcotic Crocus’ (2009), a ghost story which explores the gap between the external impressions we can gain of people and the reality which lies beneath, Glenda Beagan writes against the propensity to reduce people with dementia to problems or irritants. During the bus ride to her job at a bookshop, the story’s narrator is spoken to by an elderly woman who repeats the same conversation with several passengers, apparently

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[42] Hazan, *Old Age*, pp. 71-2.
[43] Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. by Patrick O’Brian (London: André Deutsch & Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 51. De Beauvoir gives the examples of the Hottentots in Africa, at least until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the Canadian Ojibway in the early twentieth century.

because dementia has affected her behaviour and her short-term memory. The narrator's tone is irritated; she describes how the older character 'pounces' on her and 'selects another victim', and states: 'I can be doing without garrulous old biddies'.[44] On arriving at work, she 'put[s] on a show' for her manager Mr de Silva, doing an impression of the elderly woman, whom she describes as 'White Hair and Fawn Hat', thus reducing her to a comic distraction and denoting her using stereotypical trappings of the old (90). Mr de Silva undermines this diminishing treatment and leaves the narrator feeling reprimanded when he discloses that the confused elderly woman is 'Mrs Dauncey[…]. Wife of the late Professor Dauncey, a brilliant clarinettist in her day' (90). In these two short sentences, a whole other existence and life story is added to the narrator's and, consequently, the reader's understanding of this minor character. Through this revelation, Beagan exposes the disrespect, avoidance, and separation which are meted out to elderly people with dementia and foregrounds the erasures of identity which such othering acts involve.

Like his treatment of the figures of the gossip and the cantankerous older person, Rhys Davies's rendering of an ageing woman with dementia is extremely sensitive. 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' (1967) elicits sympathy from the reader for the titular character and is revealing in its intimation of the pain which her illness causes her family. Betty has persuaded her daughter and carer Katrin that she will be safe alone for the afternoon despite her dementia and a recent stroke, but slips out of the house on an ill-advised journey to visit her other, preferred daughter several miles away. The short story's narrative is related from the protagonist's point of view and

[44] Glenda Beagan, 'Narcotic Crocus', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 83-94, (p. 89). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

occasional forays into free indirect style bring the reader closer to her consciousness, encouraging empathy:

> Oh, the glory of being out! The release brought to her feet, with conniving readiness, a preliminary briskness. […] Wasn't it much longer than six months since she had gone beyond the garden gate? She couldn't remember. She smiled a greeting to a crab-apple tree in blossom not far down the lane. The pots of jelly that tree had provided over the years![45]

However, it is gradually revealed that Betty's interpretation of her situation and assessment of her health are not reliable, when she forgets that the Second World War has ended and when the young man who helps her on her journey betrays concern for her wellbeing, for example. Details such as the pounding of the character's heart and her concern that she reach Megan's home before she is found to be missing add to the sense that her expedition will not end well. This suspicion is confirmed when she arrives, only to be informed that Megan 'died close on six years ago' (325). It seems that Betty has forgotten this devastating loss. Unfortunately, the character's shame at this realisation puts her at further risk. She is determined to hide her identity from the new residents of Megan's house and, once she has extricated herself from the immediate possibility of embarrassment, her feelings of humiliation give way to guilt at having 'committed the treachery of forgetting her daughter's death' (327). This recognition epitomises one of the cruellest features of dementia: that the disease involves painful periods of clarity amongst the confusion and forgetfulness. Furthermore, Davies captures the alienation which the illness can bring. A 'need to hide herself dominate[s] all else' when Betty leaves Megan's old home and the narrative ends with her hiding in a hedge on the roadside for the night rather than asking for help (326).

[45] Rhys Davies, 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' (1967), in *Collected Stories*, 3 vols (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996-1998), II (1996), pp. 314-31 (p. 317). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

Betty's ability to deceive in both her lucid and her most vulnerable moments helps to explain her strained relationship with Katrin, which is dominated by the younger woman's struggles to keep her mother safe and Betty's unwillingness to relinquish control over her actions. The elderly woman's memories of her daughter explaining emphatically – and patronisingly – that she can't live as she used to suggest the anxiety which her dementia must cause for those responsible for her care: 'You *can't* go out. It's not your arm and body now, you silly. It's your mind. You'll soon be fancying Queen Victoria is still on her throne in black, the same as Lady Pencisely thinks.' (327) Beyond reflecting the realities of a family living with dementia, 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' also includes a trope which occurs in relation to older figures with memory loss more than once in Welsh writing in English. Betty remembers a comment made by Katrin: 'You ought to be glad it's only your mind. Forgetfulness can be a blessing. I often wish I could forget a lot – and if I stay Christian long enough, perhaps I will.' (327) As well as betraying a lack of understanding of the distress which her mother's condition causes her, Katrin's remark suggests that, ironically, the devastating loss caused by dementia in terms of deteriorating memory and personality changes may have the positive side effect of shielding the sufferer from some of life's sadnesses. The reader is not told explicitly what it is that Katrin wishes she could forget, but the fact she 'never mentioned her sister's name after the death' is suggestive (327). Outliving one's child is probably one of the most heart-breaking situations one can experience, so it is understandable that Katrin thinks that Betty's illness is shielding her from pain.

Kate Roberts's 'Old Age' (1925) similarly emphasises the poignant irony that the devastating effects of dementia can sometimes prevent sadness and, interestingly, it is again the loss of a grown-up child that is incomprehensible to the older character

in this short story.[46] Narrated by a family friend, Wil, the text tells of the sad demise of middle-aged Twm Llain Wen and of his elderly mother's inability to understand his illness and death due to her retreat into memories and her confusion over the realities of everyday life. It is Twm himself who expresses the irony that forgetfulness may prevent pain when he comments during his illness that his mother's memory loss is '[n]ot such a bad thing, I suppose'.[47] The repetition of this trope across the field of Welsh writing suggests that perhaps older people should be protected from life's harsher realities when they are coming to the ends of their lives.[48] Roberts's text does not encourage empathy for its elderly character in the way that 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' does. Significantly, the elderly woman is unnamed throughout and the reader is not party to her thoughts. However, 'Old Age' is revealing in its focus on the changes in personality and, therefore, identity that can result from dementia. Wil is saddened to observe that, where she was once a protective, doting mother, now the older women cannot concentrate on discussions about her son's condition. He can see nothing of the woman he knew as a child in the elderly figure before him:

> I thought about that diligent mother, – and this old woman, sitting by the fire with her hands folded.
>
> I suppose she had the same clothes now. I never remember her without the white cap under the black straw hat. [...]
>
> 'The same sort of clothes,' I said to myself, but not the same face or arms. It wasn't these arms I saw long ago kneading a bowlful of dough until it wobbled like a bog under her fingers. There was little of her face to be seen

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[46] My analysis of Roberts's fiction in this thesis is based upon translations of her work into English. In this chapter and Chapter 3, I draw upon Joseph P. Clancy's translations of selected short stories and novellas (see Footnote 47 below for full reference). In Chapter 4, I discuss *Feet in Chains*, Katie Gramich's 2012 translation of *Traed Mewn Cyffion*, and *Y Lôn Wen/ The White Lane* (2009), Gillian Clarke's translation of Roberts's autobiography.

[47] Kate Roberts, 'Old Age' (1925), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 41-45 (p. 43).

[48] The trope of the older person who is protected from grief by dementia also appears in Raine's *Queen of the Rushes*. An expert herbalist and figure of admiration at the novel's opening, by the end of the text Hezekiah Morgan is forgetful and confused. Raine uses Hezekiah's condition to create a twist in the plot, whereby the old man's conviction that his missing niece is still alive is dismissed by other members of the community. However, despite the writer's utilising her character's dementia for a specific narrative purpose, the novel expresses similar sentiments to Davies and Roberts's short stories.

> now, because she tied the strings of her cap under her chin. The little that was to be seen was all furrows, like mud after rain. (44)

Wil’s focus on the elderly character’s failure to perform her socially-prescribed function of motherhood and his difficulty in reconciling the devoted parent of the past with the distracted, vulnerable woman of the present invites the reader to question the limited scope and rigidity of the roles on offer to women. Further, if women like Roberts’s character are defined by these roles and their individual identities submerged in them, one is led to ask what happens when these functions disappear. Are these women rendered socially void and empty? The narrator’s omitting to give the elderly woman a name suggests that, to him, if she is not Twm’s mother she is a blank. However, this is a woman who once felt such anxiety over her son’s health that she muffled him in flannels and handkerchiefs on all but the hottest days. The fact that she now shows no emotion at the news of Twm’s death – stating only: ‘I don’t know him, you see’ (45) – suggests that the disappearance of her responsibilities is a kind of liberation.

The Wise Older Person

At this point in my discussion, I turn to stock older characters and stereotypes that are superficially more positive than those I have examined so far. A common example of such a character type is that of the wise older person. Incarnations of this figure in Western cultural discourse include wizards and fairy godmothers, Sybils and soothsayers, Old Father Time, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, and even representations of the Christian god as an elderly patriarch. A substantial body of theoretical work suggests that wisdom, or a lack of it, is a key factor in cultural constructions of age and that the wise character type can have both positive and

negative associations and effects. In Erik Erikson's life cycle theory of personality development, for example, individuals go through a number of identity crises during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as they adjust to changing societal expectations. Each crisis is defined as a tension between a productive and a destructive response. If the individual is to continue on a path of healthy personality development, he or she must avoid the dysfunctional and achieve the healthy response. Out of this resolution comes a strength or positive attribute. Tellingly, in the eighth stage of personality development, designated 'mature' or 'old age', wisdom is the strength which results from the successful negotiation of the tension between integrity and despair.[49] Segal gives various examples of accomplished artists and inventors who produced their greatest work in later life and hopes that 'the greater our knowledge of the life-long persistence of creativity, at times even of exceptional talent, among some of the already eminent, the easier it becomes to encourage more positive awareness of the potential and perhaps hidden creativity that might be fostered in the lesser-known elderly folk we encounter.' However, the critic warns:

> […] there is also wishful thinking in the strategic denial of trying to assert the irrelevance of ageing and old age, ignoring what is distinctive about the layers of years lived. […] To argue that age is irrelevant thus runs the risk of turning our attention once more away from the varied distinctiveness of old age, with its gains and losses, its demanding challenges and fluctuating temporalities.[50]

Similarly, in his discussion of stereotyping, Hazan sees problems in the wise older character type. He explains that 'the idea that old people are supernaturally wise, that is to say, possessed of a perspective on reality of an entirely different order to that of

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[49] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994). Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). Erikson developed his theories over several decades and his terminology and emphasis differ somewhat between publications.

[50] Segal, *Out of Time*, p. 66. The critic offers Benjamin Franklin, Georgia O'Keefe, Michelangelo, Guiseppe Verdi, and Frank Lloyd Wright as examples of exceptional people whose creativity continued into old age. One might add W.B. Yeats and R.S. Thomas, both accepted to have written their best poetry in old age, as examples from closer to home.

ordinary persons' works in synergy with the contradictory 'mirror image' stereotype – related to dementia – which views 'biological deterioration (resulting in mental erosion)' as 'inevitable, uncontrollable, and irreversible'. Hazan states:

> On occasion we ask [older people's] advice, attempting to draw on their life experiences for answers to our most fundamental existential questions. In some societies, such reverence is traditionally bestowed on the seer and the wise man; in others, a parallel may be found with the madman and the court jester, ambiguous symbolic types of a similar stereotypical configuration. Clearly, persons who are supposed to be incapable of making decisions in day-to-day life cannot be expected to offer reliable guidance. The attribution of the latter capacity to the elderly is made possible by the image of them as preoccupied with matters of the spirit.[51]

This idea that older wisdom is detached from the practicalities of everyday life and instead associated with the metaphysical or ontological aspects of the human condition is problematic because it is an act of Barthesian mythologizing, removing historical, political, economic, and social factors from accounts of ageing individuals' circumstances.[52]

There is a wide variety of wise older people in Welsh fiction in English. Hilda Vaughan's short story 'A Thing of Nought' (1934) features an elderly character who is reminiscent of the wise person 'preoccupied with matters of the spirit' described by Hazan. Protagonist Megan Lloyd's insight is aligned with the spiritual throughout the text. Much of the narrative is spent charting her stoic endurance of the hardships of her younger years, through which she has developed wisdom. In the frame narrative and present day of the text, Megan is in the 'autumn' of her life and has the spiritual

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[51] Hazan, *Old Age*, pp. 30-31.

[52] In his seminal essay collection *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes analyses the removal of contextualising information for ideological purposes in a broad range of cultural forms. The critic describes this reduction as the operation of 'myth' and explains that it works by presenting 'History' (specific socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical factors) as 'Nature': '[…] in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.' Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), revised edn, trans. by Annette Lavers and Siân Reynolds (London: Vintage, 2009), p. xix.

wisdom to be at peace in the knowledge that death will soon be with her: 'She was profoundly calm; serene as an autumn evening after a tempestuous day […] during these last months of her life, she sat, content to wait for death […].'[53] She is suggested to have a sensitive understanding of the human condition. For example, a growing awareness of the relative brevity of human life gave her the ability to keep on living and caring for her children when existence was painful. She explains philosophically: 'I did not *want* to live, […] but lookin' up at those ancient old hills, it seemed to me such a small little thing to live out my short span, patient like, to the end o' my days.' (169) Further, Megan's insight does not come from academic learning, but is part of a less tangible wisdom grounded in faith and experience. Although the character's poor spelling and slow writing skills are emphasised, her understanding is compared positively to her husband's theological training. The protagonist knows that 'his knowledge of many matters was as great as was her ignorance', but 'the wisdom of her humility' means that she can also recognise that 'he was well instructed rather than wise' (149). Not only is Vaughan's representation of this ageing woman reminiscent of the spiritual aspects of the wise character type, the association of her insight with qualities less palpable than academic learning is in keeping with the idea that the skills of the wise older person are often distanced from the practicalities of everyday life.

Vaughan's rendering of Megan is also suggestive of the supernatural qualities of the wise older person. The narrator frequently associates the elderly character with the figure of Saint Anne, mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus, who, having

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[53] Hilda Vaughan, 'A Thing of Nought' (1934), *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 132-71 (p. 133). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

spent her fertile years childless, conceived in later life through a miracle.[54] Warner explains that 'one of the most lively devotions of the middle ages' developed around Saint Anne and continued into the seventeenth century.[55] The saint was seen as 'a patroness of childless women and grandmothers' and as 'an educator, who in numerous cult images teaches her daughter Mary to read'. Furthermore, Warner argues that this figure tempers more negative images of knowledgeable older women:

> The image of Saint Anne, flourishing in a place and at a time when terror of witches was rife, when the deviancy of wise women was a commonplace belief, mitigates these suspicions and fears. Anne offers an alternative, inspiring, contrastingly humane image of aged female expertise, and although a certain degree of clerical taming is implied as well […], the permitted benevolence is unexpected, and consolatory.[56]

Saint Anne appears a passive character who is directed by her faith and is a device in the wider narrative of the coming of the Messiah, rather than an actor in her own right. Her 'value is guaranteed by her child', 'she is always lesser than Mary, and serves her so that she may fulfil her destiny'. Her knowledge and teaching are also focused altruistically on the greater good and approved of by the dominant culture thanks to their subservience to religious doctrine: 'Usually, mother [Anne] and daughter [Mary] are reading from the Bible […] Anne's recourse to the authority of scripture […] provides assurance of her dependability as an instrument of God rather than an original narrator.'[57] The path of Vaughan's protagonist mirrors that of Saint Anne when she conceives a child by a man she loves devotedly but has been prevented from marrying and with whom she has never had a physical relationship. This miracle connotes the supernatural elements of the wise older person stereotype, while the narrator's linking of Megan with a religious figure also befits the

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[54] For an account of the legend of Saint Anne and its roots, see Chapter 6, entitled 'Saint Anne, Dear Nan: Sibyls II', in Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, pp. 81-96.
[55] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 83.
[56] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 82.
[57] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 90.

association of her wisdom with spiritual matters. Furthermore, like Anne, Megan appears altruistic, passive, and directed by the teachings of the church. Her roles as a mother and grandmother are emphasised, it is her sense of religious duty which finally allows her to be persuaded to marry the local minister rather than her beloved Penry Price, and she is willing to accept the miracle of her child with Penry thanks to her unquestioning faith:

> 'All things are possible to the spirit,' she answered, 'as we are readin' in the Bible.[…] I am not laughin' at the old stories, as some are doin'. Folks as have had a bit of education, they aren't willin' to believe in anything as they can't understand. But the wisest are them as are full o' wonder still […] There is nothin' so strange but what it may come to pass.' This was the summing up of her faith. (166)

Thus, like Saint Anne, Megan's knowledge could be viewed by those in power as safe and unthreatening, as it is unlikely to result in her challenging the dominant cultural or religious discourse. The comparison of the character to the saint throughout 'A Thing of Nought' adds to the reader's sense that, despite her superior wisdom, she remains humble.

Where Vaughan's text reinforces several aspects of the stereotype of the wise older person, Gwyn Thomas's *The Dark Philosophers* (1946) undermines this figure and offers a quite different imagining of older insight which eschews associations with the supernatural and spiritual for a brand of wisdom rooted in practical experience of economic and political realities. Set in a small mining town in the South Wales valleys during the Second World War, the novella is unflinching in its depiction of the poverty, unemployment, and exploitation which have plagued the working-class townspeople for decades. The text is narrated by one of the ageing 'philosophers' of the title. With his friends Walter, Arthur, and Ben, he has lived through the jingoistic recruitment of the Great War, the drama of the General Strike, and the hardship of the Depression and now casts a wary eye on the changes which

have come to the valley with a new war. Hardened political radicals, the philosophers spend their evenings dissecting the power dynamics at play in their community. In particular, their critical faculties are exercised by the town's ageing minister Emmanuel. Thomas's rendering of this character draws on several elements of the stereotypical wise old man. His hair turns white prematurely and is referenced repeatedly. However, where this physical trait would usually be interpreted as a sign of wisdom and benevolence – indeed, a younger member of the congregation states that Emmanuel appears 'just like a saint' – the philosophers reject these connotations.[58] Dwelling on the fact that the whitening coincides with the minister's abandonment of the left-wing allegiances which they once shared, the narrator views it as a symbol of cowardly dereliction of principles: 'It might well be that it is a man's conscience that helps to keep his hair black. When he has tossed that conscience to the dogs, what could this hair do but turn snowy?' (109) The figure of the benign wise old man is further destabilised by Emmanuel's actions. He adopts a 'gentle, fatherly manner of pulpit talking', but uses this mild performance to advance the cause of the rich and powerful in his community (109). In addition, the extent of Emmanuel's hypocrisy is revealed when he uses his position to seduce an impressionable young woman in his congregation.

As he dismantles the traditional figure of the wise old man, Thomas offers the reader an alternative vision of older insight in the form of the philosophers themselves. Their wisdom is evident in their critiques of the establishment and the socioeconomic situation of 1940s Britain. For instance, the narrator evokes the sad irony that the biggest improvement in employment prospects in the 'Terraces' of his

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[58] Gwyn Thomas, *The Dark Philosophers* (1946), in *The Dark Philosophers* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), pp. 103-240 (p. 180). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

home town has been brought about by war and reveals an awareness of the desperation which drives the community:

> We thought it a pity, of course, that this increase of jobs and prosperity should be due to the making of guns […], but the attitude of most of us was that anything that brought life a heightened sense of meaning and direction, and a more flippant attitude towards Social Insurance was our notion of a sound religion. […] You would denounce it as pagan if you had none of our experiences, but you would not if you knew anything much about the Terraces. (114)

As the undermining of Emmanuel is part of the text's anti-chapel sentiments, it is also fitting that, as a result of their experiences, the philosophers have lost any spiritual beliefs they might once have held. However, these men are not an idealised image of older wisdom. Sadly, the years of hardship have left them cynical and numb to the beauty in life. Their 'kindness' has 'mostly evaporated' (225-6) and the narrator explains: 'We cursed within our minds the sterile cold and loneliness we had lived in for many years when misery and anger had killed the memory of all such loveliness as that music within us […].' (124) The question is raised as to whether the philosophers are knowledgeable on the subject of love, given that it is of a more metaphysical nature than their socially-situated political analysis. Walter explains that they are not, for '[t]hey do not run classes on it at the Library and [Miners'] Institute, so it cannot be a subject of any great value' (224). At the end of the text, however, the four punish Emmanuel for using his authority to seduce a young friend's grieving fiancée by goading him into an impassioned defence of his actions. As they have calculated, the excitement proves too much for the minister and he collapses in a fatal seizure. This act suggests that the four do have an understanding of the human heart, but, sadly, their hardened attitude means that they use this insight for violence. The irony of this situation is reinforced in the text's final lines, when the narrator comments that 'wisdom, though sweet, is hard as the hills' (240). The fact that the insights espoused

by Thomas's titular characters are situated in their particular socioeconomic experiences combats the tendency of the stereotype of the wise older person to suggest that older people cannot negotiate the complexities of everyday life and avoids mythologizing the concept of older wisdom by associating it only with the metaphysical. While the suggestion that the philosophers' optimism has been destroyed by hardship is depressing in itself, the fact that the four continue critiquing the world around them and attempt to uphold their principles through direct, albeit violent, action is oddly inspiring. It is certainly not an example of the type of fertile creativity which Segal hopes may become a more commonplace image of ageing, but it does assert the ability of the most marginalised of people to remain critically aware and passionate in their beliefs as they age.

'Her gift-wrapped strength': Inspirational Grandmothers

Across the field of Welsh fiction in English, elderly women feature more frequently than their male counterparts and the most inspiring portraits of older people tend to take the form of grandmothers. Critics' work on the presentation of ageing in other cultural fields offers some explanation for this phenomenon. Of course, on a statistical level women live longer than men, so it is not surprising that older female characters are more in evidence than older males. However, this is not the whole story. Segal states that:

> […] women seem early on to acquire a special affinity with ageing, when many of the experiences and emotions of old age have been associated with the feminine all along: from its apparent fragilities and frequent humiliations to the laborious work of caring for those in need, starting with birth all the way through to dealing with death and dying.[59]

[59] Segal, *Out of Time*, p. 26.

Given this 'special affinity', perhaps a female character is a more obvious signifier of old age than a male one. Further, Kathleen Woodward suggests that the role of grandparent is one of a limited number of functions open to elderly women: 'For is not the grandmother – the sexless and comfortable grandmother – one of the few stock images of the older woman?'[60] If this is the case, it would make sense that the most positive renderings of older women are of those who adhere to the role which society prescribes for them. However, several Welsh writers do more with the figure of the grandmother than simply offering a restrictive, stereotypical image of a 'comfortable' – for which read 'benign and passive' – older woman who is a carer above all else.[61]

Glyn Jones's *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956) is one of a number of texts which feature grandmothers who are adored by and inspirations to their grandchildren. The novel is a bildungsroman which charts protagonist and narrator Trystan Morgan's struggles to choose a vocation and assert his identity in adolescence and early adulthood. Following the death of his parents, he is adopted by his paternal grandmother, Mary Lydia. This elderly character is a pillar of strength and determination. An autodidact who survived a poverty- stricken childhood, her 'mangled', 'red and rugged' 'hands of a labourer' serve as a reminder of the work and sacrifice that she has endured in order that her children, and Trystan himself, can have

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[60] Woodward, 'Performing Age, Performing Gender', p. 170.

[61] The dominance of the grandmother as the most positive image of old age in the field of Welsh fiction can also be explained in part by what Jeff Hearn describes as older men becoming 'relatively redundant, even invisible' in contemporary society, 'not just in terms of paid work and family responsibilities, but more importantly in terms of life itself'. Hearn attributes this phenomenon to factors including the separating of older people from those closer to child-rearing age by 'geographical and social mobility', and the fact that older men die earlier than women and so are 'constructed as pre-death'. Of particular relevance to my analysis is Hearn's identification of the '"invisibility" of grandfatherhood' as an example of this trend of redundant older men. The representation of grandfathers and ageing men will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter. Jeff Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 97-115 (pp. 101-02).

the opportunities she lacked.[62] The elderly woman's remarkable fortitude and her grandson's adoration are apparent in Trystan's recollections and digressions, which are typical of Jones's style in their inclusion of colourful characters, hyperbolic descriptions, and slippages into the surreal. Tall in stature, the image of Mary Lydia dressed in her chapel clothes and carrying Trystan's father's trunk from her cottage to the railway '*upon her head*' the morning he went away to college 'with the erect bearing of some at last triumphant wet-eyed queen' implies regal dignity and superhuman determination (10, emphasis in original). At times, she appears god-like in the protagonist's eyes. For example, in his dream after her funeral, her spirit's final journey from the mining valley to paradise in the form of a 'great indomitable bird' carries connotations of the Ascension of Christ or the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (150).

Trystan's grandmother and characters like her can be viewed as variations on the stereotype of the Welsh Mam. Gwenno Ffrancon charts the evolution of this figure from her roots in the eighteenth century ideology of the 'virtuous and considerate mother', via the Victorian 'Angel of Hearth and Home' and Welsh responses to the 'Treachery of the Blue Books', to its repetition in twentieth-century film and literature.[63] She characterises the Welsh Mam as an idealised figure who is selflessly

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[62] Glyn Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956), (Cardigan: Parthian, 2009), p. 9. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

[63] Ffrancon explains that the figure of the Welsh Mam was born out of Victorian anxieties about the emancipation of women following the Industrial Revolution: '[…] with the coming of industrialization, fundamental changes occurred and, as the competition between the genders for work increased and the campaign to secure equal political and legal rights for women gathered momentum, traditional feminine characteristics were increasingly emphasized within society and the ideal of the "Angel in the Home" was promoted.' Further, the transmission of the ideal of the virtuous wife and mother in Wales had much to do with cultural responses to the infamous 1847 Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales, better known as the 'Treachery of the Blue Books', and the desire to 'restore the good name of Wales and her people' following the condemnation of the country's morals by the commissioners. Gwenno Ffrancon, 'The Angel in the Home? Rachel Thomas, Siân Phillips and the On-Screen Embodiment of the Welsh Mam', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 2009*, new series, 16 (2010), 110-22 (pp. 110-13).

devoted to her family, 'pious, dutiful and hardworking', and confined to the domestic sphere.[64] Tenacious, chapel-going and driven by love for her family, Mary Lydia certainly fits this mould. However, Ffrancon reveals problematic elements to the Welsh Mam stereotype, in particular the figure's role in shoring up Victorian patriarchal structures and limiting Welsh women's choices:

> The Welsh woman, and the Welsh Mam in particular, was raised on a pedestal and canonized. Through this process of idealization and romanticization, the Welsh wife or mother became enslaved to her apron and her kitchen and entrusted with the burden of rearing a clean family in all senses of the word.[65]

It could be, therefore, that Jones's inclusion of elements of the Welsh Mam in Trystan's grandmother reduces the character to a stereotype or makes her a negative representation of older women and old age more generally. However, the character is more complex than this. Her teaching herself to read and write in first Welsh and then English is an act of self-improvement and self-expression, rather than a domestic task undertaken for the benefit of family, and the power of Jones's descriptions of Mary Lydia encourages the reader to become as intoxicated and inspired by her determination as the protagonist himself. Furthermore, this elderly woman is not confined to the domestic sphere. She is presented sitting in public judgment of her community's morals and behaviour in one of the novel's more surreal episodes (see Chapter 4 below) and the respect that she commands locally is such that the headmaster of Trystan's grammar school is loath to go against the wishes of this 'very remarkable woman' (93). In Mary Lydia there is a powerful imagining of later life as a time of strength, nurturing, and involvement with family which provides a balance to images of ageing centred on degeneration or withdrawal from society. Finally, she is not passive or servile in her attitude to her children and grandchild. Although a

[64] Ffrancon, 'The Angel in the Home?', p. 115.
[65] Ffrancon, 'The Angel in the Home?', p. 114.

loving relationship, the ties between Trystan and his grandmother prove problematic when Mary Lydia's traditional opinions on his ideal career path clash with his wishes. These difficulties will be considered alongside other intergenerational relationships in Chapter 4.

While their specific character traits and the details of their relationships with their grandchildren may vary, inspirational and beloved grandmothers can be found in a range of Welsh novels and short stories from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In texts such as *Turf or Stone* (1934) by Margiad Evans, young adults obtain greater understanding and support for their individual needs from their grandmothers than from their parents. Teenage Phoebe Kilminster is released temporarily from the violent, gothic environment of her parents' estate when her grandmother insists that she comes to live with her. A remarkable farmer's daughter turned aesthete herself, the older woman recognises Phoebe's talents and wants to ensure that she attends a good school and that her gift for music and singing is nurtured. More recently, in Rachel Trezise's 2000 novel *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl*, the central character's grandmother provides the only positive role model and one of the few glimmers of hope in her abuse-scarred teenage years. It is while nursing her dying grandmother Rose that Rebecca begins to overcome the depression which has plagued her since she was raped as a child and to make plans for the future. As is the case in Trystan's recollections of his grandmother in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, it is Rose's strength that makes the greatest impression on her granddaughter. Also as in Jones's novel and echoing the selfless Welsh Mam stereotype, this tenacity is demonstrated in the fact that Rebecca's grandmother worked and overcame obstacles in order that she could give her children what she never had:

> She had worked all her life. Born in Carmarthen, she left for London at fourteen to marry. She worked through the war, driving buses, driving troops around Britain, and was the only woman in the district to do so. She moved to Rhondda when she met my Grandfather, and she cleaned every pub in Treorchy. Her children were the best fed and dressed; and they were the first family in the Rhondda with a television and a car.[66]

In particular, Rose's proficiency at cleaning and the fact that her success as a mother is evidenced by her children's tidy appearance is in keeping with Deirdre Beddoe's discussion of the Welsh Mam's relationship with housework. Considering the testimonies of women from the coal-mining communities of the Rhondda specifically, Beddoe argues that the lack of pit-head baths and hot running water in the homes of these miners' wives shaped their values and characters:

> Despite all the difficulties of keeping the houses clean, or perhaps *because* of them, women in the mining valleys took an enormous pride in keeping their houses spotlessly clean. […] Cleanliness was next to godliness and people could say proudly, 'we were poor but we were clean'. Women's triumph over adverse circumstances was reflected in polished surfaces and conveyed to neighbours by shining door-knockers and scrubbed doorsteps. […]
>
> These women were, in their own language 'tidy women' a term that implied far more than good housekeeping: it connoted respectability.[67]

However, Rebecca's grandmother is not just a stereotypical variation on the figure of the Welsh Mam. The fact that she undertook driving work during the war – a task usually performed by men – undermines the association of this character with domestic and traditionally feminine roles;[68] one is reminded of the figure cut by tall, proud Mary Lydia carrying her son's trunk on her head in the absence of her deceased

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[66] Rachel Trezise, *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000), (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), p. 145. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[67] Beddoe's analysis is focused on the interwar years, but her point holds here. Deirdre Beddoe, 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939', in *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, ed. by Angela John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 189-209 (p. 204, emphasis in original).
[68] Beddoe notes that, although women had been employed in a range of industries during the First World War, during the 1920s and 1930s, government institutions and the popular media were determined to see women back in domestic service or in unpaid work in their own homes. Beddoe, 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams', pp. 193-96.

husband. Similarly, the fact that when Rose did perform cleaning tasks it was to clean 'every pub in Treorchy' contradicts the piety expected of the traditional Welsh Mam.

Rebecca's response to her grandmother's past fortitude reveals the damage that has been done to her by her childhood. Where Trystan feels guilt at the thought of Mary Lydia's work-worn fingers in comparison to his smooth hands, the reaction of Trezise's protagonist is more extreme. Although still only in her teens, she envies her grandmother's impending death and views Rose as more deserving of life than herself, thanks to the elderly woman's accumulated experience:

> She, with a healthy appetite and a house full of possessions and a lifetime of riveting war stories, sticking together through poverty stories, marrying, nurturing four children and even more grandchildren stories and she was dying. And me, me with not even a thought in my head, was living. Just didn't seem right.' (145)

This notion is a reversal of the attitude, expressed by older characters in other Welsh texts, that the death of a young person is a greater tragedy than the passing of someone old because they have not yet lived a full life.[69] Rebecca's unusual perspective is symptomatic of her dysfunctional family and the 'upside-down' life she has lived (150). Generational roles and boundaries are confused not only when the protagonist is raped by her stepfather before she has reached physical maturity, but also in the fact that her mother does not behave like an adult. The protagonist's fourteen-year-old brother is left to comfort his mother when her husband (his father) leaves. Her innocence destroyed, it is unsurprising that Rebecca feels she missed out on childhood. She describes her feelings in terms usually associated with older people coming to the end of their lives, reinforcing the sense of generational confusion:

> I feel as though I have never been a child. […] When I was growing up, developing pink nipples and my legs grew a peach fuzz which would need

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[69] See, for example, older members of the community praying for God to take them but save the younger men trapped underground following a mining accident in Jack Jones's *Rhondda Roundabout* (1934) and the response to the death of a young miner in Menna Gallie's *The Small Mine* (1962).

> soon to be shaved, I thought like an old man. I watched my life with tired eyes, disappearing surely, and waited for it to end with little effort to prolong it. (64)

The protagonist's viewing herself as aged before her time is also in keeping with links drawn between herself and her grandmother in the novel. The reader learns that, as a very small child, she explained to her mother that her 'name wasn't Rebecca, it was Rosemary' and she 'wasn't a baby, [she] was thirty-eight years old and expecting a baby, [her] husband David was away at World War II, and [she] feared a bomb might kill [her]'. (12-13) No explanation is offered for this precocious story, but the revelation that the protagonist's grandmother is named Rose – reminiscent of Rosemary – and that she was in London during the Blitz suggests a kind of psychic link between grandmother and granddaughter. Further, the strength which Rebecca needs to survive her past and become her adult self is inherited from her grandmother:

> My Gran died the following Tuesday […] she gave me more than a choice of clothes and a sewing machine, she gave me the person who is writing this sentence. She gave me treasured stories and examples and standards to live by […]. She equipped me with everything I would need to begin a new forceful life of my own making. The strongest woman I have ever known handed out to me her gift-wrapped strength. (147)

The affinity between Rebecca and Rose and the sense that their relationship enables Rebecca to create her future are reminiscent of Woodward's reflections on intergenerational relationships between women. The critic asserts that 'the older woman is a missing person in Freudian psychoanalysis' and seeks to establish her importance in female psychological development. [70] Recollecting a 'mood' of 'fluent companionship' which existed between her ten-year-old self and her own grandmother one summer afternoon, Woodward argues that Freud's structure of Oedipal nuclear familial relations, based as it is on two generations and privileging

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[70] Kathleen Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Ageism', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 79-96 (p. 86).

sexual differentiations above all else, is not the most helpful way of describing the psychological growth of little girls.[71] Instead, she suggests a linear, tri-generational structure of formative relationships concerned with the developing child, the mother, and grandmother:

> […] I propose we look at this plumb line, or lineage, from a different point of view, from the perspective of the older woman. Kaja Silverman has insisted that for the choric fantasy of women's unity to function effectively it must point forward as well as backward. Turning our attention to the figure of the other woman, the older woman, as the third term is precisely one way of moving forward, of thinking prospectively rather than retrospectively (although it will involve this also). And to up the ante, I suggest that we imagine her as a figure of knowledge who represents the difference that history, or time, makes, a difference that she in fact literally embodies.[72]

Woodward's main argument is that feminist academics should acknowledge that 'there are more than two generations of women in the academy' and reap the benefits of reciprocal relationships between women separated by generations.[73] However, she also acknowledges the importance of intergenerational relationships for female empowerment in 'everyday life': 'It is common knowledge that struggle can "skip" a generation, that many of us have formative relationships with women a generation, if not more, older than our mothers.'[74] Given the strength that Rebecca gains from her grandmother, they can be seen to have just this kind of relationship. In addition, the protagonist's strategies for recovering from her childhood and protecting herself from further pain incorporate specifically feminist aspects, including as they do a temporary desire to dispense with men through lesbian relationships and her discovery of feminism via grunge music. However, it is only when nursing her grandmother that she finally symbolically kills off the old version of herself and

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[71] Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman', p. 82.
[72] Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman', p. 86.
[73] Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman', p. 89.
[74] Woodward, 'Tribute to the Older Woman', p. 91.

emerges ready for new challenges. Thus, Rebecca's grandmother plays a vital role in her personal 'struggle'. Woodward's description of the older woman as 'a figure of knowledge who represents the difference that history, or time, makes' and her view that looking back at this figure's past is a way of 'moving forward, of thinking prospectively rather than retrospectively' is also relevant to Trezise's characters, as the stories that Rose tells of her earlier life contribute to Rebecca's resolve to have a future. Finally, the psychic link between grandmother and granddaughter which is suggested by little Rebecca's talk of life during the war can be read as a literary manifestation of the synergy which Woodward felt with her grandmother as a child, the 'fluent companionship that [...] stretched across the continuity established by three generations'.[75]

Ageing Men and Grandfathers

As discussed above, when one looks for positive images of old age in Welsh fiction in English, grandmothers tend to stand out. In contrast, there are a number of ambiguous or potentially problematic tropes involved in the representation of ageing men and grandfathers. Several writers reflect a propensity to present older men as foolish or incapable and as sources of humour.[76] For example, Glyn Jones's 'Wat Pantathro' (1941) details the titular character's eccentric appearance and behaviour, but encourages the reader to sympathise with Wat rather than laugh along with his neighbours. Narrated by Wat's son, the short story tells of the pair's trip to a local horse fair. Wat is an accomplished horseman who can make the wildest steeds

[75] Woodward. 'Tribute to the Older Woman', p. 82.
[76] The mocking of King Lear by the Fool in Shakespeare's tragedy is an example of this tendency.

compliant. However, Jones's description reveals not only the character's age, but also his alcoholic's complexion:

> His face was long and bony, dull red or rather purplish all over, the same colour as the underside of your tongue, and covered with a mass of tiny little wormy veins. He had thick grey hair and rich brown eyebrows that were curved upwards and as bushy as a pair of silkworms.[77]

We learn that, although he loves and admires his father, the narrator is often embarrassed by him. On the day of the fair, the boy is at turns frightened and lonely because his father first leaves him to manage a wild, unbroken mare and then abandons him for an afternoon's drinking. The text reaches its climax as evening falls and Wat sings and recites poetry for a mocking market crowd. The narrator is dismayed at the mob's inability to recognise what he sees as his father's great talents, instead making him 'a gazing-stock and the fool of the fair' (147):

> And soon the serving men were shouting, 'Come on Wat, the "Loss of the Gwladys", Watcyn,' but I could see now they only wanted to make fun of him while he was saying that sad poem. I couldn't understand them because my father was so clever, a better actor and reciter than any of them. (145-46)

However, Jones ensures that the reader is aware of the older man's abilities and redeeming features as well as his flaws. The narrator is cheered and his confidence about driving the new mare home single-handed is increased by comments to the effect that, as he is Wat Pantathro's son, he 'ought to be able to drive anything' (147). Further, he exhibits great affection for his father and there is an intimate bond between the pair, perhaps due in part to the boy's mother being dead. Father and son share a bed and Wat is a source of comfort and tender care.

The titular character's attraction for his son and, as a result, the reader also lies in his capacity for fun. In addition to being entertained at home by his father's special

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[77] Glyn Jones, 'Wat Pantathro' (1941), in *Collected Stories*, ed. by Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 139-48 (p. 140). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

brand of dramatic performance, the narrator is 'shocked and excited' by Wat's risky yet expert handling of a horse and cart (142). Jones's emphasis on the playful aspects of this older character is part of a wider trend in the presentation of ageing men in Anglophone Welsh fiction. In Dylan Thomas's short story 'A Visit to Grandpa's' (1940), for example, the narrator is entertained by his grandfather's light-hearted tales about the local area and lively behaviour, which often involves fantasy:

> On the last day but one of my visit I was taken to Llanstephan in a governess cart pulled by a short, weak pony. Grandpa might have been driving a bison, so tightly he held the reins, so ferociously cracked the long whip, so blasphemously shouted warning to boys who played in the road, so stoutly stood with his gaitered legs apart and cursed the demon strength and wilfulness of his tottering pony.[78]

Grandfather and grandchild's shared playfulness suggests that they have a special rapport. Indeed, children are frequently allied to older people in Welsh fiction in English.[79] The narrator's affinity with his grandfather is apparent from the opening of the text, when the boy wakes from a dream 'full of whips and lariats as long as serpents, and runaway coaches on mountain passes, and wide, windy gallops over cactus fields' to find Grandpa, in the next room, engaged in a similar imaginary journey, 'crying, "Gee-up!" and "Whoa!" and trotting his tongue on the roof of his mouth' (138). The fact that the elderly man sounds 'very young and loud' at this point not only suggests his similarity to his young visitor, but also that he has become childlike (138). Indeed, the narrator and his grandfather swap roles at times, with the boy taking responsibility for the older man; for example, the boy enters his grandfather's bedroom at night to 'see if he was ill, or had set the bedclothes on fire' (138). Thus, the text engages with the tendency within contemporary Western society

[78] Dylan Thomas, 'A Visit to Grandpa's (1940), in *Collected Stories* (London: Phoenix, 1992), pp. 138-43 (pp. 139-40). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[79] See, for example, 'Into Kings', 'The Boy Who Called for a Light', and 'The Old and the Young' in Margiad Evans's *The Old and the Young* (1948), Glyn Jones's *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956, discussed above), and Rachel Trezise's, *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl* (2000, also discussed above).

to associate old age with childhood 'through both verbal and visual images'.[80] Jenny Hockey and Allison James identify two ways in which old age and childhood are 'brought into association': firstly, 'parallels between childhood and old age' are remarked upon, in particular because they 'share the experience of dependency', so that old age and childhood are imaged as 'not only parallel social categories, but also parallel categories of experience'; and, secondly, a 'more active and intentional imaging of old age as "second childhood" enlists the transformatory power of metaphor in lived experiences […]. Old age is no longer simply set alongside childhood; it becomes childhood'. The theorists demonstrate the figurative operation of this metaphor and also give examples of 'well-meaning acts – the comforting pat on the arm, the birthday treat, the helping hand' that 'may be symptomatic of a more damaging and embedded set of practices known as infantilization'.[81] They argue: 'In these examples […] the image of the child is connoted in such a way that the adult status, or personhood, of elderly people becomes obscured. The elderly people have been transformed into metaphoric children.'[82]

One might ask, then, whether Thomas's creation of an affinity between grandson and grandfather in 'A Visit to Grandpa's' is problematic, particularly given that Hockey and James use a quotation from the writer's *Under Milk Wood* (1954) to illustrate the 'remarking of parallels between childhood and old age'.[83] I don't find the text problematic, as the intimacy between older and younger characters revolves around playfulness and enjoyment, rather than dependency and a lack of adult status. Furthermore, the writer presents the kind of acts of infantilization described by

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[80] Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 'Back to Our Futures: Imaging Second Childhood', *in Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 135-48 (p. 135).
[81] Hockey and James, 'Back to Our Futures', pp. 135-36.
[82] Hockey and James, 'Back to Our Futures', p. 137.
[83] Hockey and James, 'Back to Our Futures', p. 135.

Hockey and James in a negative light. When, at the end of the text, Grandpa embarks upon one of his regular and, apparently, unauthorised trips to Llangadock 'to be buried' (142), a group of his neighbours sets out to bring him home. Although they appear motivated by concern for the older man's wellbeing, these self-appointed rescuers address him like an errant child. Mr. Griff the barber asks 'sternly': 'And what do you think you are doing on Carmarthen bridge in the middle of the afternoon [...] with your best waistcoat and your old hat?' (142); while the neighbours' attempts to persuade Grandpa to return home are accompanied by the sort of bribery usually reserved for toddlers:

> His neighbours moved close to him. They said: 'You aren't dead, Mr. Thomas.'
> 'How can you be buried, then?'
> 'Come on home, Mr. Thomas.'
> 'There's strong beer for tea.'
> 'And cake.' (142-43)

In the text's final image, Grandpa cuts a lonely figure, doggedly holding onto his black bag and his belief that he will soon require burial: 'But grandpa stood firmly on the bridge, and clutched his bag to his side, and stared at the flowing river and the sky, like a prophet who has no doubt.' (143) The tone is mournful and the image bleak in comparison to the colourful descriptions of fun activities found earlier in the text. The writer's likening the elderly character to a prophet also gives him an air of dignity which undermines any sense of incompetence or foolishness which may have resulted from previous events.

The ending of 'Wat Pantathro' is rather different to that of 'A Visit to Grandpa's'. Where Thomas emphasises his older character's dignity, Jones details the physical effects of Wat's excessive drinking:

> His pretty horseshoe tie was like a gunrag and the blue jay's feather was hanging torn from his wet hat beside me on the seat [...]. [...] And on the inside of his best breeches, too, there was a dark stain where he had wet

> himself, but I didn't care about that, I was driving him home myself with the young mare between the shafts and I was safe on the hill outside Lewsin Penylan's already. (148)

The older man's incontinence and the fact he is 'safe and sleeping soundly' under his son's watchful eye connote an infant or young child (148). The implication that, as he ages, Wat is becoming more childlike is also apparent in the way in which father and son have swapped roles, with the narrator driving the unconscious Wat home. The fact that the text is a coming-of-age story for the boy is also relevant. Although when he brings the mare home without incident, turning triumphantly into the drive 'without touching the gateposts', the narrator derives confidence from the belief that he has inherited his father's skill with horses, this high note is muted by the reader's uncomfortable understanding that Wat's talents are being overshadowed by his weakness and that his ability to function is waning (148). There is a sense that, as his son's self-assurance and competence grow, a shift in the balance of their relationship is taking place, whereby the narrator will no longer need his father's protection, and is likely to begin caring for Wat instead. However, although Jones's text gestures towards the metaphor that makes old age a second childhood here, his older character is not a stereotype. The circumstances described in 'Wat Pantathro' are individual and specific, in particular Wat's drinking and widowed status. The fact that Wat's alcoholism is the main cause of his embarrassing behaviour and physical degeneration, rather than his age, also complicates his becoming the child in his relationship with his son.

Representations of ageing by Welsh writers also reflect the importance of employment and retirement to male self-image in later life. Jeff Hearn argues that where, in pre-industrial societies, 'increasing and greater age' was 'the major determinant of the social power of different men' and '"maleness" and "age(dness)"

were usually mutually reinforcing and reaffirming as means to power', with industrialisation and the dominance of capitalism, the situation has changed: 'Labour-power has been transformed from generational ownership to ownership of the body on the "free market". […] beyond a certain point, the older the man, the weaker he becomes not just physically and bodily, but also socially.'[84] Somewhat reassuringly, the sociologist also notes that a change in the focus of labour from 'the body to the mind/ technology' through developments including the expansion of office and professional work means that older men's labour can still be valuable when their physical abilities are changing.[85] In addition, Hearn views the introduction of state pensions and retirement in the twentieth century as significant for imaging the ageing of men. He argues that the emergence of concepts such as 'early retirement' and 'voluntary severance' has complicated the 'occupational structuring of "retired" older men' and created a 'new younger "retired" group'.[86] These issues of employment and retirement feature in texts of contrasting styles from across a wide time period.

Kate Roberts's 'The Condemned' (1937) is a sensitive exploration of the interior journey of Dafydd Parri after he receives the news that he is terminally ill at the age of only fifty-five. Dafydd is sent home from hospital to live out his last months with his wife Laura, too ill to continue with his job at the local quarry. Before his illness takes over and he becomes focused only on his pain and his interactions with Laura, the character is preoccupied with thoughts of his workmates holding conversations without him and exchanging news and gossip to which he is not party. Spending his weekdays in the house rather than at the quarry, Dafydd's life becomes

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[84] Jeff Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 97-115 (p. 100).
[85] Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', p. 100.
[86] Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', p. 101.

'narrow and new'.[87] As the days pass, the physical traces of his work fade from his body:

> Dafydd would wash himself deliberately and carefully on getting up. He had a habit of rubbing the towel between his fingers, and he noticed that his hands became cleaner day by day, and that the seam of grey from the quarry dust was disappearing from between his fingers. (106)

As his interest in the quarry dwindles, the protagonist is inducted into the daytime routine of his home and its domestic rhythms – 'the different states a house goes through from five in the morning till ten at night' (105). Observing the regular pattern of Bron Eithin seems to comfort Dafydd and makes him more aware of Laura and attentive to her movements:

> She'd leave the bedroom door open, and he could hear the boys talking as they ate their breakfast. He could see a little of the kitchen too, and as he looked at it over the bedside it looked unnatural, as if he were seeing it in a mirror. Around nine, after finishing with the cows and the pigs, Laura would bring him a little Scotch broth, and she'd have time to sit down and relax with him then. He'd get up a little before dinner, and the hearthstone would be just washed, and the edge of the slate could be seen drying in streaks. Laura took care to have a comfortable hearth for him every day by the time he got up. (106)

The introduction of a retired man into the domestic space previously demarcated as female is an image described by Hearn in his discussion of representations of older men. He states:

> The construction of men as 'retired' has […] produced a wealth of literature, including that on retirement planning, retirement courses, […] and so on […]. This also addresses men in marriage, and the possible problems of the man spending more time at home, and even in the kitchen. Men are constructed here as newcomers to the home.[88]

Indeed, further examples of this trope exist in modern and contemporary Welsh fiction. Both 'I Will Keep Her Company' (1964) by Rhys Davies and Emyr

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[87] Kate Roberts, 'The Condemned' (1937), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 103-10, (p. 108). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[88] Hearn, 'Imaging the Aging of Men', p. 101.

Humphreys's more recent short fiction 'The Garden Cottage' (2009)[89] centre on isolated older men whose vulnerability derives in part from the fact that they have been left alone in the domestic environment by the sudden deaths of their wives.

In contrast to Roberts's delicate short story, *The Book of Idiots* (2012) by Christopher Meredith is humorous and irreverent. Concerned with masculinity and mortality, the novel explores the ways in which middle-aged narrator Dean and his predominantly male associates are affected by work, retirement, illness, and ageing. The protagonist's interactions with Jeff, who is older and no longer working, are revealing in their presentation of retirement and ageing. Jeff appears lonely when he meets Dean at the swimming pool, extending their one-way conversations for as long as possible so that the narrator eventually hurries him, cutting him off with an 'Anyway, Jeff' more than once.[90] The older man responds aggressively to the teenage staff at the pool, suggesting that he feels threatened by younger men, and, relatedly, reveals that he was forced to retire from his job at a local college after he punched a disrespectful seventeen-year-old student. It seems that Jeff's retirement was not voluntary and he has not adjusted well. The character's superficially enthusiastic description of days spent at his allotment betrays a struggle to fill the empty hours left now that his work is done and his sons have grown up: 'I bloody love it. Don't know how I found the time before I finished. […] I got all this time see. All this time. I go up dead early some mornings. Pat's still sleeping. No Dennis now see. Or Mark. We don't see 'em much.' (85)

Furthermore, there is a sense that Jeff and other ageing men in the novel are being superseded by younger generations and alienated by the progress of modern

[89] Discussed below in Chapter 4.
[90] Christopher Meredith, *The Book of Idiots* (Bridgend: Seren, 2012), p. 14. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

life. Following the recruitment of the 'unfeasibly young' Kyle to replace Dean's colleague Graham upon his retirement (136), the narrator predicts a shift in the hierarchy of age in the office which will position him as the next to leave: 'I caught myself sounding like Graham. And that perhaps was how Grice and Davies [the organisation's senior staff] saw it. We would all shuffle into place. Kyle becomes Andy, Andy becomes Edith, Edith becomes me, I become Graham.' (148) The text is filled with references to the trappings of twenty-first-century life: Renault Meganes, Nordic walking, and the pretension which dubs a foyer an '*atrium*', for example (97, emphasis in original). These fashions and consumer goods appear unfamiliar and over-complicated when compared with Dean's recollections of the simple outdoor games he played as a child. Significantly, where Dean is aware of the alien quality of these fashions and fads – contrasting, for example, hi-tech modern hiking equipment with long childhood walks in 'daps and jeans and tee shirts' – Jeff is excluded from and intimidated by new developments (41). Attempting to buy swimming trunks in modern 'Endurance' fabric on Dean's recommendation, he cannot find a pair big enough to fit him (89). Sadly, it seems that modern life is not designed with older men like Jeff in mind. He has been superseded. Given this implication and the older man's loneliness and suggested redundancy, his suicide at his allotment later in the text is sad but unsurprising.

However, Meredith also provides more positive imaginings of retirement and male ageing which mean that, when viewed as a group, the older characters in *The Book of Idiots* leave one with the impression that there is no single template for men's retirement and later life, rather, a range of options and experiences. Peter, the amateur glider pilot who takes Dean out flying, is '[o]lder than Jeff […] close to seventy' (215), but still has the physique of a younger man: 'Peter was tall and thin and

unremarkable. He was in a check shirt, jeans and trainers. Only his hands and face looked old […].' (215) He is a picture of competence as he guides the glider through the sky and, when Dean comments that he once performed a parachute jump, Peter replies: 'One more than I ever intend doing' (216). That the older man views a parachute jump as an activity that is still open to him and which he chooses to reject, rather than an experience which he will never have, suggests that later life and retirement can be a time of activity, new experiences, and choice.

Beyond presenting the personal difficulties of characters such as Jeff in adjusting to retirement, *The Book of Idiots* critiques the marginalisation of older people in our society more generally. When senior staff at Dean's employer, the Foundation, interview applicants to replace Graham, the narrator and his colleagues choose their preferred candidate based on brief presentations. This decision-making process is influenced by various prejudices. Of the four candidates, three are dismissed due, in part at least, to their age or gender:

> 'I like Owens pretty well' Andy said. […]
> '[…] It's like, astronomers say there's only a certain band in solar systems that can have lifebearing planets. Not too hot, not too cold, not too big, not too small, and all that. […] Owens is the one in the zone. The others either don't know enough or they've forgotten it. They're either too old or too young.'
> 'Or too female?' Graham said.
> 'I'm glad *you* said that' Edith said. […]
> 'Anyway' Andy said, 'that's nothing to do with it. I thought Melanie was pretty good. Very good actually. Owens does play five a side, mind.' (139-40)

It is revealing that the older and younger applicants are discounted along with the one woman interviewee, suggesting that age can be as important a factor as gender in the othering of an individual. Also, assumptions are made about the oldest of the four candidates which imply that Dean and his colleagues are stereotyping him. In addition to Andy's comment that this mature, experienced candidate will have 'forgotten' the expertise required to do the job, Graham imagines that, because he is himself nearing

retirement and wants to 'coast' until he can collect his pension, the candidate would do the same (139). The inaccuracy of these assumptions is revealed when the preferred candidate argues that the 'old guy' is 'brilliant' and that it is a genuine passion to return to Wales and improve the country which motivates him, not a desire to kill time until retirement (144).

Unmarried Women, or Spinsters with Hinterlands

In addition to the tenacious and inspirational grandmothers that feature frequently in Welsh fiction in English, there exists another group of older female characters who are rendered with a level of depth and complexity which undermines common stereotypes. 'Spinsters', in particular elderly unmarried women, have long been condemned or pitied in popular narratives. In her analysis of common characters in traditional fairy tales, for example, Warner argues that it is often a woman's age and single status which dooms her to be presented as malevolent:

> The kind of woman who threatens society by her singleness and her dependency was not always a clinging mother, or a desperate or abusive widow. She could be a spinster, an unmarried mother, an old nurse or servant in a household – any woman who was unattached and ageing was vulnerable. In the centuries when the image of Mother Goose was being disseminated through numerous editions of fairytale collections, 'there was,' writes historian Michelle Perrot, 'in a radical sense, no place for female solitude in the conceptual framework of the time.' […]
>
> The old wives who spin their tales are almost always represented as unattached: spinsters or widows. Mother Goose appears an anomalous crone, an unhusbanded female cut loose from the moorings of the patriarchal hearth; kin to the witch and the bawd.[91]

Similarly, Maryhelen C. Harmon identifies associations with witches and crones as important to the representation of 'Old Maid' characters in her exploration of works

[91] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, pp. 229-30.

by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Dickens, and William Faulkner, and argues that these 'memorable and affecting old, never-married women […] evoke […] seemingly contradictory but curiously comingled emotions of compassion and scorn'. Harmon also states that the 'archetypal "spinster"' is 'felt to live a frustrated, loveless, unfulfilled life'.[92] Happily, in the case of Welsh fiction in English, the state of being old, female, and unmarried (or, indeed, widowed) does not necessarily mean a miserable existence.

Margiad Evans's tale of two elderly unmarried women 'A Modest Adornment' (1948) gestures towards the negative associations of the spinster stereotype before moving beyond them. Although their neighbours are unaware of the fact and the short story does not make it explicit until its final sentence, Miss Allensmoore and Miss Plant have lived as a couple for many years. Set in a small village, the text tells of Plant's death, Allensmoore's reaction to this loss, and the local gossip which surrounds it. Evans describes Miss Allensmoore as a 'fat black cauldron' with 'a great many dirty black cats', suggesting a witch;[93] her feet are at turns 'hobbling' (116) and 'dark as toads' (118), and the chips she cooks are 'gaunt as talons' (118), in keeping with the crone's withered state, air of stagnation, and physical grotesqueness. Further, both women can be seen to commit failures of femininity. Miss Allensmoore is judged for her poor housekeeping, a conventional measure of female success.[94] She is 'an atrocious but, alas, perpetual cook' (116) and the nurse who visits considers her an 'old slut' and the cottage 'awful': 'Every time

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[92] Maryhelen C. Harmon, 'Old Maids and Old Mansions: The Barren Sisters of Hawthorne, Dickens, and Faulkner', in *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1999), pp. 103-14 (pp. 103-04).
[93] Margiad Evans, 'A Modest Adornment', in *The Old and the Young* (1948) (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 116-35, (p. 116). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[94] See my discussion of the Angel of the Hearth and Home and the Welsh Mam (above). Harmon also observes that Faulkner, Hawthorne, and Dickens's spinsters are domestically deficient: 'Hepzibah, Edith, Miss Havisham, and Emily Grierson all failed, one way or another, as positive goddesses of the hearth and home.' Harmon, 'Old Maids and Old Mansions', p. 110.

she walked in the tables seemed more and more crammed with washing up, with crumbs and tea leaves and the hilly horizons of many obstructive meals.' (119) Further, Miss Allensmoore is nicknamed 'Sooner' – short for 'Sooner Not Do Anything', part of wider criticism by her neighbours of her housekeeping and her care for her dying partner (118). Although 'very, very pretty', Miss Plant is 'squalid' like Miss Allensmoore, her poor eyesight renders her clumsy, and her 'soft silver hair' has 'yellowish patches in it the colour of tobacco stain', suggesting the not quite clean and the uncouth, traditionally masculine habit of smoking (116). Because their neighbours are unaware of their relationship, Allensmoore and Plant are viewed as having lived the kind of 'frustrated, loveless, unfulfilled life' which Harmon argues is typical of the spinster character type. Gossip the morning after her death focuses on local people's assumption that Miss Plant 'had never known people' (125). They are surprised at the revelation that she once walked to London for '[l]ove and scenery' and take it for granted that this passion was short-lived and in the distant past:

> 'Eh? Did she now? Did 'ers s'y that? Poor thing, 'er 'asn't 'ad a lot.'
> […]
> […] 'Ah, if she said that there must a' been a man.'
> 'I've always thought so,' said Mrs Webb sadly.
> 'Huh! It must a' bin Adam then, 'twas so long ago,' (125)

Even Mrs Webb – who visited Miss Plant during her last illness and whose affection and concern are interpreted by Kirsti Bohata as a romantic attraction to the dying woman – assumes both publicly and privately that the object of this love was a man.[95] Thus, as ageing, unmarried women, the idea that Miss Plant and Miss Allensmoore might enjoy a romantic relationship, with each other or anyone else, is ruled out.

[95] Kirsti Bohata, 'The Apparitional Lover: Homoerotic and Lesbian Imagery in the Writing of Margiad Evans', in *Rediscovering Margiad Evans: Marginality, Gender and Illness*, ed. by Kirsti Bohata and Katie Gramich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 107-128 (p. 115).

However, there is more to these older characters than their initial association with the spinster character type implies. Miss Allensmoore has a talent which suggests a hidden side to herself: she is a gifted musician. Where her domestic arrangements and grooming are sloppy, and her encounters with those around her awkward and marred by judgments and prejudice, her oboe playing is delicate, truthful, and unselfconscious:

> Now she would gently, gently put out her hand and take up the oboe. Presently she would play. How beautifully she could play! Between the pieces sighs of joy broke from her and loud words that left holes in her breath. […]
>
> […] In the hours of her playing the universe went round her in satellites of sound, and that irrelevant ingredient, her identity, lapsed into an instinct so rapt and so concise that it amounted to genius. (119-20)

The revelation that Allensmoore has the capacity within her for such beauty suggests that there are other attractive aspects to her character which are not visible to her neighbours or the reader, but which motivated Miss Plant to walk to London when they were first in love. This suspicion is unsettling for the reader and makes it difficult to know how seriously to take her neighbours' judgments of her. Given Mrs Webb and the nurse's observations, the community's criticisms seem justified. Further, Miss Plant is hurt and angered by her partner's behaviour, confiding in Mrs Webb that she likes neither music nor cats and 'wonder[s] if anybody *ever* thinks of [her]' (131, emphasis in original), while Allensmoore admits to herself that the relationship has become 'secretly weary' (135). At first, she takes a distanced, no-nonsense attitude to Miss Plant's passing which might appear callous, describing death as 'nothing after all' and seeming pleased to have a quiet house in which to play the oboe (120). However, during the funeral, these protective rationalisations break down and Allensmoore realises the enormity of her loss:

> Trumpets of rage and grief sounded for her. She went so pale that many of the small crowd thought she would faint. […]

> As she stood on the hill, watching Nora Plant's body being taken to the earth, it was useless telling herself she was going back to silence, useless to say the uproar was over and there would be no more crashes, no more fidgetings, no more nurses and neighbours coming. For the foundation on which she had suffered these things to be, was gone, and nothing was significant any more, and perhaps never would be again. (134-35)

Thus, characters who at first appear to fit the ageing spinster stereotype are revealed to harbour deeper and more complicated feelings and relationships. Jane Aaron views the failings in Allensmoore and Plant's relationship as caused by the impinging of public opinion and heteronormative prejudice on their private lives, stating that the 'community's inability to imagine its members as motivated by any except the expected patterns of loving serves to erode [their] long-term lesbian relationship, and illustrates the loneliness of the homosexual in close-knit but narrow-minded communities'.[96] In this way, then, Evans can be seen to critique the effects of stereotypes upon the older individuals that they target.

The trope of the musical older spinster appears in fiction by other Welsh writers, communicating a variety of different meanings.[97] In Davies's *The Black Venus*, Olwen's piano teacher Miss Eurgain is resolutely and happily single. Breaking with the traditional perception of the spinster as someone who has lived a narrow life, this elderly character had exotic and romantic adventures in her youth, including studying under virtuoso pianist Liszt in Germany and being 'rescued in her nightdress from a burning house in Paris', but chose to remain unattached in order to devote

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[96] Jane Aaron, 'Introduction', in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales, c. 1850-1950* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. ix-xx (p. xix).

[97] In her essay on women's same-sex desire and nationhood in Welsh literature, Bohata also examines the connotations of the trope of musicianship in texts with lesbian characters, including 'A Modest Adornment' and *The Black Venus*. Discussing 'some of the key inter-representations of sexuality and Welsh identities from 1880 to the present', the critic argues: 'Music, which communicates on a level beyond language, is a sensuous, sometimes unsettling force associated with same-sex desire in stories by Margiad Evans and Rhys Davies.' Furthermore, in texts by Davies in particular, 'music is explicitly linked to both ancient, pagan, Celtic Wales and the homosexual decadence of *fin de siècle* Europe'. Kirsti Bohata, '"A queer kind of fancy": Women, Same-sex Desire and Nation in Welsh Literature', in *Queer Wales: The History, Culture and Politics of Queer Life in Wales*, ed. by Huw Osborne (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 91-114 (pp. 92 and 101-02).

herself to her music (41). Like Miss Allensmoore, this ageing female musician is eccentric in her appearance; she is described as 'blacklipped', bedecked in jet, and always clad in an ancient yellow feather boa (39). However, unlike Evans's character, she is not judged for her unconventional choices. Rather, she is a respected figure in the community. For example, she serves as a judge at local eisteddfodau '[b]ecause of her travels and the letter from Liszt' (41), advises Olwen in her quest to find a husband, and excites admiration in Olwen's father, who finds it 'wonderful' that she went out 'alone into the world with only music in her fingers' (43). Miss Eurgain's dress symbolises the experiences which her talent afforded her in her youth and her decision to live as she pleases; she bought the boa in Paris, wears it with 'an assurance born of long practice' (108), and, while she gains pleasure from others' exploits in more mainstream ways of living and dressing, is confident in the choices she has made:

> The two Ty Rhosyn ladies had been upstairs showing off their newest shop purchases to Miss Eurgain, who enjoyed them vicariously but without envy; living in absolute concord with her music and her memories of Liszt, she had need of neither new clothes nor suitors. (44)

Miss Eurgain's musical accomplishments can thus be interpreted as representing a higher, more refined purpose and object of devotion than the pursuit of marriage or sexual relationships. Indeed, the musical adventures of her youth are often described as compensating for her single status.

However, many of Davies's works of fiction have been interpreted as coded texts, in which gender and sexuality are unstable and characters perform these identities in ways which undermine the dominant female/ male heterosexual binary.[98] One need only consider Davies's presentation of Noah Watts, whom Olwen

[98] See Footnote 28 above.

eventually marries, to find such ambivalence in *The Black Venus*. When this 'short round-bodied' (114) young theological student first appears at the heroine's bedroom window sporting spectacles, a too-tight overcoat, and a bowler hat, his face 'plain but plump as an apple' (115), he is hardly a figure of conventional masculine sexual magnetism. Complaining that he is soaked to the skin, Noah is soon making himself at home dressed in one of Olwen's lace-fringed nightdresses. Tellingly, Olwen observes that 'it was strange that he did not look foolish in the woman's garment' (116). Given this ambiguity surrounding gender within the text, Miss Eurgain's comments to Olwen on the subject of marriage can be read not as confirmation that she has lived a single life, but rather as an indication that she has remained unmarried because she has had lesbian relationships:

> 'Love,' Miss Eurgain declared bravely, 'between men and women is not beautiful.'
> Olwen looked uneasy.
> 'You can do without men, indeed, if you like,' Miss Eurgain pointed out further – 'like me.'
> 'I am expecting I will,' Olwen brooded. (73)

Further, the reader is reassured so often that Miss Eurgain is content to be alone in her old age because she has 'known Liszt', that the phrase begins to feel like a euphemism, suggesting that she also enjoyed a heterosexual relationship with this romantic figure in her youth (108).

Of course, Miss Eurgain is not the only ageing spinster in *The Black Venus*. Lizzie Pugh remains unmarried and, as discussed above in the section on gossips, possesses the witch and crone-like characteristics associated with both character types. Bohata observes that Lizzie's 'gender and sexuality are ambiguous', citing the character's cross-dressing in cabin boy's trousers and her 'undeniable' sexual

attraction to Olwen,[99] which she voices on several occasions: 'Oh, there's love and there's hate your body I do, Miss Olwen! Better than my black statue you are. There's pleasure it would be for me to bathe you. A faithful servant I would be.' (111-12) Not only do Davies's renderings of Miss Eurgain and Lizzie break with the spinster stereotype by presenting them as sexual subjects and, in the case of Miss Eurgain, experienced, respected, and fulfilled members of the community, in the final section of the novel these older women form an important part of Olwen's non-traditional family at Ty Rhosyn. After conceiving a child with Rhisiart Hughes, Olwen creates a household to suit her needs and those of her son Owain. The boy's stepfather Noah lives elsewhere, but visits twice a week, Miss Eurgain attends to the domestic arrangements while Olwen busies herself with council matters, and Olwen fulfils her old obligation by allowing Lizzie to reside with them, albeit the latter makes no practical contribution to the house, instead 'hinder[ing] its wheels by her aggressive demands' (172). Thus, the household is a matriarchy in which the text's spinsters play a part. Davies also gives his characters room to voice their opinions on political matters. Ty Rhosyn's status as a kind of proto-feminist experiment is sealed when Noah asks Lizzie and Miss Eurgain their views 'on the question of women's freedom' (193). Both women respond with wit, self-assurance, and a disregard for the status quo:

> Lizzie, dangling her trousered narrow little legs from her high chair, was not at a loss. 'A woman tossing pancakes in her frying pan,' she announced, 'is a better sight than a woman tossing words in a council chamber.' She looked across with relish at Olwen before adding: 'But only to men, indeed […] Why is it I am always trying to change myself into a man that is not a man proper? Not because I like men is it, but because of women I've been and low as the crabs in the bottom of the sea is my opinion of them.'

[99] Kirsti Bohata, '*The Black Venus*: Atavistic Sexualities', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 231-43 (p. 237).

> ‘They are rising,’ [Noah] said, ‘they are rising… And your opinion, Miss Eurgain?’
>
> ‘Vessels of pleasure we are only,’ she tittered ironically. ‘And until men are made to move from that idea, true good we’ll never be to ourselves or men.’ (193)

Thus, Miss Eurgain and Lizzie Pugh display an understanding of the social context and historical moment in which they exist and are not afraid to speak their minds on contentious subjects. Their insights and behaviour contradict assumptions that older, unmarried women suffer from a narrowness of experience and outlook and are, therefore, left frustrated and unfulfilled.

As well as homosexual pairings, Welsh writers present heterosexual bonds involving older, unmarried women. In Trezza Azzopardi’s *Remember Me* (2004), the protagonist’s ageing Aunty Ena is already isolated in the rural community in which she lives and becomes more so when she begins an intimate affair with Mr Stadnik, an Eastern European refugee. During the Second World War, narrator Winnie (at this time a teenager) and Stadnik journey to Ena’s farmhouse in the Norfolk fens to avoid the bombing in Norwich. The place smells of rotting cabbages (connoting degeneration) and a wide ditch and barren fields (symbolising Ena’s sexuality) separate her home ‘from everywhere else in the world’.[100] Most of her furniture has been sold, but her piano remains – for she is a musician like Miss Allensmoore and Miss Eurgain, and playing it appears to be her main activity, suggesting the capacity for love beneath her reserved exterior. As Mr Stadnik begins to dig the symbolically ‘[d]ead land’ which surrounds them, Ena leaves off playing to watch him and her passion is diverted as their relationship develops (99). However, Stadnik’s nationality makes him unwelcome locally. When their neighbours discover the affair, Ena is

[100] Trezza Azzopardi, *Remember Me* (2004), (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2005), p. 95. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

bullied and ostracised and Stadnik leaves under cover of night following a harsh warning from the community's vicar. However, it is Ena's active sexuality, rather than Stadnik's foreign origins, which so riles the cleric. He reprimands her using the biblical language of sin: 'You're putting everyone in danger to sate your lust […].' (119) Thus, it seems that an older woman engaged in a sexual relationship outside the sanctifying institution of marriage was at least as offensive to polite society in 1940s Britain as harbouring a foreign refugee, if not more so.

Although a widow and divorcee, rather than a spinster, Davies's representation of Audrey Vines in 'The Chosen One' also engages with anxieties about older female sexuality. She is a pianist, like Miss Eurgain and Aunty Ena, and, yet again, her musicianship is related to her romantic life. Audrey engaged in '[l]ong duets […] most evenings' with her second husband, a violinist, before he disappeared (267). This ageing woman's sexuality is a subject of speculation and violent associations. Local gossip suggests that she murdered her husbands, while her former estate keeper describes the violence she did him, but also implies that their relationship was sexual. Furthermore, although she attributes the hours she spends watching her much-younger tenant Rufus through a pair of binoculars to an anthropological interest, she appears fixated by his physique:

> 'Are you aware that I could institute a police charge against you for bathing completely naked in the river on my estate? […] You are almost as hairy as an ape. Perhaps you consider that is sufficient covering?' Sedate as a judge in court, she added, 'But your organs are exceptionally pronounced.' (270)

There is a definite sexual tension in Rufus and his landlady's fatal final confrontation. The meeting is a parody of a seduction, with Audrey made-up and perfumed in an evening dress and jewels, and Rufus, charged with Dutch courage, trying to make the right impression, but 'baffled' by her accusations (272). As Audrey goads Rufus into

killing her in a calculated act of manipulation, it is the subject of his fiancée which finally causes her to lose her temper. Her resulting rant is like that of a jealous lover:

> In a sudden, total extinction of control, her face became contorted into an angry shape of wrinkled flesh. Her eyes blazed almost sightlessly. She threw the cigarette on the floor and screamed, 'Did you think I was going to allow that slut to live there? Braying and squealing on my estate like a prostitute!' (275)

Audrey's sexuality also appears violent through its association with consumption. Barbara Prys-Williams identifies 'lascivious engagement with food' in Davies's work, 'particularly in his predatory female characters', and refers to 'The Chosen One' as a key example.[101] Indeed, asserting her dominance, Audrey forces Rufus to wait for several minutes during their interview as she continues eating. Davies's description of her unselfconscious pleasure suggests a kind of sadistic cannibalism:

> The silence continued. A visitor might not have been present. Rufus watched her leisurely selection of a slice of tomato and an olive, the careful unwrapping of foil from cheese. […]
>
> There was another silence. Needing time to reassemble his thoughts, he watched as she carefully manipulated a sardine out of the tin with her pointed fingernails. […] She held it aloft by its tail end to let oil drip into the tin, and regally tilted her head back and slowly lowered it whole into her mouth. The coral-red lips softly clamped about the disappearing body, drawing it in with appreciation. […] Lifting another fish, she repeated the performance, her face wholly absorbed in her pleasure. (270-71)

Thus, 'The Chosen One' articulates the fear and demonization of older female sexuality at which Azzopardi's subplot involving Aunty Ena hints. *Remember Me* comes down firmly on the side of Aunty Ena, provoking sympathy for her predicament as she slips into depression after Stadnik departs, whereas Davies's depiction is not as clear cut. There is an element of the grotesque in the writer's detailed descriptions of Audrey eating. However, I think the narrative is influenced by

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[101] Barbara Prys-Williams, 'Rhys Davies as Autobiographer: Hare or Houdini?', in *Rhys Davies: Decoding the Hare*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), pp. 104-37 (p. 130 and Footnote 37 on p. 137).

Rufus's perception of his landlady; he is at turns frightened of her, angry, and confused by her actions.

Examination of older characters from a broad range of Welsh fiction written in English reveals the influence of common character types and assumptions about older people across the field. The witch, crone, and gossip cast their shadows over representations found in novels and short stories from a period of more than one hundred years, alongside supernaturally wise or cantankerous elderly people, those with dementia, and foolish old men. However, in the vast majority of cases, these figures are not reproduced unquestioningly. In texts such as Caradoc Evans's 'Be This Her Memorial', Rhys Davies's *The Black Venus*, and Margiad Evans's 'A Modest Adornment', writers allude to negative stereotypes only to undermine them. Further, short fictions including Margiad Evans's 'Thomas Griffiths and Parson Cope' and 'The Old Woman and the Wind', and Rhys Davies's 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' render the uncertainties that come with ageing and, in the cases of Thomas Griffiths and Betty Leyshon, characters' desire to hide their vulnerability. Even Allen Raine's *Queen of the Rushes* – which ostensibly reinforces the stereotypes of the spiteful female gossip and the cantankerous older person in the characters of Nelli Amos and n'wncwl Sam respectively – encourages sympathy for these individuals and provides context for their dissatisfactions. Welsh writers also reveal the shameful treatment of elderly people – in 'Be This Her Memorial' and Glenda Beagan's 'Narcotic Crocus', for example – and, perhaps most importantly, they imagine different possibilities for older people and for wider society's engagement with them. Margiad Evans's 'The Wicked Woman' evokes a community which rallies to save and care for John Morgan when he is threatened by his son and daughter-in-law, while Gwyn Thomas's dark

philosophers and the ageing spinsters of *The Black Venus* contribute to their communities by challenging authority and the status quo and, in Davies's novel, looking to a future of greater diversity and opportunities for women. In addition, writers including Glenda Beagan, Christopher Meredith, and Dylan Thomas can be seen to critique the stereotyping of elderly people directly in their fiction. In particular, Thomas resists the metaphor which makes old age a second childhood, instead choosing to render the loneliness and alienation of a vulnerable ageing character who is patronised and treated like a child. *The Book of Idiots* also imagines later life to be a time of choice and offers the reader a range of images of old age and the end of life.

Throughout my research for this chapter, gender has proved an important factor in the representation of older people, with specific tropes being attached to male and female characters. Writers such as Dylan Thomas and Christopher Meredith appear aware of the change in social status which greets men as they age, while Meredith and Kate Roberts represent the effects of retirement and a move into the domestic sphere on individual male identities. Strong ageing women abound, with Glyn Jones and Rachel Trezise borrowing from and building upon the figure of the Welsh Mam to create inspirational grandmothers and some of the most positive renderings of older people in the field. The treatment of single older women and their sexualities by a number of Welsh writers is complex and radical. Love relationships involving older spinsters, lesbians, and widows are suggested to be largely obscured, proscribed, or made subjects of speculation within small communities. However, Margiad Evans, Rhys Davies, and Trezza Azzopardi all treat their ageing single women with sensitivity and encourage sympathy and admiration from their readers.

Further, in *The Black Venus*, the figure of the gossip becomes a source of powerful female knowledge and outspokenness in the form of Lizzie Pugh.

I will consider the reasons that Welsh writers create so many strong older female characters in more detail in subsequent chapters, but, for now, I would suggest that ageing characters such as Caradoc Evans's Old Nanni and Rhys Davies's Miss Eurgain act as important links to the past for their communities: Nanni can remember the birth of everyone in the congregation of Capel Sion and Miss Eurgain has first-hand experience of European cities in the nineteenth century and the romantic, historical figure of Liszt. Other findings to be considered in more detail in later chapters include the affinities between older and younger characters which emerge in texts by Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas, Rachel Trezise, and Margiad Evans and could be linked to the proliferation of child narrators in the field. One might speculate that the very young and very old can be viewed as outsiders or underdogs and, as such, hold a special significance in fiction from Wales thanks to the country's size, colonised status as a 'province' of England for hundreds of years, and the role which working class Welsh people have played in the colonial and industrial successes of Great Britain… of which more later. Texts such as 'Wat Pantathro', *In and out of the Goldfish Bowl*, and *The Book of Idiots* express anxieties about the cycle of generations and the passing of time to which I will also return. Finally, the cruelties and kindnesses of memory and forgetfulness that are explored in 'Betty Leyshon's Marathon' and Kate Roberts's 'Old Age' will be examined again in Chapter 3, as will the distance between older and younger versions of a person observed by the narrator of Roberts's story.

3 'Clocks and mirrors: liars both': Experiences of Ageing

Following my exploration of the treatment by writers of Welsh fiction in English of various older figures, character types, and stereotypes viewed by the reader from the outside, in this chapter I turn to representations of older people as seen from within. A number of Welsh writers have attempted to render the innermost thoughts of ageing men and women, usually protagonists, in their novels and short stories. I will consider how the experience of physical ageing is treated in such texts and what is suggested about the effects of this process on older individuals' sense of self. Writers have also concerned themselves with older characters' responses to and relationships with their memories and pasts, and with changes in the way in which they experience time. My analysis will examine such representations, as well as those that engage with or comment on the treatment of elderly people in twentieth and twenty-first-century society. Analysis of novels and short stories by Kate Roberts, B.S. Johnson, Trezza Azzopardi, Glenda Beagan, Emyr Humphreys, and Allen Raine will form the basis of my discussion.

Keeping Body and Soul Together: The Ageing Body and the Ageing Self

Kate Roberts turned frequently to older characters in her short fiction, both as a young writer and in her own old age. In particular, her work explores the lives of ageing women in domestic settings or with domestic concerns. Critics have commented on

Roberts's sensitivity in depicting common human experiences, especially those of hardship and suffering. Katie Gramich, for example, writes of the 'astonishingly empathetic quality' of her fiction, while Derec Llwyd Morgan has described passages in her novels concerned with the First World War as 'some of the most poignant social criticism made in Welsh literature in the twentieth century'.[1] An insightful sympathy is in evidence in her presentation of the physical and social changes that can characterise later life, where her sparse yet penetrating style invokes compassion for her older subjects, particularly in her later works.

In 'Buying a Doll' (1969), the central character's anxiety about physical ageing dominates. This unnamed older woman journeys into town to buy a doll to dress in a suit of clothes she made in her youth. There is an uneasy atmosphere from the outset. The protagonist's namelessness brings a feeling of voyeurism as one observes the personal moments of this stranger's life. Her private thoughts are expressed, but the narrative does not stray into free indirect style and, therefore, maintains a boundary between reader and central consciousness which it feels uncomfortable to cross. The doll is a link to the protagonist's memories of her youth and prompts her to meditate on how she has changed in the intervening years. Her eyesight has deteriorated so that 'even with spectacles' she cannot see the stitches in its clothes, and her manual dexterity has also suffered;[2] she wonders 'how in the world she had ever been able to make' the embroidered frock, drawers, and pinafore (295). There is an air of obsession in the elderly woman's quest to find a doll to model the clothes; it is a 'fascination' which has 'pursued her like a hound' (293). When a

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[1] Katie Gramich, *Kate Roberts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 80. Derec Llwyd Morgan, *Kate Roberts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. 14.

[2] Kate Roberts, 'Buying a Doll' (1969), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 293-96 (p. 296). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

suitable doll is found, the character is particularly taken with its hair, which reminds her of her own as a child. Thus, by buying and dressing the doll, the character is trying to rediscover or resurrect her younger self. Furthermore, dolls are emblems of traditional femininity within patriarchal structures: silent, lifeless, childlike objects to be possessed, dressed, posed, and controlled for the pleasure of the (male) viewer.[3] Roberts's placing of this symbol in the hands of an elderly woman suggests that the protagonist is experimenting with configurations of femininity as she negotiates the changes to her body and, therefore, self which she experiences as she ages. Given that older women are marginalised in Western popular culture, the image of such a woman taking up a symbol of patriarchal prescriptions of femininity suggests anxiety over how an older woman might position her ageing body and make it acceptable, but also the possibility of taking control of and challenging expectations.

The character appears frightened by the prospect of further physical changes. Catching sight of her eye watering in a mirror, she imagines this slight imperfection developing into a monstrosity:

> There was a cold look to her left eye, it was all watery, and the corner next to her nose had swollen and held a little pool of a tear. What if it were to keep on swelling and become red, like Ugly Wil's eye long ago? (294)

This image is part of a gradual change in 'Buying a Doll', whereby the uneasy tone which pervades from the beginning is heightened by uncanny elements. Later, in the bath, observing joints and limbs which have become bony, the protagonist knows that,

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[3] See, for example, Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House*, in which Nora Helmer is patronised and infantilised by her husband Torvald and eventually ends their marriage, despite her financial dependence upon him. The trope of a beautiful doll coming to life is also a recurring male fantasy in literature and art. For example, in E.T.A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (1816), Nathaniel becomes obsessed by Octavia, a beautiful, lifelike mechanical doll whose attractive features include her ability to listen passively to his stories without boredom or interruption, unlike his human sweetheart. Hoffman's tale is the source for *Coppélia*, a light-hearted ballet originally choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon to music by Leo Délibes.

despite their appearance, she can still move easily. However, she is taken with the idea that they will stiffen with age:

> She was just like the pictures by these newfangled artists, or pictures by a five-year-old child, her limbs as if they'd been soldered on to her body, instead of growing out of it. But up to now… they had gone on moving nimbly. There was nothing wrong with the way they were moving, any more than with the movements of the doll. (296)

The protagonist's viewing her limbs as 'soldered' suggests mechanisation rather than an organic body, as does her comparing them to those of the doll. Mechanical dolls and marionettes are associated with the uncanny and are common in gothic literature, as are monstrous female bodies. [4] Such bodies are discussed in Ellen Moers's exploration of 'Female Gothic', where the critic identifies 'the self-disgust, the self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction that have been increasingly prominent themes in the writing of women in the twentieth century' as important factors in 'the persistence of the Gothic mode into our own time'.[5] She argues that this rejection of one's own body has its genesis in the 'ruthless scrutiny' with which girls' appearances are examined 'from the moment of birth', particularly by other women and their own mothers.[6] Moers goes on to discuss the frequent inclusion of 'monsters' and 'freaks' in gothic fiction by women in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She states that Carson McCullers 'cloaks with humorous tenderness her unsentimental

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[4] Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny', in which he sought to define this effect, refers to Ernst Jentsch's earlier investigation of the subject, in particular, the latter's discussion of Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (see Footnote 3 above), 'doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate, and 'the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata'. While Freud is dismissive of Jentsch's assertion, dolls are a common trope in gothic literature and horror films. See, for example, Rochester's designating Antoinette/ Bertha a 'marionette' and 'doll' in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and the operation of murderous ventriloquist's dummy Fats as a manifestation of the sublimated desires of psychologically disturbed magician Corky in the 1978 film *Magic* (written by William Goldman and directed by Richard Attenborough). Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) in *Art and Literature*, ed. by Albert Dickson, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990) pp. 339-76 (p. 347).
[5] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 107.
[6] Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 108.

perception of the freakish self as originating in female adolescence' and comments on Sigmund Freud's reference in 'The Uncanny' to perceptions of female genitalia as 'monstrous', again suggesting that fears and imaginings of monstrosity are particularly related to female bodies and sexualities.[7] In 'Buying a Doll' these tropes create the impression that the character is being haunted by spectres of future physical degeneration, infirmity, and self-disgust which are particularly associated with the female body.

Mirrors are also uncanny objects which hold a special resonance in women's writing. They are associated with uncertainties about identity and the ability to know oneself. Moers writes:

> Despair is hardly the exclusive province of any one sex or class in our age, but to give visual form to the fear of self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination, may well be more common in the writings of women than of men. While I cannot prove this statistically, I can offer a reason: that nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply, and more early in life, than the compulsion to visualize the self.[8]

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar also link the mirror in nineteenth-century literature to conflicts around the formation of female identity. They argue that mirrors are symbolic of restrictive, patriarchal images of a model woman, as reflected and prescribed by literary texts and male writers. This ideal is beautiful, innocent, passive,

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[7] Moers, *Literary Women*, pp. 108-09. See also Claire Kahane's argument that the gothic house or castle often acts as a symbol for the maternal body and anxieties around the infantile processes of recognising this body as other to oneself and achieving separation from it. Kahane suggests that the gothic heroine's relationship with the maternal body is complicated because she is separate from this body but shares it because she is female. Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror' in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 334-51, p. 338.

[8] Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 107. Nicholas Royle also describes an association between the uncanny and crises of identity: 'The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself (of one's so-called "personality" or "sexuality", for example) seems strangely questionable.' Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1.

and selfless (Gilbert and Gubar cite Virginia Woolf's 'angel in the house').[9] She is silent (and hence particularly problematic for women writers), objectified, and ultimately killed into inactivity. There is a tension between this 'angel-woman' and an angry and frustrated 'monster-woman' who longs to live, write, and act, but is trapped in the 'mirror' of patriarchal prescriptions of femininity. These opposite beings are argued to be exemplified in Snow White and the Queen, her Wicked Stepmother, in Grimm's 'Little Snow White' and also to be two sides of the same self: 'while the Queen struggles to free herself from the passive Snow White in herself, Snow White must struggle to repress the assertive Queen in herself.'[10] Ageing itself is central to this fairy tale. Furious at her loss of youth and beauty, the Wicked Stepmother unleashes a murderous rage against the young girl who has supplanted her. The process of growing older becomes a struggle between the two possibilities for female identity symbolised by the Queen and Snow White. Thus, Roberts's utilisation of the trope of the mirror is further suggestive of conflicts in her protagonist's sense of self prompted by the ageing process. There is even something of the fierce, frustrated Queen railing at the younger generation in the ageing woman's defiant behaviour on the bus ride home:

> The bus was full, and the conductor said so quite emphatically on seeing her jump on to the platform by the door, where two young women were standing already.
>
> 'Well', she said, 'I'm not about to get off for you or anyone else.'[…]
>
> She was ready to box the ears of anyone who would dare to try to make her get off. (294)[11]

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[9] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 17.

[10] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, pp. 36-44.

[11] Woodward and Chivers have noted the importance of mirrors to literary texts which seek to render shifting and conflicted ageing identities. Taking as her starting point Marcel Proust's *The Past Recaptured* (1927), Woodward states: 'Not only in Proust but elsewhere the image of the mirror dominates western literary representations of the aged body […]. This is not surprising. Given the western obsession with the body of youth, we can understand the "horror" of the mirror image of the

Finally, with regards to gothic and uncanny motifs, the doll acts as a double for the elderly protagonist.[12] The story reaches a climax at bedtime, when she takes pleasure in staring at the doll until she sees herself as a child in its features:

> […] she could see the doll and her image in the mirror. She enjoyed looking at her. […] From gazing and gazing and going on gazing, she saw herself in the doll, herself at seven years old, when she'd had her picture taken for the first time ever, with a look half sad, half shy on her, the look of an innocent child. (296)

A fearful moment follows as the doll appears to grow before the protagonist's eyes, becoming 'bigger, and more like herself' so that she can't 'bear the sight' of it (296). This development can be read as the doll growing up and becoming old. Thus, the fear invested in the trope of the double develops into a terror of witnessing one's own ageing. However, 'Buying a Doll' is not wholly negative on the subject of growing old. The protagonist is frequently distracted from her fears of future degeneration by the concerns and pleasures of the day. She is 'too comfortable in bed' to throw away the doll when it becomes her double and has earlier felt happy after recollecting a quotation from Turgeniev which recommends focusing on the present rather than worrying about the past or the future: 'Happiness doesn't know about tomorrow, and it has no yesterday. Happiness forgets the past, and it doesn't think of the future. It knows only the present – and that, not for a day, but for a moment.' (296) Indeed, viewed by the light of day, there is nothing frightening about the doll. Thus, the text implies that it is possible to glean happiness from the pleasures of the moment, even

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body of Narcissus.' With reference to Freud's 'The Uncanny' and Lacan's concept of the mirror stage of infancy, Woodward theorises a 'mirror stage of old age' during which the older subject must navigate the recognition (or denial) of her or his physical ageing. Relatedly, Chivers considers contemporary women's narratives of ageing in particular and identifies 'the mirror-gazing trope that pervades most negative stories of old age'.
Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 61-62 and 67.
Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, p. 32.

[12] The phenomenon of the double is also described by Freud in 'The Uncanny'.

as spectres of physical degeneration hover in the background. Further, as discussed above, the trope of the doll suggests that older women might take control of their identities and patriarchal society's expectations of them. Gramich describes the maintenance of a 'fine balance […] between hope and despair' as 'archetypal' in Roberts's work, while Morgan states that the consolation of 'hope and happiness' becomes 'a commonplace' at the end of her later works.[13] 'Buying a Doll' is an example of this balance.

In her monograph on the subject of ageing, Simone de Beauvoir writes that many people have difficulty in recognising their own ageing. She explains that, because each individual views her- or himself as unique, 'we are often astonished when the common fate becomes our own – when we are struck by sickness, a shattered relationship, or bereavement'. As the passage of time and old age are universal, we are shocked when they bring about a 'private, personal metamorphosis'.[14] The fact that one does not necessarily feel different as one ages adds to this challenge. De Beauvoir states that, despite the numerical and biological evidence to the contrary, 'our private, inward experience does not tell us the number of our years; no fresh perception comes into being to show us the decline of age'.[15] Instead, older individuals acquire an awareness of their age when they are defined as such by others. De Beauvoir argues that 'it is natural that the revelation of our age should come to us from outside' and that we 'do not accept it willingly'.[16] In particular, she foregrounds the experience of recognising one's own old age in the changed faces of one's contemporaries through discussion of Marcel Proust's

[13] Gramich, *Kate Roberts*, p. 56. Morgan, *Kate Roberts*, p. 29.
[14] Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. by Patrick O'Brian (London: André Deutsch & Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 283.
[15] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 284.
[16] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 288.

description of the phenomenon and examples from her own life.[17] De Beauvoir says of the outsider's definition: 'Within me it is Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself.'[18] Because we cannot experience ourselves as others see us, de Beauvoir places old age in the 'category which [Jean-Paul] Sartre calls the unrealizables'.[19] She explains that the coming of age can, understandably, cause individuals to have 'identification cris[e]s'. These difficulties stem from the fact that the 'infinite number of ways' of being old offered to the ageing individual by society will never coincide with the inner self.[20] In addition, whereas adolescents recognise their change of life stage through the physical transitions which they experience, ageing individuals have no such important changes (menopause, de Beauvoir argues, comes to women 'well before old age'), and so, learning of his or her new status from others, the older person 'does not accept the label that has been stuck to him [sic] – he no longer knows who he is'.[21]

Several scholars concerned with literary and cultural representations of ageing have criticised de Beauvoir's attitude to growing older, particularly to the physical process of ageing, in both her philosophical and her fictional works. Kathleen Woodward, for example, addresses what she views as de Beauvoir's generalisations and subjective analysis. She states of the cultural model of ageing offered in de Beauvoir's *Old Age* (1972, entitled *The Coming of Age* in the United States):

> It is a model that in fact I now reject as being based on the identification of a younger person with an unnamed older person who, representing all older people, is cast as an object of pity, one miserable in all senses of the word

[17] 'One day, when I was in Rome [...] a tall, sixty-year-old American woman was sitting at the terrace of the café where I happened to be. She was talking to a friend, and suddenly she laughed, a burst of laughter, a young woman's laughter – it transfigured her and moved me back twenty years in time, to California, where I had known her. In this case too, the abrupt contraction of time revealed to me its shattering power with painful clarity.' De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 290.
[18] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 284.
[19] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 291.
[20] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 291.
[21] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 292.

> (impoverished, alone, frail), one who ultimately represents the fatality of the human condition. Here identification is in part projective identification […] – the projection of Beauvoir's [sic] own fear of aging on to older people as a class. Equally as invidious is that Beauvoir's model assumes a levelling of individuality to sameness. The reality is quite different.[22]

Relatedly, Sally Chivers finds the presentation of ageing in de Beauvoir's fiction problematic in its negativity, her comments echoing Woodward's discussion of *Old Age*. Reading *The Mandarins* (1954) alongside Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964), Chivers argues:

> [… b]ecause both [de Beauvoir and Laurence] invest in physical form and the horror that late-life physical change can evoke for readers, and perhaps because both possess a deep-seated fear of the 'ravages' of age, de Beauvoir's and Laurence's depictions of aging damage as much as they help in initiating new, constructive cultural models of aging. Readers could expect aging characters to be the protagonists and even narrators of major literary works and could expect such characters to be completely engaging; however, readers are also invited to join in a disgust towards aging bodies that promotes social misconceptions of age as alienating decrepitude.[23]

While I acknowledge the criticisms of Woodward, Chivers, and others, I believe that de Beauvoir's work still provides a useful theoretical framework for the interpretation of literary representations of older subjectivity. Of particular value is her discussion,

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[22] Kathleen Woodward, 'Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature', in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 149-68 (p. 156). Admittedly, Woodward also identifies valuable elements to de Beauvoir's *Old Age*. She explains that the monograph was one of 'four texts which served [her] as touchstones for many years' but no longer 'hold […] the same force' for her and states that de Beauvoir's 'paradigm was productive in past decades'. (155-56) Returning to the text in 2016, Woodward is more positive, stating that 'Beauvoir's theoretical insights and foundational arguments about aging are profound and illuminating'. Furthermore, reading as a woman in her seventies, she recognises de Beauvoir's description of older experiences of temporality in her own experience. However, the critic still finds de Beauvoir's 'one-dimensional generalizations about the experience of aging and old age […] dismaying and dispiriting'. Woodward, 'Rereading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*', *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3 (2016) <ageculturehumanities.org/WP/rereading-simone-de-beauvoirs-the-coming-of-age> [accessed 21 February 2018]. See also Thomas R. Cole's rereading of de Beauvoir's monograph, which sits alongside Woodward's article in the 'Forum' section of *Age, Culture, Humanities*: Cole, 'Rereading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* from a Distance of Some Forty Years', *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 3 (2016) <ageculturehumanities.org/WP/rereading-simone-de-beauvoirs-the-coming-of-age-from-a-distance-of-some-forty-years> [accessed 21 February 2018].

[23] Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), p. 1.

outlined above, of the gap between an individual's sense of identity and the othering response to physical ageing which wider society projects onto him or her. That de Beauvoir's vision of old age has been judged to be overly pessimistic and characterised by a fear of apparently inevitable physical decline should certainly be borne in mind when utilising her work. However, by applying discrete findings from *Old Age* to examples of Anglophone Welsh fiction, I hope to demonstrate that Welsh writers do more than just create bleak narratives of decline in their novels and short stories.

The internal conflicts which de Beauvoir identifies as characteristic of the ageing process are presented with great sensitivity in a number of Roberts's short stories. Her use of gothic elements in 'Buying a Doll' results in a delicate rendering of the type of 'identification' crisis described by de Beauvoir. In particular, the distance between the protagonist and her own ageing suggested when her changing face is reflected back to her in the mirror and, later, the ageing process is projected on to the separate entity of the doll implies that this character sees the changes taking place in her body as other from herself. In 'Cats at an Auction' (1964), the death of a contemporary prompts older protagonist Elen to contemplate her own death, while the behaviour of the late Mrs Hughes's friends suggests their own crises. The characters are preoccupied with their advancing age (they are in their sixties) and the physical effects of ageing. De Beauvoir suggests that some women seek to deny or ignore their ageing by masking the physical signs:

> They try to deceive the rest of the world by means of their clothes, make-up and behaviour; but above all they make a hysterical attempt at convincing themselves that they are not affected by the universal law. They cling to the idea that 'this only happens to other people' and that for them, who are not 'other people' it is 'not the same thing'.[24]

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[24] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 295.

Mrs Hughes's friends are responding to their ageing in just this fashion. Roberts's description of their dress emphasises their attempts to 'improve on nature' and contrasts Mrs Hughes's less ostentatious style:

> The others wore smart, colourful clothing; they curled their hair and they coloured their lips – they tried to improve on nature. Mrs. Hughes was colourless, always wore grey, pepper-and-salt-coloured clothing, and her hair […] blended into her clothes like the water of a stream running into a river.[25]

While Mrs Hughes did not try to disguise her ageing, her friends' way of dressing signifies superficiality, particularly when considered alongside their behaviour. They 'always spoke English though their Welsh was better' and openly criticise the dead woman, although she was apparently a close friend (286). Bearing in mind de Beauvoir's assertion that it is in the appearance of our contemporaries that we see our own ageing, perhaps it is the fact that, by appearing old and then dying, Mrs Hughes has turned her friends' attentions to their own mortality which prompts their catty comments about her, rather than the miserliness and poor housekeeping of which they accuse her. Indeed, the gossip which circulates betrays a sense of punctilious outrage that she has dared to let herself die:

> She had plenty of money, it was said, and she was miserly, it was said: by now the story was abroad that her house was slovenly, and even worse, though it could have been otherwise, since she had plenty of money to pay for help. Indeed, these tale-mongers said, she shouldn't have died at all. (286)

Elen is less self-deluding in her response to Mrs Hughes's passing. She does not participate in blaming the dead woman and identifies with her at some points. However, she exhibits an initial unwillingness to affiliate herself with her because Mrs Hughes makes her think of her own death. The representation of later life is

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[25] Kate Roberts, 'Cats at an Auction' (1964) in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 285-92 (p. 286). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

particularly bleak in this story because it is characterised by fear, cruel gossip, and a lack of camaraderie between older people.

As well as exploring experiences of physical ageing, Roberts's fiction includes older characters who encounter changes in their social lives as a result of growing older. *Gossip Row* (1949) is concerned with Ffebi, a single woman in her mid to late fifties, who is housebound due to a spinal injury.[26] Set in a small town in North Wales in the late 1930s, the novella depicts the claustrophobic atmosphere of gossip and intrigue which can develop in close-knit communities. The text is concerned with a period of upheaval for the protagonist, the plot being driven by Ffebi's brother John's plans to marry late in life. *Gossip Row* is unusual within Roberts's oeuvre, as it is written in the first person, purporting to be Ffebi's diary. This formal decision offers the writer greater opportunity to present the introspection and obsessive thoughts which result from the protagonist's withdrawal from many aspects of society. Ffebi is frequently dislikeable, shown to be self-centred, manipulative, and judgmental. However, the narrative form increases the likelihood of a compassionate response by bringing one as close as possible to her psyche and experience. While not a stream of consciousness which seeks to represent the rhythms of the central character's thoughts in the style of Woolf or James Joyce, Roberts's creation of Ffebi's diary entries – in which the protagonist interrogates her feelings and catalogues her days – incorporates a level of detail and repetition that emphasises the inactivity and tedium of her daily

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[26] I have deduced Ffebi's age from the information that her younger sister is fifty-three and her older brother is sixty. Although, in the early twenty-first century, a woman in her mid to late fifties would not usually be classed as 'old', my inclusion of this character within my discussion can be justified by the fact that *Gossip Row* was first published in the original Welsh in 1949 and is set about a decade earlier, 'in one of the years just before the 1939-45 war' (117). Age can be viewed as a relative concept and UK life expectancy has increased significantly since the text was first published, changing attitudes to who might be considered elderly and the kinds of lives which people over the age over fifty might lead. In addition, Ffebi's position as an invalid who believes that she is not going to get any better – she explains the 'unwritten law that none of our crowd asks how I am by now' (138) – places her at the frailer end of the ageing spectrum, where issues of mobility and dependence become very real concerns.

life. The days seem longer and merge into one another for the reader, reflecting the character's own experience, particularly as her sleeplessness blurs the boundaries between night and day. Furthermore, the scope of Ffebi's diary demonstrates the narrowness of her interior world. Not only is the character housebound, but, beyond anxieties about the family shop and her friends' reports of events at chapel, her imagination does not stray outside the business of her immediate neighbours. As the local minister observes: 'it's evident this narrow little life has made you turn your mind too much on yourself.'[27]

The details of Ffebi's housebound existence work alongside the novella's form to encourage further sympathy. In particular, the character is presented as a passive observer. Her lack of agency stems from her physical reliance on others and financial dependence on her brother and is evident in the way in which her moods are ruled by the actions of her family and friends and the uncontrollable force of the weather. Roberts's sensitive portrayal of Ffebi's lack of control and the narrowness of her experience makes the character's manipulative behaviour and preoccupation with gossip more forgivable. One can surmise that the uneventfulness of her own existence causes Ffebi to live vicariously through tales of others' lives. Her gossiping can also be interpreted as motivated in part by a lack of consideration from her brother of her need to be kept informed of events which will affect her. Indeed, this thoughtlessness on John's part goes some way to justifying her scheming as an attempt to influence the path of her life. Thus, Roberts encourages sympathy for a character who does not at first appear to warrant it. In fact, part of the power of Roberts' work is the way in

[27] *Gossip Row* (1949), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 117-66 (p. 164). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

which she often gives voice to and appears to be on the side of the marginalised and the unpopular.[28]

Where Ffebi is a portrait of dishonest actions and introspection, in the more light-hearted 'Flowers' (1969), Gwen Huws – an ageing woman 'in bed with her last illness' – is open in her criticism of the treatment of older people like herself, lively in her interactions with those around her, and still finds pleasure in her life.[29] Having spent time in hospital, she explains to her neighbour and carer Leusa that she is happier to be at home:

> Everybody was very kind there, I had plenty of food and every care. But you know what was depressing there, Leusa? [...] Waking up every morning and seeing a row of white heads on white pillows; a single white line along the ward, just like a blind man's cane. I can wake up here and see paper on the wall instead of paint. (299)

It appears that a prolonged stay in hospital would mean a loss of individuality for Gwen. The image of a line of identikit older women filed neatly in their beds, the repetition of 'white', and the metaphor of the 'blind man's cane' suggest the obscuring of distinguishing features by institutionalisation. In contrast, Gwen's preference for wallpaper over paint implies an appreciation of individuality and diversity. She also enjoys being at home for the chance to be in familiar surroundings with the routines of daily life continuing around her:

> But I was saying how I've enjoyed being in bed here. Hearing you knocking things about down there, hearing the sound of tea things [...]. And I like seeing the old cat come up sometimes and lie on the bed, purring and winking at me.

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[28] *Dark Tonight* (1962), for example, is the first person account of Bet Jones, the wife of a small town minister who is provoked and ostracised by the women in her husband's congregation and suffers a mental breakdown and loss of faith. Similarly, the short stories which comprise *Tea in the Heather* (1959) chart the development of Winni Ffinni Hadog from the wild, neglected eldest child of the most disreputable family in the village into a spirited young woman with the poise and wherewithal to secure a job in service and escape the influence of her alcoholic father.

[29] Kate Roberts, 'Flowers' (1969), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 297-303 (p. 297). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

> It's quite a nice thing to have the last look at things familiar to one when they were healthy. (299-300)

The sound of Leusa performing household tasks, the domesticity of the crockery, and the activity of the cat are a world away from the static, orderly, colourless bodies in the hospital. Gwen's holding onto objects peculiar to her and enjoying the trappings of specifically domestic activities to the last can be read as part of her guarding against any loss of identity which might come with sickness and institutionalisation.[30] Although she is later upset by a visit from Mrs Jones the coffin-maker's wife looking for business, the ageing woman is sarcastic and dismissive during the event. Thus, where Ffebi elicits sympathy, Gwen's insightful assessment of the environment on the geriatric ward, her spirited rebuttal of Mrs Jones's overtures, and her defiant refusal to compromise her sense of self provoke admiration in the reader.

However, Roberts's more inspiring portraits of older people are tempered by her representations of the parts of old age which are not open to defiance or manipulation. Experiences of isolation and loneliness feature frequently. 'Two Old Men' (1969), for example, is the thoughtful tale of seventy-eight-year-old writer Nathan's reaction to the death of his neighbour Wil Dic at the age of eighty-eight. A significant portion of the story, and of Nathan's concentration, is taken up with his bitter reminiscences about the time and money he wasted on Wil. He brands the older man a 'miser' and recollects that he visited Nathan at meal times expecting to be fed, saving money while Nathan took on debt.[31] However, it becomes apparent that

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[30] Images of invalids catching snatches of lives being played out without them, beyond their reach, are common in Roberts's fiction – for example, in 'The Condemned' (1937, discussed below in Chapter 4) and *Gossip Row* – and in representations of the experience of old age in works by other writers, in Margiad Evans's 'Mrs Pike's Eldorado' (1948), for instance. While, in texts such as *Gossip Row*, the sounds of familiar activities continuing despite his or her illness are symptomatic of the afflicted character's wider lack of agency, for others, including Gwen in 'Flowers' and the protagonist in 'The Condemned', they are a comfort.

[31] Kate Roberts, 'Two Old Men' (1969), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 318-25 (p. 318). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

Nathan lives a lonely existence and that the extra time he has since Wil's death is not as welcome as he expected – he has been unable to write since. Nathan likens feeding Wil to encouraging a persistent stray. However, Nathan's cat symbolises his need for company, so the comparison suggests that Wil is more than just an irritation. Indeed, when Wil falls ill, Nathan treats him with care and a kind of intimacy. Towards the end of her story, Roberts's fine description of Nathan's lift in mood following a fortnight of depression sheds further light on his relationship with Wil: 'he began to find some diversion in his own sadness. […] Hope, to him, was the child of despair. Little things, bit by bit, gave him comfort now; life was morsels of comfort by this time, not one large comfort.' (324) The dense image of 'morsels of comfort' connotes nurture through the act of feeding. One is reminded not only of Nathan feeding Wil when he was ill, but also of the meals they shared and the protagonist's attempts to nurture himself and raise his spirits on the day of the funeral, warming his heart with beer and cake. By the end of 'Two Old Men', the reader is aware that Wil's daily visits encouraged Nathan to care for himself and were as much about company for the titular characters as they were about Wil's miserly tendencies.

I now turn to a novel which, while formally and stylistically very different from Roberts's fiction, is similar to the texts discussed above because it also attempts to bring the reader as close as possible to its older protagonists' consciousnesses. This text is B.S. Johnson's late modernist novel *House Mother Normal* (1971). Although Johnson was English and lived most of his life in London, the inclusion of his writing in a thesis on Welsh literature can be justified. The writer spent time in Wales throughout his life and had experiences here which influenced his work greatly. Philip Pacey identifies 'three separate periods' during which an '[a]wareness of Wales and

things Welsh helped shape […] Johnson's achievement as poet and novelist'.[32] Firstly, Johnson spent two summers working on the Llŷn peninsula and consequently incorporated his experiences there and Welsh settings into his early published work. The writer returned to Wales on various occasions, but Pacey identifies his fellowship at Gregynog near Newtown – former home of coal heiresses and art collectors Gwendoline and Margaret Davies and, by then, owned by the University of Wales – as the second point at which Wales was particularly significant to Johnson's work, its influence being 'felt as guiding spirit and tutelar'.[33] Indeed, Johnson's biographer Jonathan Coe describes this time as 'the longest period of sustained happiness he seems ever to have enjoyed in his personal and professional life'.[34] Finally, Pacey discusses Johnson's return to Llŷn weeks before his death in 1973 to make the short film *Fat Man on a Beach*. Coe also writes of two curious spiritual encounters which Johnson underwent during trips to Wales, both involving supernatural female figures.[35] Coe associates these visions with the poetic muse explored in Roberts Graves's *The White Goddess*, a text which figured in Johnson's obsessive fear that 'the goddess' would allow him to have either a successful literary career or a successful relationship, but not both.[36] Thus, Wales held important spiritual and creative associations for Johnson.

The writer also had an enthusiasm for Welsh literary culture and sympathised with nationalist politics. While acknowledging Johnson's criticism of Anglophone

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[32] Philip Pacey, 'B.S. Johnson and Wales', *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 63 (1978), 73-80 (p. 73).
[33] Pacey, 'B.S. Johnson and Wales', p. 73.
[34] Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 293.
[35] The first 'strange occult experience' is recounted in the short story 'Sheela-Na-Gig' (1964, also discussed by Pacey). It involved a woman hitchhiker picked up by Johnson during a night drive from Dorset to Llŷn suddenly appearing like a living 'Sheela-na-gig' – 'a pre-Christian and pre-Celtic figure, symbolic of both death and procreation'. During another trip to Llŷn, the writer climbed a mountain, stripped naked, and worshipped 'some sort of female deity'. Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, p. 40. Extract from *Fat Man on a Beach*, cited in Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, p. 137.
[36] See the chapter entitled 'The Goddess' in Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, pp. 35-41.

Welsh writing in the late 60s and early 70s for what he perceived to be formal conventionalism, Nicholas Jones argues that the writer was attracted by the 'unashamedly political and defiantly nationalistic' commitment of poets such as Meic Stephens to the Welsh language movement, the combination of left wing and nationalist politics in this movement at the time, and emerging postcolonial readings of Welsh literature.[37] Johnson's interest in Welsh writing and the Welsh language is evidenced in his 'learning some Welsh' while at Gregynog, in Jones's discussion of his later translation, with Ned Thomas, of poems by Gwenallt, and also in Pacey's noting that he wrote englynion at Gregynog.[38] In terms of Welsh influences to be detected in *House Mother Normal*, not only did Johnson write the novel at Gregynog, the text also features evocations of the house during the time of the Davies sisters, two Welsh characters in the form of Sioned Bowen and Rosetta Stanton, and a use of Welsh which is of relevance to my exploration of portraits of aged experience.

Johnson uses modernist techniques to create a bleak yet comic vision of life in a residential home for older people where neglect and cruelty reign. *House Mother Normal* employs a range of experimental features and evidences Johnson's rejection of conventional realism in pursuit of a form which he hoped would more adequately reflect the modern world. Glyn White explains: 'Johnson reacted against conservative conceptions of mimesis in a very personal way. He studiously avoided the term "realism", by then associated with convention, and set himself a new standard of mimesis, naming it […] "my truth to reality".'[39] The writer frequently 'breaks the

[37] Nicholas Jones, '"He Would be Working at the Welsh Books": B.S. Johnson and the Two Literatures of Wales', in *Re-reading B.S. Johnson*, ed. by Philip Tew and Glyn White (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 189-201 (p. 191)

[38] See Johnson's 1970 letter to Peter and Rosmarie Buckman, quoted in Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, p. 287. Jones, '"He Would be Working at the Welsh Books"', pp. 194-98. Pacey, 'B.S. Johnson and Wales', p. 76.

[39] Glyn White, *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 85.

frame' in his texts, reminding his readers that they are works of fiction. In the case of *House Mother Normal*, the novel's textuality is revealed from the outset when the House Mother, the only member of staff at the home bar a part-time cook, addresses the reader directly, invites him or her to join the residents for their 'Social Evening', and promises: 'You shall see into the minds of our eight old friends, and you shall see into my mind.'[40] A series of nine interior monologues follows – one from each of the older people and one from the House Mother herself. The ageing characters are on a continuum of degeneration, becoming older and frailer with each monologue. These monologues are predominantly evocations of the characters' inner thoughts. It seems, then, that Johnson's intention was similar to that of Roberts when she adopted the diary format for *Gossip Row*: to represent the introspection which can come with isolation and bring the reader closer to his characters' consciousnesses.[41] However, where Roberts was wedded to realism and maintains this through the frame of Ffebi's diary, Johnson's text is more self-conscious.[42]

In addition to these direct revelations of the novel's textuality, it has an air of performance which encourages the reader to consider his or her attitudes towards older people and the treatment they receive. Alongside the monologues and multiple

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[40] B.S. Johnson, *House Mother Normal* (1971), (New York: New Directions, 1986), p. 5. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[41] Vanessa Guignery argues that Johnson's decision to fragment the narrative in his works, for example by presenting the same events from nine different viewpoints in *House Mother Normal*, is also part of an attempt to represent the multiplicity and disintegration of metanarratives which characterise the postmodern condition. Vanessa Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in B.S. Johnson's *House Mother Normal*', in *The Ethical Component in Experimental British Fiction since the 1960s*, ed. by Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 50-70.
[42] Gramich notes Roberts's admiration for the work of Virginia Woolf (with reference to Francesca Rhydderch's unpublished thesis comparing the two writers) and discusses her experimentation with Modernist interior monologue and an 'impressionistic' style in two texts in her second volume of short stories *Rhigolau Bywyd* [*The Ruts of Life*] (1929). Gramich goes on to suggest that, had these stories been better received by Welsh critics, 'Roberts might have developed in a different direction stylistically'. However, the critic also acknowledges that the writer 'shared with Raymond Williams a wariness of the potential solipsism of Modernist subjectivity', suggesting that her political passions and acute understanding of the economic and social pressures on her characters also influenced her stylistic decisions. Gramich, *Kate Roberts*, pp. 41-42.

voices, the House Mother's introduction and conclusion suggest a performance through her referring to herself as the 'puppet or concoction of a writer', aligning herself with the reader, and providing clues to interpretation (204). The character also implies that the action exists for the reader's edification: 'So you see this is from [the writer's] skull. It is a diagram of certain aspects of the inside of his skull! [...] Still, I'll finish off for him, about the sadness, the need to go farther better to appreciate the nearer, what you have now […].' (204) Indeed, the performance contains a direct message for the reader: 'if you are not like our friends, friend, laugh now, prepare, accept, worse times are a-coming, nothing is more sure.' (204) This inducement to ready oneself for old age is echoed by some of the elderly characters. Observing Rosetta, who is close to death and completely isolated, Ivy comments: 'Didn't prepare herself for this, obviously. I did.' (65) Furthermore, Ivy suggests that the way one behaves in one's youth might affect the treatment one receives in old age: 'My eyes are not what they were, still, I collected over seven hundred pound for the Blind Club, they'll see to my eyes, for that [...].' (59) While the idea that the Blind Club will recompense her for her donations is as funny as it is sad, the older woman's comments and the House Mother's relation of the events in the novel to the reader's own old age reflect the fact that the treatment we give to our senior citizens, as a society, when we are younger is likely to be the treatment which we receive in later life. Indeed, this premise is one of the justifications for action on the conditions of older people which de Beauvoir outlines in her polemical introduction to *Old Age*.[43] Thus, although he does not adhere to realist conventions, Johnson's text engages with the very real issue of the care received by the elderly in late twentieth-century British

[43] 'The old person who can no longer provide for himself is always a burden. But in those societies where there is some degree of equality – within a rural community, for example, or among certain primitive nations – the middle-aged man is aware, in spite of himself, that his state tomorrow will be the same as that which he allots to the old today.' De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 5.

society, a concern which is still in the headlines more than forty years on. In fact, Coe notes that Johnson collected newspaper articles on conditions in older people's homes and mental institutions when working on *House Mother Normal*.[44] Relatedly, the memories revisited by several of Johnson's characters in the course of their monologues suggest that they have lived on the edges of society and experienced significant suffering: Ron has lived on the wrong side of the law; he and Charlie both fought in wars; the latter was homeless for a time; and Gloria worked as a prostitute. The knowledge that a group of individuals who have lived difficult lives is now subjected to cruel and isolating treatment adds to the novel's poignancy. One might suggest that the very fact that these residents have been poor, vulnerable, and on the margins of society has contributed to their ending up in an undesirable, isolated position in their old age.

Like Roberts, Johnson renders his characters' experiences of the physical effects of ageing. The case notes which precede each monologue detail the relevant character's age, marital status, levels of sensory perception and movement, 'pathology' or ailments, and 'CQ count' – the number of correct answers given to ten questions designed to detect dementia. Humanising and individualising information which might be useful to a prospective carer is not given, suggesting that the residents are defined largely by their physical state. Focusing on bodily ailments and diagnoses above all else has been viewed as a drawback of standard medical practice. Drew Leder argues that medical advances and diagnoses have prioritised knowledge gained through dissection of cadavers and the use of technologies such as 'the stethoscope, the blood test, the X-ray' – which 'allow a kind of dissection of the living body' – over patients' accounts of their symptoms and circumstances:

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[44] Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, pp. 295-96.

> Medical education still begins with the dissection of a cadaver, just as the clinical case ends in the pathologist's lab. In between, the living patient is often treated in a cadaverous or machine-like fashion. We see this, for example, in the traditional physical examination. The patient is asked to assume a corpse-like pose, flat, passive, naked, mute. The entire ritual and context serves to reduce the living body to something almost dead. Personal identity is stripped away as the patient is removed from his or her habitual surroundings, activities, even clothes.[45]

Leder states that this 'machine-model of the body has given rise not only to therapeutic triumphs but to limitations and distortions in medical practice'.[46] He cites the neglect of 'psychosocial factors in the etiology and treatment of disease'[47] and calls for a more holistic medicine of 'the lived body', which he describes as 'an "intending" entity […] that is bound up with, and directed toward, an experienced world. It is a being in relationship to that which is other: other people, other things, an environment'.[48] The 'pathology' sections of *House Mother Normal* reveal this tendency to reduce living, thinking, social beings to animated corpses, particularly given that the streams of consciousness which follow provide a contrast to the stark science of the case notes, reminding the reader that there are individuals behind the medical descriptions and percentages. Furthermore, Vanessa Guignery argues that the text's rigid structure of case notes and twenty-one-page interior monologues carefully paginated to ensure the same events are related at the same point in each section results in the characters being 'categorised and imprisoned in a fixed identity'.[49] Close consideration of the case notes also suggests that characters are suffering from neglect, although the complex medical terminology employed serves to discourage

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[45] Drew Leder, 'A Tale of Two Bodies: the Cartesian Corpse and the Lived Body', in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 117-29 (pp. 120-21).
[46] Leder 'A Tale of Two Bodies', p. 121.
[47] Leder 'A Tale of Two Bodies', p. 121.
[48] Leder, 'A Tale of Two Bodies', pp. 122-23.
[49] Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in *House Mother Normal*', p. 60.

such discoveries – a deliberate ploy on the part of the House Mother and another example of scientific diagnosis preventing a holistic understanding of the patients' conditions, one might suggest. For example, George Hedbury is suffering from 'advanced inanition', more commonly known as starvation (139).

Given the revelations of the pathology sections of the novel, it follows that physical discomfort is a key concern in several of the characters' interior monologues. Sympathy and respect are evoked by Charlie's anxieties about keeping clean. He is distressed at being unable to live up to his usual standards due to bouts of incontinence, unavoidable spitting, and lack of assistance with washing. Johnson uses typography to render the experience of constant physical discomfort in Ron's monologue. Physical gaps and breaks in the text represent severe pain interrupting his thoughts:

> I can think
> of nothing but the pain at the
> very centre of my arse.
>
> Say nothing
>
> Keep quiet
>
> Bear the pain without
>
> saying (75)

Both elderly men suffer a loss of dignity alongside their physical suffering. Charlie worries that the 'places [he] can't reach […] get wet when [he] bath[s], but not washed' and that he is 'not allowed to be as fastidious' as he once was (47), whilst Ron is described as a 'filthy old man always fingering his backside', presumably as he tries to lessen his pain (128). That neither man is helped to retain his dignity through assistance with washing or pain relief is extremely saddening. Ron's case notes

indicate that, although he has been told he is suffering from piles, he actually has a 'rectal carcinoma' (73). Thus, he has also been denied information about his condition and the ability to make decisions about his treatment. In *House Mother Normal*, then, older people who become ill lose control over their own bodies and are not assisted in taking it back.

Johnson's monologue structure creates the sense that the elderly residents are living separate, compartmentalised lives. Italics are used to differentiate between their interior thoughts and moments of direct speech. However, conversations are rare occurrences and the reader is only privy to half of any exchanges with other characters in a given monologue. The effect is to leave one feeling trapped within the interpretation of one individual, possibly unreliable, narrator without the satisfaction and illumination to be gained from sustained dialogue. In her discussion of the text, Vanessa Guignery examines the use of monologues and fragmentary dialogue discussed above as well as the House Mother's overpowering the inmates through 'authoritative and insulting' or 'strikingly hypocritical and deceptive speech'.[50] She writes:

> […] the inmates seemingly fail to open towards the other in the present, a condition which may be considered as characteristic of old age when people suffer from physical and psychological deficiencies and which Johnson renders truthfully. […]
>
> In the geriatric ward, dialogues between patients are rare, suggesting not only their physical and psychic decay, but also, on the part of the most healthy, a lack of curiosity and empathy for the other […].[51]

A withdrawal from social interactions may well accompany the physical degeneration of old age. However, Johnson's text is a portrait of ageing in a specific and particularly bleak setting, meaning that at least some of the residents' isolation and

[50] Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in *House Mother Normal*', p. 65.
[51] Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in *House Mother Normal*', p. 63.

lack of compassion is related to this brutalising environment. It is ironic, given the lack of communication and camaraderie between the elderly characters, that all except Rosetta end their monologues with the same words. 'No, doesn't matter' comment Charlie, Sarah, Sioned, et al, having reacted with disgust, anger, or excitement at the House Mother's final pornographic performance (27, 49, 71, 93, 115, 137, 159). This utterance suggests a shared experience of being too exhausted and depressed to protest at their living conditions.

The institutional environment has other negative effects on the residents. The House Mother has enforced a regime based on fear of punishment which encourages those in her care to compete for her attention and for petty symbols of her preference. The flip side of these minor recognitions is the violence and humiliation which is meted out to those who are unwilling or unable to court her attentions. Disruptive Ivy is threatened regularly with the 'twitcher' and Ron is punished for his illness when the House Mother makes sure he 'wins' a package of faeces in a sick twist on pass the parcel. Events such as this game, the brutal 'tourney' (23), and the House Mother's obscene performance at the end of the text might be argued to go beyond the bounds of the believable – Coe states that there is a 'plausibility problem' with the ending.[52] However, these episodes strike me as surreal, rather than unbelievable, and I would argue that Johnson's exaggeration here of the cruelty and neglect which still exist in residential homes and hospital wards for elderly people today brings a nightmarish quality to the text. Reality is magnified and pushed to its logical limits, encouraging the reader to consider the consequences of poor standards of care.[53]

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[52] Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, p. 294.

[53] See, for example, the scandal relating to inadequate care and preventable deaths at Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust. A number of the horrifying cases reported in the media relate to the care of older patients. Mark Tran, 'Mid Staffs NHS Trust Charged over Deaths of Four Patients', *Guardian*, 15 October 2015 <www.theguardian.com/society/2015/oct/15/mid-staffs-nhs-trust-charged-over-deaths-of-four-patients> [accessed 7 February 2018].

Given that this thesis is concerned with the representation of old age in literature with a specifically Welsh context, Rosetta's case notes and monologue are of particular interest. In addition to being isolated from her fellow residents by the brutalising environment, Rosetta is prevented from communicating by her physical ailments, and is further distanced because, as she has retreated into her own thoughts, she now exists mainly in her first language, Welsh, rather than English, the language spoken in the residential home. The care on offer is therefore even less suitable to her needs than to those of the other residents, further underlining the failings of a regime where patients' treatment is dictated only by physical diagnosis. In her final hours, there is no one to speak with her in her mother tongue, although, tragically, if the institution encouraged the building of friendships, Sioned, who also speaks Welsh, would know to do so. Jones describes Rosetta's monologue as 'one of Johnson's most fascinating and subtle reactions to his Welsh experiences' and interprets this character symbolically. He suggests that she 'dies in a language that is not her own, suffering cultural dislocation right up until her final breath, the destruction of the Welsh language and culture by imperialism embodied in the neglected end of a mentally and physically decaying woman'.[54] However, Jones also points to a different reading, whereby Rosetta's final thought of 'no mor' (176), does not suggest the English 'more', but the Welsh word 'mor', which is 'used as an intensifier like the English word "so", or to express two quantities being equal'. Thus, '[i]t is possible to suggest that Mrs. Stanton is finally able to return to her own language at the moment of death'.[55] Whichever of Jones's interpretations one finds most convincing, a contemporary reader might also be reminded of current developments in the

[54] Jones, '"He Would be Working at the Welsh Books"', p. 200.
[55] Jones, '"He Would be Working at the Welsh Books"', p. 200.

requirement for public bodies to provide services in Welsh and debates around what expense on translation can be justified during an economic downturn in a country where there are no adult monoglot Welsh speakers.[56] Rosetta's situation is reminiscent of the phenomenon whereby bilingual people revert to their first language during times of illness and stress.[57] This association and the representation of a very elderly first language Welsh speaker in such a sympathetic light encourages support for the argument that core services must be delivered in both national languages.

Readers who speak Welsh or make use of a dictionary to translate Rosetta's broken thoughts will find that her words are generally positive in tone and connote beauty, nobility, health, and youth. For example, she thinks of the words 'lwcus' (lucky), 'geirwir' (truthful), 'iachus' (healthy), 'serennu' (to sparkle), 'gwron' (hero), 'ifanc' (young), and 'unol' (united) (162-75).[58] Guignery finds the 'positive connotations' 'ironic', presumably given the horrors of Rosetta's external environment, and suggests that the character is 'nostalgically remembering her past'

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[56] Following the passing of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which gives the Welsh language official status in Wales, the first Welsh Language Commissioner was appointed. Meri Huws's role includes upholding requirements on specific public sector organisations, private companies, and voluntary organisations to treat Welsh and English equally. Wales Online, 'Welsh Language Commissioner Vows to Use Full Extent of Powers', *Wales Online*, 2 April 2012 <www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/welsh-language-commissioner-vows-use-2046769> [accessed 21 February 2018].

For an example of debates about which services should be provided bilingually, see the discussion which followed journalist Martin Shipton's criticism, on the grounds of translation costs, of a recommendation by a committee of the National Assembly for Wales that transcripts of all official meetings of the Assembly be made available in English and Welsh. Martin Shipton, '£400,000-a-year Meeting Translation Plan for National Assembly', *Western Mail*, 22 May 2012 <www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/400000-a-year-meeting-translation-plan-national-2031161> [accessed 21 February 2018] and Wales Online, 'Should We Spend £400K to Translate Records of Every Assembly Meeting?', *Wales Online*, 23 May 2012 <www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/should-spend-400k-translate-records-2051071> [accessed 21 February 2018].

[57] See, for example, Keith Davies AM's description of forgetting how to speak English whilst in hospital undergoing neurological treatment. Sion Morgan, '"NHS in Wales Needs Better Welsh Language Services," Campaigners Will Tell Carwyn Jones Today', *Western Mail*, 5 August 2013 <www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/nhs-wales-needs-better-welsh-5584430> [accessed 21 February 2018].

[58] Some of the Welsh words used by Johnson to render Rosetta's thoughts are very literary and slightly archaic. This suggests that Johnson sourced them from books, perhaps from Gregynog's library, rather than from Welsh speakers.

or 'simply asserting her own dignity'.[59] If one takes the youthful tone of Rosetta's thoughts to suggest earlier memories, the stark contrast between the vitality and optimism of the character's inner life and her current physical situation also evokes the experience of disjunction between self and older body, a phenomenon which has been described both by Bryan S. Turner and Simone de Beauvoir. Turner states:

> […] we might say that we find difficulty empathizing with our own process of aging because we subjectively cling to an image of ourselves as unchangingly young. […] In phenomenological terms, we might note that the inside of the body remains subjectively young or youthful while the outside body becomes both biologically and socially old. There is a necessary disjuncture between the inner self and the image of the body.[60]

This view is supported by de Beauvoir's examination of ageing, which suggests that the incongruity between body and self can never be reconciled completely:

> There is an insoluble contradiction between the obvious clarity of the inward feeling that guarantees our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our transformation. All we can do is waver from one to the other, never managing to hold them both firmly together.[61]

Rosetta's final moment of clarity, when she silently cries out to Ivy, is an expression of this disjunction, whereby the failing body hampers the more constant self within:

> I am a prisoner in my
> self. It is terrible. The movement agonises me.
>
> Let me out, or I shall die. (175-76)

There is also a reminder to the reader here that rejection and othering based on physical degeneration reduces older individuals to mere bodies without personalities or pasts. Johnson's unusual use of form and horrifically bleak content might have resulted in a Grand Guignol text which indulges in experimentation for its own sake.

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[59] Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in *House Mother Normal*', pp. 60-61.
[60] Bryan S. Turner, 'Aging and Identity: Some Reflections on the Somatization of the Self', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 245-60 (p. 250).
[61] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 290.

However, the use of case notes, interior monologues, and typographic effects renders the isolation of institutionalisation with great clarity, particularly in the case of Rosetta's bilingual and broken monologue, while the fact that the events in the residential home are based loosely upon real accounts and are reminiscent of contemporary news stories and official reviews which crop up with depressing regularity indicates a wider relevance and purpose in Johnson's work. Indeed, Guignery argues that the novel, in particular the callous figure of the House Mother, 'demands from the reader an ethical response'.[62]

Like many of Johnson's older characters, the protagonist of Trezza Azzopardi's 2004 novel *Remember Me* has spent her life on the outskirts of society. 'Winnie', as she is known in later life, is a homeless, vulnerable elderly woman with learning difficulties. She has been appropriated and abused by others since her mother's suicide when she was a small child. Not unlike Johnson's use of monologues to render the isolation and self-absorption which result from his characters' institutionalisation, Azzopardi's episodic first-person narrative, which switches between the present day of the text and flashbacks to Winnie's earlier life, means that the reader experiences the character's confusion over the meaning and order of past events and must work to piece together her story. Throughout the text, the difficulties related to physical ageing encountered by Winnie interrelate with and are magnified by her disability, the social exclusion she suffers, and the after effects of hardship and abuse. The text includes a complex exploration of bodily ageing and also critiques the treatment of elderly and vulnerable people in contemporary British society. While Azzopardi's novel is set in England, she herself was born and raised in Cardiff and includes a note to explain that

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[62] Guignery, 'Ethics and Experimentation in *House Mother Normal*', p. 66.

'[a]lthough Winnie is a fictional character set in a fictional Norwich, she was inspired by Nora Bridle, a resident of the streets of Cardiff.'[63]

Winnie's body is an important signifier throughout the text, a preoccupation for the protagonist and for other characters. Her physical characteristics and experiences are ever present. For example, her 'pikey' and 'telltale' red hair reveals her shameful paternity (75-76), her feet fixate sexually predatory shoemaker Hewitt, and her experience of a backstreet abortion is recounted. This physicality is particularly evident in the sections of the text set in the twenty-first century, where Winnie is old. For example, she is anxious to avoid smelling and states frequently that she does not. The foregrounding of this concern suggests that the character is trying to avoid stereotypes surrounding homeless people and 'smelly old people' and her pride and dignity invite empathy and respect from the reader. Azzopardi renders a realistic exploration of older embodiment through her elderly character's reaction to and relationship with her ageing body. Mike Featherstone, Andrew Wernick, and Mike Hepworth have utilised the metaphor of the 'mask' of old age in their examinations of the relationship between an older individual's changed body and the more constant self within. In particular, Featherstone and Wernick discuss the 'glimpses of the actual practices and experiences of being old and the ways in which the aging body works, and doesn't work' which can be found in the 'limited amount of ethnographically sensitive research' on ageing:

> Here we see the struggles with bodily betrayals, stigmatization and various modes of disempowerment. This focus on embodied persons relating to each other through the visible body, the body which sees and can be seen, gives us a much richer sense of the dark side of the aging process, and the notion that for some the outer body and face can become a rigid alien structure of

[63] Trezza Azzopardi, *Remember Me* (2004), (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2005), no page number. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

> imprisonment which can mask forever the possibilities of expressing the self within.[64]

This concept of the older body as a restricting structure which traps the essential self is evident in Winnie's meditations on ageing. In particular, her experiences are characterised by a feeling of distance from the outside world resulting from physical degeneration:

> There's not a lot of wisdom in age, despite what they say. Truth is, as you get older, things get further away. Objects, I mean, like telephone boxes and the shops and that. Places you have to imagine walking to […]. And near up, everything's such a mist – you're practically blind. (169)

Here, the novel engages not only with the effects of ageing on the individual, but also with their social consequences. Like Ffebi in *Gossip Row* and the elderly residents of the House Mother's institution, the changes in the character's body contribute to her social isolation.

Links are made between the physical effects of ageing and social exclusion elsewhere in the text when the effects of Winnie's loss of linguistic ability, a common symptom of dementia, are explored and Azzopardi appears to suggest that language has a role to play in the mistreatment of vulnerable older people. The naming of people and objects is of concern in *Remember Me* and is associated with power relations between individuals. For example, the men in Winnie's life change her name to suit their purposes and perceptions of her, and the character is subjected to name-calling. Her physical appearance and position as a homeless person with learning

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[64] Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, 'Introduction', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-15 (p. 2). In addition, Featherstone applies the 'mask of aging' specifically to 'those individuals who experience severe bodily decline through disabling illness to the extent that the outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self'. Mike Featherstone, 'Post-Bodies, Aging and Virtual Reality', in *Images of Aging*, ed. by Featherstone and Wernick, pp. 227-44 (p. 227). See also Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth, 'The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course' (1988), in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner (London, Newbury Park and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), pp. 371-89.

difficulties make her an easy target. The chapter entitled ‘sticks’ refers to the colloquial saying about ‘sticks and stones’ and name-calling and, in the course of this section, Winnie muses on the potency of names, contradicting the adage that ‘names will never hurt me’:

> What’s in a name? I’ll tell you. Everything, that’s what: lies and truth alike. I’ve been called a hobo and a tramp and down-and-out; a dipso, a wino, even though I don’t care for it. […] I’ve been called a beachcomber too. I’m rather fond of that. (111)

The conclusion that ‘Everything’ is encompassed in names implies that they can be as powerful and affecting as physical violence, while their encompassing both ‘lies and truth’ casts doubt on the accuracy of the labels applied to vulnerable or older people.[65] The sinister workings of such labels are further revealed as Winnie recounts being ‘called’, or rather ‘referred to’ – ‘which is not the same thing at all’, as a ‘derelict’ by a shop assistant in Marks and Spencer’s: ‘She pointed her pink fingernail in my direction and asked the security guard if he couldn’t “do something about that derelict”.’ (111, emphasis in original) The character’s stressing that she was ‘referred to’ indicates that she understands that this is an act of objectification through language in the same way that Gwen in Roberts’s ‘Flowers’ is aware that she risked the erasure of her individual identity during her time on a geriatric ward. The tragedy and vulnerability of Winnie’s situation is heightened when she is unable to protect herself because speech fails her, although she senses the removal of human status and the reduction to a symbol or stereotype which the act of labelling exacts upon her:

> The security guard asked me if I intended to buy anything. It was after talking had stopped; I couldn’t say what my intentions were. I couldn’t say it was

[65] For a discussion of changing names in the text and their relationship to Winnie as a ‘flexible self’ who enacts various different identities throughout, see Eglė Kačkutė, ‘*The Self as Other* in French and British Contemporary Women’s Writing’, in *Women’s Writing in Western Europe: Gender, Generation, Legacy*, ed. by Adalgisa Giorgio and Julia Walters (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 375-88. Interestingly, Kačkutė argues that Winnie ‘retains a sense of self that is only accessible to her and eludes any external reference’ despite being repeatedly renamed by those with power over her (381).

> warm and dry inside. […] Or that I wasn't doing anybody any harm. I wasn't a thing unallowed, a symbol on a sign with a red line through it: a dog, or a cigarette with a smouldering tip. I simply couldn't say. (111-12)

The fact that Winnie can't explain that she is in the shop because it is 'warm and dry' suggests that her problems with language contribute to her isolation by preventing her from asking for the support that she needs.

The mystifying use of language by institutions apparently designed to support the vulnerable is also revealed in the text. When Winnie visits social services, she receives no help, instead getting caught in the Catch 22 complexity of the modern welfare system:

> […] to get money, you need a place. But if you have no money, it's not easy. You try finding a fixed Abode, as they call it, without any means of fixing it. And if you have no fixed abode, you can't get any money, not off the assistance, anyway. (171)

The repetition and capitalisation of 'fixed Abode' emphasises the use of this bureaucratic term in place of the simpler but more emotionally invested 'home' and suggests that, by avoiding this emotive term, the governing system erases and ignores the comforts which it represents – shelter, security, family – and Winnie's lack thereof. Winnie's playing with and repeating the phrase suggests that she is aware of the way in which it operates to withhold support. Similarly, she comments on her lack of understanding of the need for a driving licence: 'You could say I'd been very *sheltered*' (171, my emphasis). One might suggest that periods of language loss, caused either by an age-related condition or mental illness, have defamiliarised words for Winnie. As a result, their use by social institutions for mystifying and ideological purposes has become clearer to her.

While changes in her body make the external world recede for Winnie, her physical sensations, biological functions, and the cooperation, or not, of her body with her wishes loom large in her thoughts:

> Can't see my hands up close: they're as blurred as a drunk. But I can feel them all right: my very own chicken claws, one in each pocket. […]
>
> Why don't they warn you? Why don't they say that there's cruelty in the air? You go half blind, half deaf, your feet are so far away from you they might as well belong to another person: a lame one, at that. Eating's a burden. Sleep is a stranger. (169-70)

This dominance of physical issues for Winnie can be interpreted as a manifestation of what Leder terms the 'dys-appearance' of the body. Leder, a philosopher and physician argues that, although the state of being human is necessarily an 'incarnated' experience, in the course of everyday life, one's body largely disappears as a focus for thoughts and actions: 'While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. That is, one's own body is rarely the thematic object of experience.'[66] However, during times of illness, pain, discomfort, or change, the body becomes more present. This is 'dys-appearance':

> It is characteristic of the body itself to presence in times of breakdown or problematic performance. […] At moments of breakdown I experience to my body, not simply from it. My body demands a direct and focal thematization. In contrast to the 'disappearances' that characterize ordinary functioning, I will term this the principle of dys-appearance. That is, the body appears as thematic focus, but precisely as in a *dys* state – *dys* is from the Greek prefix signifying 'bad,' 'hard,' or 'ill,' and is found in English words such as 'dysfunctional.'[67]

Old age is included within the states which Leder identifies as involving dys-appearance and his description of the response of older individuals to physical change certainly fits with Winnie's behaviour: 'In puberty and old age, one's body structure, appearance, and abilities undergo significant alterations. As such, greater attention is often paid to the body at these times. […] The aging seek to adjust to unaccustomed

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[66] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 1.
[67] Leder, *The Absent Body*, pp. 83-84.

limitations.'[68] Winnie's comment that she may not be able to see her hands, but can 'feel them all right' suggests that, due to discomfort and awkwardness, they have become more present for her than when she was younger. In addition, her feeling as though she has the feet of a 'lame person' betrays a disconnection between her perception of herself and the body which she inhabits – its strangeness means that it must belong to someone else. Like Rosetta in *House Mother Normal*, Winnie is experiencing the common disjunction between self and older body here. Her labelling her hands 'chicken claws' is also revealing, as it suggests not only a loss of dexterity, but also that her body has become so at odds with her sense of self, so other, that she no longer perceives it as human. As de Beauvoir puts it: 'Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species: "Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?"'[69] Winnie's feelings of unfamiliarity with her body interact with wider concerns about identity in the text so that the effects of ageing and of the ill-treatment she has suffered intermingle. The boundaries between people often become confused. As well as being made to adopt her dead mother's name by her grandfather, who is 'confusing [her] with someone else', Winnie finds that the man she thought to be her father was not (48). Her real father is Hewitt, who, not realising this, is attracted to Winnie because she reminds him of someone else – her own mother. 'I must learn to tell the difference between things by their names' says Winnie, but this is not easy when names and people appear interchangeable (55).[70] The overall effect of this instability of identity is to add to the reader's perception of old age as a time of uncertainty,

[68] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p.89.
[69] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 283.
[70] Kačkutė is helpful on the construction of Winnie's self through interactions with others in the text using Judith Butler's work on identity, performativity, and power to inform her interpretation. Kačkutė, 'The Self as Other in French and British Contemporary Women's Writing'.

while the figure of Winnie brings with it questions about the nature of older subjectivity which feed back into the overriding sense of slippage.

The physical changes which occur in later life are an important part of Roberts, Johnson, and Azzopardi's renderings of ageing. All three writers include experiences of fear and discomfort in their representations of physical degeneration, through the use of uncanny elements by Roberts and in Azzopardi's indications that the body becomes more present for her elderly protagonist, for example. Bodies become sites of conflicted identity as characters experience a disjunction between a constant sense of self and their changed appearances and capabilities. As discussed in my review of the field of literary gerontology (see Chapter 1 – Introduction, above), literary and cultural critics concerned with the representation of ageing have found artistic works which focus solely on bodily decline without wider contextualisation problematic. Despite their emotive renderings of the experience of physical ageing, the novels and short stories analysed in this section avoid falling into this trap. Johnson and Roberts's texts imply that older people lose their status as individuals or have their past experiences devalued because others judge them by their physical appearance and condition above all else. Furthermore, *House Mother Normal* explores the problems which institutionalised older individuals can face in maintaining control over their bodies and related issues regarding the suitability of care and the maintenance of dignity. However, Johnson and Azzopardi's sensitive and affecting renderings of physical pain and the experience of being restricted by or trapped within an uncooperative body serve as reminders that ageing *is* an embodied experience and of the extent to which factors such as the physical care and support available to

individuals, their economic circumstances, and any stigmatisation or disempowerment experienced due to their physical status will shape their later lives.

Considered together, these novels and short stories suggest that an older individual's socioeconomic circumstances, as well as the ways in which he or she copes with and adapts to physical ageing, influence their overall experience and quality of later life. All the writers examined in this section give voices to marginalised characters and reveal the workings of caring institutions and the welfare state in their dealings with vulnerable older people. Johnson's dissection of the isolating effects of neglect and mistreatment in a local authority-funded residential home is particularly affecting, especially considering that the writer was inspired by actual news stories. Azzopardi's focus on the operation of language is of interest because it not only reveals the mystifying use of language by state institutions in their dealings with vulnerable older people, but also foregrounds the objectification involved in the act of labelling such individuals and the ways in which linguistic degeneration can operate alongside physical deterioration as a significant part of the experience of physiological ageing. Relatedly, through the character of Rosetta Stanton, Johnson offers a portrait of a woman in deep old age whose disempowerment stems in part from her being unable to use her mother tongue when she is at her most vulnerable because it happens to be a minority language.

One might ask what overall impression these texts give of the experience of ageing. Is later life represented positively or negatively? Roberts's portraits of elderly characters are complicated in that they include moments of hope and happiness amongst the harsher realities of loneliness, fear, boredom, and isolation. I have selected the works by Roberts included in this section on the grounds of their complexity and it is interesting to note that, with the exception of *Gossip Row*, they

were all published in the mid to late 1960s, when Roberts was in her seventies. Perhaps the writer's complicated vision of aged experience in these short fictions has its roots in the fact that she was elderly when she wrote them. I will examine several of Roberts's earlier short stories in the final section of this chapter, two of which present a decidedly bleak view of later life. Although it might be suggested that *House Mother Normal* is so grim that it alienates the reader rather than inspiring him or her to greater social awareness, I believe that the distancing effect of the novel's self-reflexivity and the qualities of nightmarish exaggeration and parody in its cruellest scenes prevent this scenario. Moreover, the fact that Johnson renders the inner lives of his marginalised older characters and their missed opportunities for camaraderie encourages the reader to imagine other possibilities for individuals in their situation. Similarly, the image of an ageing woman taking up and fashioning a symbol of idealised femininity in 'Buying a Doll' presents the prospect of older women seizing greater control of expectations of themselves, as do Gwen Huws's spirited refusal to be stereotyped in 'Flowers' and Winnie's recognition of her own objectification in *Remember Me*. However, the inclusion of similar issues regarding marginalisation, isolation, and inadequate care in texts spanning almost sixty years is of concern, as it suggests that there has been little change during this time in the way in which older people are treated in our society.

Older Women and Widowhood

At this point, it is illuminating to consider a trope which, although not present in the texts discussed above, appears in several recent short stories by other Welsh writers and provides a contrast to texts which depict old age as a predominantly downward

trajectory of decline and loss. This is the trope of the widowed woman who finds herself moving home and growing personally and politically after the death of her husband. Both Glenda Beagan and Emyr Humphreys published short stories involving this motif in 2009. Beagan's widowed protagonist appears in two linked stories in the collection *The Great Master of Ecstasy*. In 'Birth of an Oxbow', Judith is recently bereaved and overwhelmed by memories of her husband, 'benign bully' Bob, and of her mother, who died when she was a child.[71] These dead family members feel more real to her than her son Gareth, daughter-in-law Shani, and grandchildren, suggesting that she is focused on her past, rather than the present or future. There is a gap of more than a year between this story and its partner 'A Bad Case of September'. Judith is now living in Llandudno in a retirement block called 'Avalon Court'.[72] This ironic name prompts one to question whether the character's move will signify development or decline, alluding as it does to the myth of King Arthur and the mysterious island where he was taken after his last battle, apparently to die. However, she appears more forwarding-looking. Where, in 'Birth of an Oxbow', Judith rereads creative writing she produced forty years earlier, she is now developing new material, albeit based on her memories. The text also charts a process of emotional growth. Despite the fact that Bob still exists as an internal critical voice, Judith becomes more confident in expressing her feelings, disagreeing openly with her English neighbour on the issue of bilingual utility bills, for example. This emotional honesty causes a change in her perception of her marriage. The protagonist is distanced from her family because Bob 'disliked Shani intensely' and because Judith apparently finds her false and 'full of

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[71] Glenda Beagan, 'Birth of an Oxbow', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 95-105 (p. 98).

[72] Glenda Beagan, 'A Bad Case of September', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 115-39 (p. 117). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

condescension' ('Birth of an Oxbow', 103). Realising that this gulf was not caused by Shani, but by an unreasonable aversion on Bob's part, the protagonist is surprised to find herself accusing him: 'Bob, you deprived me of my grandchildren.' (125) She knows that this situation was caused by her being dominated by her husband, living 'many events and emotions' 'almost vicariously', 'mediated through Bob', and realises that her identity has been in crisis since his death (127). Following this epiphany, the future looks brighter as Judith resolves to visit Shani and Gareth. The text ends with the image of a goldcrest moving freely in the brush. This contrasts with the description of captive birds in an aviary which opens the story and foregrounds the emancipating process which Judith has experienced.

Judith's period of growth is nurtured by a return to places from her youth and new intellectual and social activities, alongside an exploration of her Welsh identity. Her decision to move to Llandudno is motivated not just by a desire to distance herself from her immediate family, but also because it holds 'so many memories for her, all of them good' (118-19). Hailing from Flintshire, the protagonist was 'brought up to speak Cymraeg Sir Fflint, and a smattering at that', which left her with a 'sense of linguistic inferiority' in comparison to first language Welsh speakers from West Wales (119-20). Feeling more confident about her Welshness in later life, she recognises the destructiveness of this sense of inferiority, resolves to explore it in her creative writing lessons, and also enrols on a beginners' Welsh class. It is whilst writing about childhood memories of 'Shangri La' – an idealised image of the view from Haulfre Gardens which she has carried with her since a special trip to Llandudno with her mother – that Judith realises that Bob's dislike for Shani came from his own inferior sense of Welshness in comparison to his daughter-in-law's bona fide Welsh-speaking credentials. As Judith takes the view from Haulfre Gardens once again, more

insights about her marriage emerge. She is able to let go of her treasured vision of 'Shangri La' upon realising that it has operated as a 'glorious receptacle' of idealised memories since her mother died and resolves to avoid creating a similar 'shrine' for Bob (133). Life for Judith is now about living people and looking to the future.

The situation of the protagonist of Humphreys's 'Home' (2009) bears various similarities to that of Judith. Seventy-three-year-old Dilys is also indicated to have lived vicariously through her husband: 'dazzled by his accomplishments', she gave up the chance of a good job to travel the world in 'hot pursuit' of Dennis's 'brilliant' career and, like Judith, she feels uncertain of her identity without him:

> When Dennis was alive I never thought anywhere in Europe was foreign. […] Without him, everywhere becomes cold and hostile and foreign and I am like the proverbial pilgrim in a foreign land. None of his accomplishments were mine so what am I without him? [73]

Echoing Judith's strained relationship with Gareth and Shani, her husband's dominance has caused a distance between herself and her son and, consequently, her grandchildren. In her search for somewhere to settle following Dennis's death, Dilys also chooses a place associated with happy memories from her childhood, buying a house on Ynys Môn near the former site of her grandfather's smallholding. As in 'A Bad Case of September', social developments and intellectual pursuits help Dilys to overcome her grief and build a new life for herself. Where Judith feels part of a group at her adult education classes and takes steps to repair her relationship with her son's family, Humphreys's protagonist finds a mutually-supportive surrogate family developing around her new home in the unlikely form of her elderly gardener Wil Hafan, Bulgarian immigrant Katica (her 'daily help'), Katica's children, and the son of the local shopkeeper (152). She is engaged in preparing her grandfather's letters

[73] Emyr Humphreys, 'Home', in *The Woman at the Window* (2009), (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 140-63 (pp. 142-43). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

and her minister father's sermons for posthumous publication. As well as forming a healing intellectual pastime which parallels Judith's creative writing, this activity prompts Dilys to reassess her relationship with the Welsh language and her national identity. Considering old correspondence between her grandfather and his émigré uncle in the United States, she speculates: 'There must be some kind of a link between the language of my childhood and the healing process of happiness.' (155) Furthermore, and not unlike Judith, Dilys is riled by an outsider's attitude to Wales and Welsh culture. Her grandson's desire to 'take a look at Wales' 'sounds suspiciously like those nineteenth, and for that matter twentieth-century guidebooks where the intrepid traveller is advised to advance into the unknown via Chester, Shrewsbury and Gloucester' and she is irritated by his apparent assumption that the entire country can be judged by visiting only Swansea (159-60). This protective attitude to her country is a new development, as Dilys has not previously concerned herself with issues of national identity: 'Under the influence of Dennis, I suppose, I was always inclined to believe that race, religion and nationality were a pain in the neck.' (160)

Without their beloved but domineering husbands, both Dilys and Judith become more aware of their Welsh identity. The fact that this understanding develops alongside intellectual and social pursuits which they find enriching, particularly in the case of the newly empowered Judith, suggests that embracing one's national identity in later life can bolster feelings of security in one's sense of self more generally. Indeed, in this sense, Beagan and Humphreys's short stories share characteristics with what Barbara Frey Waxman identifies as the '*Reifungsroman*, or novel of ripening',[74]

[74] Barbara Frey Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 2.

in which older female protagonists 'literally take to the open road in search of themselves and new roles in life'.[75] In particular, Waxman discusses contemporary British and north-American novels in which '[a]s they travel, [the protagonists] gradually come to terms with crucial decisions they made as youths; with past experiences, often sexual, that influenced their lives; and *with their cultural roots*.'[76] One might also suggest that Dilys and Judith missed out on some of the benefits of second wave feminism when it came to their marriages and careers. However, being in good health and comfortable financially when they are widowed presents them with the freedom to choose how they will live later in life. Indeed, there are hints that, as she reassesses her marriage to Bob, Judith begins to kick back against male dominance more generally: 'She stopped writing and looked out of the window. Somebody, it might have been Somerset Maugham, had said somewhere that a writer should always sit with his (note that personal pronoun) back to the window. Well she hadn't.'(124)[77]

Finally, with regards to Dilys and Judith's situations, these short stories feature another revealing trope which appears in Anglophone Welsh fiction about ageing. Both texts are concerned with the idea of finding a place where one feels secure in later life. At the hopeful ending of Beagan's text, Judith finds herself thinking that she will phone Shani when she gets 'home': 'Not when I get back. No,

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[75] Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*, p. 16.
[76] Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road*, p. 17, my emphasis.
[77] Siân James's sinister tale 'Delia, Oh Delia' (1996) puts a dark yet humorous spin on the trope of the older woman who gains personal empowerment when she is widowed. Having spent thirty years working in the home and on the farm of her noisy, overweight, drunken husband, delicate, compliant Delia Jarman will inherit nothing when he dies. However, where others fear the prospect of spending their later years in the local St David's Rest Home, aka 'the Geriatric', Delia is already enjoying volunteering there (150). She has negotiated a job and room for herself after Ted's death and knows that will be a place for her when she is too old to work. Dominated first by her overbearing parents and then by her husband, old age in the residential home will, ironically, give her the space and quiet she has craved for years. Siân James, 'Delia, Oh Delia' in *Not Singing Exactly: The Collected Stories* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1996), pp. 145-52.

when I get home. Because that's what Avalon Court was now.' (137-38) Similarly, the title of Humphrey's text emphasises the importance of feeling settled and Dilys expresses the need to '[f]ind a still centre in [her] confused world', a 'dwelling' she 'can call home', following the disturbance and distress of Dennis's sudden death (146-47). Humphreys is perhaps alluding to Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' in his choice of words here. Heidegger views dwelling as an all-encompassing activity involving a relationship with and contribution to a particular place, which is the foundation of human identity and the ability to be at peace on the earth:

> The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. […] this word *bauen* however *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine.[78]

Certainly, that Judith and Dilys both experience personal growth when they put down roots in Llandudno and Gelliwen respectively suggests that being in a place where one feels at home and comfortable – a place with family memories, familiar culture, and opportunities for new friendships, perhaps – is important to a fulfilling old age. It is little wonder that Dilys feels 'pierced with guilt' for sending her 'poor widowed father' to a residential home 'in a part of the country he never liked' in his own old age (147).[79]

Both 'A Bad Case of September' and 'Home' were published in 2009, but the importance of having a home in old age is also a concern in other, earlier texts. Gwen Huws's determination to remain at home and thus preserve her individuality during

[78] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1954), in *Poetry, Language, Thought* trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), pp. 141-59 (p. 145, emphasis in original).
[79] For further discussion of the representation of old age in 'Home' and other works of fiction by Emyr Humphreys, see my article: Elinor Smith, 'Old Age in the Fiction of Emyr Humphreys', *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 15 (2010-2011), 161-86. This article is based on a longer MA thesis, '"The things that have happened in our time": Old Age in the Fiction of Emyr Humphreys', which is available at Cardiff University Arts and Social Studies Library.

her last days in Roberts's 'Flowers' (1969) is discussed above, for example, and Allen Raine's 'Home, Sweet Home' (1908), has at its sad centre an ageing woman's need for a familiar place to dwell. Raine's short story follows the cruel fate of elderly widow Nancy Vaughan, who is evicted from the farm where she has lived all her married life by her selfish son and his new wife, and tricked into entering the workhouse. As in the texts discussed above, Bronwylan is linked to Nancy's past, in particular to memories of her happy marriage, caring for her children, and feeling comfortable in the kitchen. The importance of the farm to Nancy's sense of self becomes clear when she follows the Welsh practice of defining herself by the place, and also by her intimate knowledge of it: 'I cannot sleep in the workhouse. I am Nancy Vaughan, of Bronwylan. There are nine cows in the "boidy", and seven stacks in the haggard. Open those big doors for me, put me outside, and I will find my way home again.'[80] As the time passes, the protagonist repeats the same prayer 'hourly': 'Let me not die in the workhouse!' (55) The fact that it is essential to her that her final moments are spent in her home suggests that familiar surroundings are important in old age in part because they provide a comfortable setting to contemplate and face death. Furthermore, the circumstances of one's death are important because they might be viewed as one of the defining factors of one's personal narrative, for oneself and for others. Although, following her escape, Nancy only manages to walk half the distance to Bronwylan before she dies on the roadside, the reader is left in no doubt that this is a happier ending for the character than a death in the comparatively

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[80] Allen Raine, 'Home, Sweet Home' (1908), in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 45-58 (pp. 50-51). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
Interestingly, in Humphreys's 'Home', Dilys also follows this convention of describing oneself using the name of one's home once she is installed in her new house, albeit rather self-consciously: 'So here I am. Mrs Macphail, Henefail. The lady of a miniature manor.' (150) Humphreys plays with the repeated sounds in her Scottish married surname and the Welsh name of the house, reminding the reader of Dilys's journey away from Wales and her return to her roots in later life.

comfortable setting of the workhouse. As she slips off to sleep in the snow, intending just to rest for a while, she is elated to know that she is on her way and has ‘a vision of Bronwylan in her heart’ (57). There is a suggestion in the final lines of the text that this stoic character is finally able to rest at Bronwylan in the afterlife or her dreams. When her body is found, Nancy has ‘a smile of peace and content’ on her face, for in her mind ‘she had reached Home’ (58).

Memory, Time, and the Past

Representations of older subjectivity by Welsh writers frequently feature passages of reminiscence, frame narratives, and meditations on the nature of time in later life. In this section, I return to the work of Roberts, Johnson, and Azzopardi and examine each writer’s treatment of memory, time, and the past in their fiction about ageing. Roberts’s older characters often look back on their earlier lives and the writer explores the operation and qualities of memory in her short stories. ‘Between Two Pieces of Toffee’ (1929), for example, tells of Dafydd Tomos’s youthful courtship of Geini, to whom he was engaged but never married. This tale is presented through the frame of an aged Dafydd looking back some sixty years as his daughter and granddaughter pull toffee by the fire. The writer’s inclusion of detailed and emotive descriptions in the memory episodes suggests that some recollections remain vivid decades after the original events have passed:

> He remembers now that cowshed at Dôl yr Hedydd as it looked that evening. Its air was warm from the cows’ breath, its partitions filthy with dust and cobwebs and dried dung. His shadow and Geini’s were moving enlarged on the wall as they moved back and forth between the haymow and the cratch. A row of big eyes turning upon them over the edge of the cratch and necks moving back and forth. Then the heads disappearing and tongues curling

> around the hay underneath the cratch and the sound of the hay like tissue paper.[81]

In her discussion of memory in old age, de Beauvoir argues that 'memory requires forgetfulness' because 'if we were to note down and store everything, we should have nothing at our disposal'. Hence, '[m]any occurrences are either not retained or wiped out by others'. Furthermore, she observes that remembered images are generally 'far from possessing the richness of their original object':

> An image does not necessarily obey the principle of identity, it produces the object in its general and not its specific aspect; and it appears in an unreal space and time. Our images therefore cannot resuscitate the real world from which they emanate, and that is why we so often find images that we cannot place rising up in our minds.[82]

However, de Beauvoir admits that memories do occasionally represent the original accurately.[83] The immediacy and specificity of Dafydd's memories indicate that they are examples of these unusually truthful recollections. This said, de Beauvoir's observation might suggest a problem in the use of framed narratives involving reminiscence by writers in the realist tradition or in the common utilisation of flashback sequences to represent memories in film and television. However, in Roberts's story, the vitality of Dafydd's recollections of his time with Geini is tempered by the fact that, as de Beauvoir predicts, he has forgotten much of his past. Furthermore, there is an anxiety in the text about what is remembered and forgotten in later life and the changes which an individual undergoes as he or she ages.

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[81] Kate Roberts, 'Between Two Pieces of Toffee' (1929), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 57-63 (pp. 57-58). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[82] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, pp. 363-64.
[83] De Beauvoir states: '[…] some exact images do exist. At a distance of thirty years I saw that the gulf of Porto in Corsica had the same colour and the same shape that it had in my memory: my surprise proves how accustomed I am to being harshly contradicted by reality.' De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 364.

Thinking back on his days with Geini, the protagonist is aware that they are only a few in a multitude, but also that they are among the experiences that he has remembered while many others have faded:

> He had no feelings in any way in thinking about Geini. He remembered the whole story and that was all. He'd forgotten hundreds of things that had happened after that. But this story stood out in his memory like black writing on white paper, and the events that he'd forgotten were like white paper with no writing. (63)

The likening of lost memories to unmarked white paper is disturbing – suggesting that what is forgotten might as well have never happened – and problematic given that Dafydd's daughter and granddaughter, the products of his marriage after Geini, are living entities in the room with him. One is led to question why it is that he retains this memory when it no longer affects him emotionally. Perhaps Dafydd's time with Geini has stayed in his mind because she held the key to a different life trajectory. Indeed, the present-day world of the text is one of contentment, but the possibility of an alternative existence lingers. At his lowest ebb having lost Geini, the protagonist is told that '[e]veryone has a yearning for something that he can't have in this world' (63), while Roberts increases the reader's awareness of this other path through the fact that Dafydd has already visualised his marriage to Geini. That an episode which meant so much to Dafydd as a young man now excites no emotion in him in his old age is again typical of de Beauvoir's characterisation of memory. Recollecting the past, she finds that the 'freshness, novelty and bloom' of events is now 'out of date'[84] and that the meaning of memories has often been lost, leaving them empty:

> There are streets in Uzerche, Marseilles and Rouen where I can walk about, recognizing the houses, the stones; but I shall never find my plans again, my hopes and fears – I shall not find myself. And if, when I am there, I call to mind some scene that happened long ago, it is fixed against that background like a butterfly pinned in a glass case: the characters no longer move in any

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[84] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 365.

> direction. Their relationships are numbed, paralysed. And I myself no longer expect anything at all.[85]

Thus, although it is a blessing that Dafydd has not spent sixty years longing for what might have been, this fact throws into question the relationship between his older and younger selves and foregrounds the time that has passed and the things that he has lost.

Regrets about actions not taken and longings for lives not lived characterise old age in other short stories by Roberts. In 'Flowers', for example, Gwen Huws admits that she has never had much inclination to travel, to see places such as London, or even the more local destinations of 'Pantycelyn' and 'Ann Griffiths' home' (302). However, at the end of her life, the protagonist regrets this lack of curiosity and expresses candidly her desire to experience other consciousnesses, despite the questionable moral implications:

> Why didn't I go? And there are so many feelings and experiences I know nothing about. I'm leaving this world knowing nothing about the mind of a murderer or the mind of a Teddy Boy. [...] Doctors guess, for the most part. I want to know from the fountainhead, exactly how does a murderer feel when he's busy killing someone. (302)

Gramich notes Roberts's preoccupation with 'the impossibility of knowing another person or truly understanding another's experience'.[86] Gwen's desire to get into others' minds certainly expresses this difficulty and is a self-reflexive comment on the task of the writer in depicting the thoughts of others. In the context of a study of representations of ageing, one can read the older woman's wish as related to the isolation often experienced in old age and the lonely prospect of death – an individual activity if ever there was one.

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[85] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 366.
[86] Gramich, *Kate Roberts*, p. 79.

Roberts also relates such regrets to the effects of poverty. Part of the writer's wider awareness of the economic realities of her characters' lives, their memories of living in poverty echo the recollections of hardship which resurface for the residents of the older peoples' home in *House Mother Normal*.[87] In 'The Ruts of Life' (1929), Beti Gruffydd becomes aware for the first time of her own and her husband's advanced age on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. In a rare moment of contemplation, the protagonist finds herself 'looking at and listening to everything today as if it were new' and musing on the life that she has led.[88] The focus of the narrative on Beti's daily routine suggests that her time has been spent working in order to survive. The character recognises this and also sees 'nothing' in her husband's past 'but work, work without much rest' (50). The revelation that, until Dafydd's birthday, Beti 'hadn't given him so much thought since before she married' suggests that the struggles of daily life have restricted her relationship with her spouse and robbed it of intimacy (49). This loss of romance is emphasised through the contrasting of the couple's hard graft with the stories Beti reads in newspapers and novels, her only act of escapism:

> She read an occasional book like The Maid of Eithinfynydd with great pleasure, and her favourite newspaper was the Red Echo. If there was no romance about her life, there was plenty in other people's lives as one found them in the Red Echo. (48)

However, it is ironic that, despite the pleasure the Red Echo brings her, Beti 'wouldn't go far to find it' (48). Like Gwen and Ffebi, the character's narrow

[87] Gramich describes Roberts as 'an instinctive socialist' and explains that the focus on money in her short stories was criticised by some, while Morgan writes of *The Ruts of Life and Other Stories* and *Winter Fair and Other Stories*: 'In all these stories about married couples Kate Roberts makes us aware of the effect the environment – nature, industry, the economy, – has on man's primary urge and the success or failure of the first human institution. Poverty deadens physical response, it also roughens the finer edges of marriage, leaving only habit.' Gramich, *Kate Roberts*, pp. 30 and 61. Morgan, *Kate Roberts*, p. 38.

[88] Kate Roberts, 'The Ruts of Life' (1929), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 46-50 (pp. 46-47). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

experience is reflected in the limited geographic area she has explored. She has not had time for religious and cultural activities or entertainments, having never visited an 'Association', Eisteddfod, or circus (48).[89] Beti's thoughts at the end of the story are telling. Observing her husband cutting thorns, she envisages the work he has undertaken in his life as 'one great monotonous heap' which 'would have reached to the heavens no doubt' and realises that soon Dafydd will no longer be active: 'He'll be lying in the old graveyard there in a little while, with his hands folded forever.' (50) There is a deep hopelessness in the thought of a life spent working with no time to rest or contemplate one's achievements. The image of the pile of work reaching to 'the heavens' also encourages the reader to question whether an afterlife of rest awaits Dafydd when his work is finally done. The writer is silent on this matter, giving this story a more pessimistic ending than many of her other works.

Perhaps the most affecting of Roberts's stories exploring memory and regrets in old age is 'The Last Payment' (1937). Like 'The Ruts of Life', this story expresses the sense that a life dominated by work will lead to disappointment when tasks are complete and can be interpreted as a comment on the economic hardships which Roberts observed in Welsh communities.[90] Having sold the stock on their smallholding, Ffanni Rolant and her husband have moved to a house without land to

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[89] An 'Association' is a large scale religious meeting, often of Calvinistic Methodists, of the type associated with the Welsh religious revival of 1904-05.

[90] Roberts's preoccupation with those living in poverty or on limitted means in old age is clearly based on an understanding of economic realities. Alan Walker and Liam Foster's research shows that occupational class affects income and other quality of life indicators in later life, as well as life expectancy and the need for and type of care received. They state: 'Class is directly associated with the material, financial and cultural resources which are necessary to enable an older person to remain autonomous within his or her own home. Those who lack resources, including access to care, are most likely to have to enter residential care. This is usually associated with a marked reduction in the older person's autonomy and independence.' Furthermore, Roberts's own 'lack of substantial income' became an 'increasing worry as she got older'. Alan Walker and Liam Foster, 'Ageing and Social Class: An Enduring Relationship', in *The Futures of Old Age*, ed. by John A. Vincent, Chris R. Phillipson, and Murna Downs (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), pp. 44-53 (p. 52). Gramich, *Kate Roberts*, p. 86.

'finish out their lives'.[91] The passing of time is emphasised from the text's opening through the image of Ffanni standing beneath the clock as she prepares to make her regular Friday 'pay night' journey to Emwnt's shop (89). The trip is 'the custom of years', but this evening is different because Ffanni will clear her shop bill '[f]or the first time in her married life' (89). However, despite this achievement, the elderly woman is 'dawdling' and 'dilly-dallying' at home because 'she'd love to postpone the thing' (89). The description of Ffanni's walk is the centre of Roberts's story. As she trudges the road to Emwnt's, the protagonist remembers the countless times she has made the journey and the reader learns of her life. Ffanni has walked to the shop in all types of weather and in happy and unhappy circumstances – when pregnant, when some of her children had died, when family and livestock were sick, when her husband's wages were meagre, and sometimes 'with a cheerful heart at the end of a good month' (90). It is because the journey has been a backdrop to major events in her life that Ffanni is reluctant to settle her account and end the ritual. De Beauvoir writes that '[a]ge changes our relationship with time: as the years go by our future shortens, while our past grows heavier.'[92] Furthermore, when time passes and we reach the futures we imagined '[n]ot only has this past's future ceased to be a future, but in becoming the present it has often disappointed our hopes'.[93] This phenomenon can be observed in Ffanni's situation. The sheer weight of her past life is captured in the catalogue of tragedies and small triumphs which she recalls as she walks, particularly the reference to the births of her children 'always every other year' – Roberts's concision is such that years are brushed over like moments here (90). Some of the

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[91] Kate Roberts, 'The Last Payment' (1937), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 89-92 (p. 89). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[92] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 361.
[93] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 366.

character's reminiscences involve looking forward to future purchases. We learn that one of the reasons she has yet to clear her shop bill is that she was tempted to buy extra items:

> Once or twice, when she was within a little bit of paying her way, temptation came from Emwnt's in the form of a new tablecloth. And she failed to resist it. She saw that cloth on her table at hay harvest, and she bought it. She was remembering these things as she made her way to the Lower Village tonight. She remembered the joy she'd have from buying new things and the disappointment that would come to her monthly from failing to pay her bill. (91)

Ffanni's recollection of looking forward to owning something new and fantasising about how it will look in her home is poignant because this imagined future is now far in the past and the joy which the purchase brought was tempered by the frustration of remaining in debt. These memories also reveal an awareness in her that the times of hardship have characterised her existence and were not a preliminary struggle preceding a better future.

Disappointment also ensues as Ffanni makes her final transaction. Roberts's tone and imagery create a sense of sadness and waste here. The passage of time is again evident on the shop floor, which has edges 'bluer than the middle' because the centre has been worn by decades of footsteps, while tension is added by the moment by moment account of the events which follow. The women in the shop are 'quiet and strange and distant', establishing an atmosphere which Ffanni observes as being 'like the communion service' (91). The shop becomes like a darkened church, with the counter as an altar, and the shopkeeper a minister:

> It was all, the silence and the fear, like the communion service, with the shopkeeper at the far end stooping over the books, a white towel as an apron on the front of him. Ffanni Rolant looked around at the long shadows that were cast on the shelves, the gleaming white counter, dented and knotted, the black scales with their iron weights, the black tea chests with the 1, 2, 3, 4 on them in yellow, and the soap in bars. (91)

Thus, Ffanni's final payment is a ceremony which heralds her passing from one life stage to another, like a wedding or confirmation service. However, the character has few experiences left to come after this ritual, so it is most like a final communion or confessional. Roberts's inclusion of the black scales on the counter connotes judgement after death and the likening of the shopkeeper to a minister or priest emphasises the power which he holds over his customers' lives as he dispenses or withholds credit. Despite the tension, a sense of anticlimax follows the transaction. The shopkeeper gives his ageing customer a generous discount and she feels a moment of connection with him. However, once she has left the shop and closed the door 'carefully' behind her, Ffanni turns: 'She looked through the grey window, and she saw the shopkeeper with his head bent down once more over someone else's book.' (92) The fact that Ffanni views life continuing in the shop through the barrier of the window highlights her separation from this activity, while the emphasis on her latching the door for the final time suggests that she is now 'shut out' from this part of her life. Although she has shared a brief moment of intimacy with the shopkeeper, his turning his attentions immediately to other customers suggests that Ffanni has been superseded and will not be missed. It is as though, as she watches life continuing inside the shop without her, Ffanni glimpses her future death and acknowledges that the world will continue to turn without her.

An exploration of representations of aged experience would not be complete without some consideration of the way in which the passing of time is rendered from the point of view of the older subject. Philosophers have concerned themselves with the characteristics of duration and their findings are helpful to understanding literary texts. Henri Bergson argues that our perception of time is more complicated than the passing of the succession of separate units imagined as a linear continuum in space

which we have adopted as a practical means of conceiving of and measuring it. He explains that this spatialised idea of time results in a simplified impression of consciousness, whereby it is separated into a series of distinct states and the present is isolated from the past. Instead, Bergson explains that 'pure duration' is not tethered to the idea of space:

> Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.[94]

Because this idea of duration involves an overlapping of different conscious states and past and present experiences, it allows for a more complex understanding of human consciousness than the linear, spatially imagined notion of time:

> We can thus conceive of succession without distinction, and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnection and organisation of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought.[95]

Thus, it appears that the human experience of time is more subjective than scientific measurement would lead us to believe, and that the quality as well as the quantity of time holds sway. De Beauvoir's discussion of our changing relationship with time in old age also suggests that our experience does not correlate with objective, scientific measurement. Her statement that the future seems to shrink while the 'past grows heavier' is discussed above in relation to 'The Last Payment'. She also explains that 'the older one grows the faster [time] runs'.[96] This speeding up is due in part, says

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[94] Henri Bergson, 'The Idea of Duration', in *Key Writings*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 50-77 (p. 60).
[95] Bergson, 'The Idea of Duration', p. 60.
[96] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 373.

Beauvoir, to the lack of change in one's self-perception from one year to the next in old age relative to that of a younger person for whom '[e]ach year brings[…] a maelstrom of new things and experiences, intoxicatingly delightful, or hideous, and one emerges transformed, with the feeling that the near future will bring about a similar upheaval'. This pace is also related to the comparative length of a given unit of time in relation to one's past: 'we always have the whole of our life behind us, reduced to the same form and size at all ages: in perspective, twenty years are equal to sixty, and this gives the units a variable dimension.' [97] However, although months and years will seem shorter for the older person, according to de Beauvoir, 'this hellish speed does not always protect the old person from boredom: far from it'. Uneventful days, weeks or months, while they 'contain nothing to remember' afterwards, will 'drag on endlessly, hour by hour', at the time.[98] Such subjective experiences of time are reflected in 'Between Two Pieces of Toffee', where Roberts's title foregrounds the shift in the perceived pace of time which comes with the act of reminiscing, whereby memories spanning years can flash through one's mind in moments. Similarly, as discussed above, in *Gossip Row*, the level of detail and repetition in Ffebi's diary suggest that boredom and familiarity lengthen her days. The perception of time is of concern to other writers interested in representing older characters and I will return to this subject in relation to Johnson and Azzopardi.

In *House Mother Normal*, most of Johnson's older characters spend significant periods of time in silent reminiscence. Sioned Bowen, for example, recounts events from her years in service at a country house, while Gloria Ridge's monologue is

[97] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 375.
[98] De Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 376.

interspersed with different versions of the same confused memory of how she first met her 'true love' (98/ 103/ 110). Names and incidents scattered amongst these recollections suggest that a number of the characters have met in the past. Charlie, for example, remembers playing the piano in 'Bill and Glory['s]' pub (46) and Gloria later reveals that she is known as 'Glory for short', suggesting a connection (98). Similarly, although their ages would make it impossible in a realist text, Ron Lamson seems to be 'little Ronnie' (3), Sarah Lamson's estranged son, whom she longs to see 'just the once more' before she dies (15). The fact that these linked characters do not recognise one another underlines their isolation, while Sarah and Ron's impossible connection works with the non-realist elements of the text to create the impression that the residential home is not a 'real place', but a creation for the reader's examination, as discussed above. There is also a sense that the characters have been uncoupled from their pasts as part of the erasure of their individuality which has come with their institutionalisation.

Within Johnson's characters' memories, there are numerous references to the generation-defining events which were the First and Second World Wars. Sarah, for example, recalls her husband's death following his return from the First World War, while Sioned reminisces about going to the 'Lyons [tearoom] over Hammersmith station' 'in the war', and Charlie still remembers the horrors of the trenches on the Western Front (128). In his discussion of memory and ageing identities, Turner argues that individuals' memories are not formed and recollected in isolation, but in the context of social interactions and that 'in a way which is related to the idea of social memory, our individual aging takes place within a generational or cohort context'. He explains: 'It may be the case that certain generations have collective memories which

are radically different from other generations.'[99] The sociologist argues that the ability to discuss past events with others who share one's memories is important to preserving a relationship with this past, and that the loss of 'co-participants' in remembering can contribute to the 'loneliness of aging':

> My memory of my past depends on a social network of shared experiences which are reinforced, changed or lost through the process of interaction with my own and other generations. The maintenance of these memories depends not only on having documentary evidence […], but more importantly on recalling this past in present conversations. An acceptable, verified and shared past emerges out of everyday interactions in which a shared past is constantly brought into the present by the question 'Do you remember when…?' The problem with aging is that we run out of living participants who can meaningfully raise and answer such questions.[100]

It is tragic then that, in *House Mother Normal*, characters with shared pasts and backgrounds who, due to the rapid changes of the twentieth century, are perhaps more distanced from younger generations than those who came before them, are prevented from engaging in such reinforcing exchanges by their isolated positions, and so are forced to experience the 'loneliness of aging' earlier than they might in a different environment. The House Mother's regime plays a role in this theft. Her attitude to the older residents' desire to recollect the past is sarcastic, dismissive, and characterised by irritation:

> Come along now! Chivvy chivvy chivvy. Daydreaming, most of them, they remember years ago far better than they remember to change themselves, or ask to be changed. They admire the past, think so much of the past: why therefore do they expect treatment any different from that they would have received in a workhouse of the past? (185)

This refusal to give any consideration to the residents' pasts is another example of the removal of their identities within the residential home. The knowledge and experience built up over their lifetimes is negated and they are reduced to their present selves and

[99] Turner, 'Aging and Identity', p. 251.
[100] Turner, 'Aging and Identity', p. 253.

made other in comparison to younger generations. However, Johnson's use of streams of consciousness serves to reveal the damage which is wreaked by the institutional environment by providing the reader with glimpses of the characters' recollections which are full of immediacy and often focused on the people and things about which they felt passionate. Thus, the writer's examination of memory in old age is as much about critiquing the treatment received by older people as is his rendering of the experience of physical ageing.

Like Roberts's short stories, Johnson's novel is concerned with what is remembered and forgotten in old age. In an attempt to distract himself from the pain of the present, Ron tries to recollect his first sexual experience. Although popular belief would have it that one does not forget this singular event, Ron's experience contradicts this received wisdom:

> I shall try again to remember my first fuck. The first is the one you never forget, they say. They are not right in my case, not for the first time, either. Yet I remember it was when I was seventeen, because that was what I said when questioned about it some time later. But who it was is difficult to remember. (88)

That the one detail that Ron can remember – his age – is second hand, in that it is based on a memory of a memory, further destabilises the reliability of his recollection. This effect is compounded when the character proceeds to invent a memory to replace the one that he has lost, an act which suggests that, for him, there is no practical difference between memory and fantasy: 'My memory's playing me up again, so she was redhaired, ginger-eyed and had a pair of tits on her like twin mountains and an arse as broad as East Anglia.' (88) As an individual's first sexual experience is arguably an important factor in the transition between childhood and adulthood, and in the formation of sexual identity, the difficulty which Ron has in remembering his and his willingness to replace it with an invention have implications for his identity

and, as in ‘Between Two Pieces of Toffee’, indicates a gulf between his older and younger selves.

In Gloria’s monologue Johnson attempts to render the thoughts of an ageing woman with dementia. The character’s ability to utilise language and syntax appears to be breaking down, resulting in broken, nonsensical phrases where the subjects of her sentences do not fit with her verbs:

> They said it was just a craze,
> wanting to eat, it would never catch on, la la la!
> Catchy.
>
> I always did believe
> in ruining your own work, it was one of my fondest beliefs,
> if you do that then you don’t have to beholden to somebody,
> do you? (97)

The idea that Gloria’s control over language is slipping is further suggested in her frequent use of rhymes, sayings, double entendres, and tongue twisters:

> While there is no pie we make hay, six times seven sends you to heaven,
> whompot, whompit, whampit! It was a lively leading lido when
> we first could greet groaning the great dawn green with grassy longings, if
> only I could now, how now how how? (107-08)

It is as though elaborate yet trivial uses of language designed to be remembered easily have remained accessible to the character, but more complex meanings have been lost. As in Roberts’s ‘Between Two Pieces of Toffee’, this effect expresses the uncomfortable possibility that memory in old age can be randomly selective, that what is important is not necessarily what is recalled.[101] Furthermore, the arbitrariness of the signifier, and the distance between words and their meanings are revealed.

Like Roberts, Johnson engages with the passing of time and changes in the way in which it is perceived in old age in *House Mother Normal*. De Beauvoir’s

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[101] Roberts also renders this situation very poignantly in ‘Old Age’ (1925, discussed above in Chapter 2).

observation that uneventful days will drag due to boredom is expressed by Ivy, who remarks of an earlier period in her life when she 'had lots of friends then', was a member of the Women's Institute, and 'did the flowers for the Church', that 'life

seemed so busy then, […] time seemed to fly by doesn't now' (60).

Johnson's repetition of the same day's events from nine different points of view adds to the reader's awareness of the tedium and slow pace of existence in the older peoples' residence. Not only do the interior monologues force one to re-examine the same incidents with a growing understanding of the horrors taking place in the residential home, one also experiences the repetition of mundane activities which typifies the elderly characters' lives, and the duration of these events is lengthened in comparison to the time it takes to read about them. Thus, Johnson's use of monologues can again be seen to be more than just a formal experiment for its own sake, but an integral part of the writer's rendering of the experience of ageing. The idea of setting store in the future is problematic in Johnson's text, as it is for Roberts's fearful protagonist in 'Buying a Doll'. For example, George's momentary thought of a time when he gets 'better' is very poignant (152). The character has forgotten that, as de Beauvoir puts it, his future is 'shortened' as a frail eighty-nine-year-old. However, in contrast to the situation in Roberts's text, the lives of Johnson's institutionalised characters are so unpleasant that focusing on the present is an inadequate compensation for their fears and uncertainties about the future or the unreliability of their recollections of the past. In particular, Ron's monologue is not only dominated by the gaps and exclamations which denote his severe discomfort and suffering, his attempts to escape into memories are also interrupted by the more pressing demands of his pain.

In *Remember Me*, the operation of memory is complicated as Winnie struggles to come to terms with the past, seeking both to avoid painful recollections and to hold on to memories of loved ones she has lost. Although realist in style, the novel includes supernatural elements which are involved in the writer's representation of old age. Winnie's clairvoyance means that she has been plagued by visions and voices of the dead and the appearance of ghosts serves as a metaphor for the resurfacing of disturbing recollections. This experience is focused on Winnie's body, as the character associates the impinging of the past on the present with her nose, suggesting that memories are more immediate for her than current experience:

> Then there's the other stuff, memories for instance: now they really should be far away. But just one nudge and they're right under your nose. And it is *all* in the nose. That innocent scent wafting out of the chemist? That's my father's hands after he danced with my mother; and that particular, early morning winter air with a tang of spring in it? Joseph Dodd, waiting in the church plantation […]. It all means something. […]
>
> […] Leather. Hewitt is, and always will be, leather. I couldn't pass a shoe shop without the dread of him ghosting up. (169-70, emphasis in original)

Winnie's desire to avoid smelling indicates that she wishes to avoid summoning such recollections, particularly the painful ones associated with Hewitt – she wears synthetic shoes these days. Indeed, she is very concerned to live in the present. She likes her silver coat from the Salvation Army because it feels 'space age' and 'like it had no memories in it' (47) and, asked where she lives by the man from social services, she comments: 'I could've said, I live in the present.' (171)

However, despite the character's best efforts, Azzopardi's descriptions indicate that Winnie is unable to escape her memories. This ageing woman's body is layered with and surrounded by artefacts from her past. In keeping with the importance of her hair in the novel and at odds with the futuristic coat, she still wears the wig and skullcap given to her by Bernard and Jean Foy in 1945 when they took

her in and changed her name. Turner identifies our state of embodiment as central to the human experience of time passing:

> In old age we may suffer the misfortune of senile dementia or cerebral atherosclerosis in which case much of our memory will disappear completely. I want, however, to insist on the importance of our embodiment in all of these processes, precisely because we might say that time is inscribed indelibly on our bodies. […] My body is, so to speak, a walking memory.[102]

By layering Winnie with the detritus of the past, Azzopardi foregrounds this concept of the body as the key connecting factor between one's past and one's present and as a reminder, through the change it has undergone, of the time that has passed.

In addition, Winnie carries with her a case of objects which embody the memories she recounts throughout the novel:

> The heart-shaped locket [from her father], Joseph's feather, the opal brooch that Aunty Ena wore […]. A greasy black wig, like a dead bird, which I wouldn't be wearing again. The divine wooden foot lay in my lap, its brass plate blackened from the touching. I could feel the imprint of the words engraved: Lillian Price. My mother's name first, and then my own. (261)

The significance of these objects as links to people she once knew is made explicit following Mr Stadnick's flight, when Winnie scans the room, 'wild with grief', searching 'for a speck of dust, a single hair, anything to say that he was here on the earth'. She realises: 'I had nothing to remember him by.' (112) As David James puts it: 'the tactile documentation of known objects provisionally dispels that estrangement which Winnie suffers throughout this novel and which motivates her investment in fugitive attachments.' However, while Winnie's mementoes 'often seem endowed with presence', they do not make up for the loss they represent, rather 'they also underscore the corporeal absence of the person with whom the object is associated'.[103] The fact that Winnie seeks both to escape and to preserve memories suggests that

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[102] Turner, 'Aging and Identity', p. 250.
[103] David James, 'Quotidian Mnemonics: Graham Swift and the Rhetoric of Remembrance', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50.2 (2009), 131-54 (p. 134).

older individuals' relationships with the past can be complicated by tensions between yearnings for things lost and the desire to let go of painful or shameful recollections. Furthermore, the revelation that some of the items from Winnie's case are found objects which do not actually hold the significance she attaches to them destabilises the reliability of her memories and of her testimony as a narrator. The character appears at her most pathetic when we learn that the mittens which apparently belonged to Janice, the baby she stole, feature images of Bart Simpson, making them too new to be genuine artefacts. It seems that Winnie is trying to create memories of events which never happened. As in 'Between Two Pieces of Toffee' and *House Mother Normal*, these efforts on the part of the protagonist suggest that memory is unreliable and influenced as much by the desires and fears of the individual as by the facts of past events themselves. In *Remember Me*, the body itself is the most trustworthy connection with the past. In addition to the operation of Winnie's body as a walking catalogue of her earlier experiences, Janice still bears the 'long, white scar, running like a frown along her hairline', which negates the protagonist's belief, based upon her recollection of events, that the damage caused by her theft of the child's hair was 'just a scratch' (260).

As in Roberts and Johnson's renderings of old age, the way that time is experienced in later life is significant in *Remember Me*. In addition to the representing Winnie's confused state of mind and the impinging of the past on her present, the novel's episodic structure indicates that, in later life, the protagonist is cast adrift in time. Indeed, Winnie comments: 'Sometimes there's an event, like a snow, or a funfair, or Christmas lights going on in the city, and it reminds you how the year rolls over. But mostly there's no edge, just tumbling days, which is how I like it.' (4-5) This abandonment of time is due in part to the dysfunctional events of Winnie's

earlier life. She describes '[c]locks and mirrors' as 'liars both', relating the untrustworthiness of measurements of time to the unreliability of identities in the text (69). Winnie's lack of concern for the socially-prescribed system for measuring time is also a result of her isolation from the wider community due to the deterioration of her sight and hearing, her loss of language, and social exclusion. Similarly, towards the end of his life, the character's grandfather 'realizes that what the time is doesn't matter', 'lets the clock wind itself down', and simply watches the garden grow and the seasons turn (99). Isolation again plays a part in this process of standardised time becoming meaningless, as the old man is alone and confined mainly to his house. Furthermore, this passage is part of a glimpse of Winnie's grandfather's life in Norwich during the Second World War, with the destruction of the Blitz alluded to as 'noises' 'above his head' (99). Thus, the elderly man's dispensing with the trappings of time is not just caused by his isolation, but also by his alienation due to the unfamiliarity and violence of the situation in which he finds himself. I will discuss the idea that the social, political, and technological developments and the destruction of the twentieth century present more change than it is possible for some older characters to assimilate in a single lifespan further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

All the texts examined in this section express anxieties about what is remembered and forgotten in old age. Memories are often suggested to be unreliable and what is recollected is not necessarily what is most important. In *Remember Me*, the body is a more dependable connection with the past than either memories or mementoes from days gone by. Moreover, in *House Mother Normal* and 'Between Two Pieces of Toffee' respectively, Ron's difficulty in recalling his first sexual experience and Dafydd's unemotional response to a relationship which once meant so much suggest a

distance between older and younger selves which echoes the disjunction between the changed older body and the more constant self within discussed above. A good deal of pathos is related to the subjects of recollection and the past in the texts considered. Roberts's older characters are preoccupied with regrets over time that they have wasted and experiences they never had, and all three writers create sadness around lost people and possessions. Roberts's concern with memories is often related to social critique of the economic circumstances her older protagonists have endured throughout their lives, while Johnson and Azzopardi also seem aware that monetary resources are an important factor in one's experience of old age.[104] In *House Mother Normal*, the lack of someone to share memories with underlines the isolation of Johnson's older characters and the fact that they are cut off from their recollections is another aspect of the stereotyping and narrowing of identities which takes place under the House Mother's regime. One of the major sadnesses in *Remember Me* is that Winnie has few pleasant memories into which she can escape. In Johnson's text, characters such as Rosetta and Ivy do have this option, although the immediacy of Ron's pain also removes this pleasure for him. The fact that remembering and forgetting and changes in the way in which time is experienced are presented in a more decidedly poignant fashion in the fiction of Roberts, Johnson, and Azzopardi than the experiences of bodily ageing is perhaps unexpected given the fixation with masking and delaying physical ageing in popular contemporary discourse. The focus

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[104] There are, however, a number of texts by Welsh writers with more financially secure older protagonists. For example, Emyr Humphreys's most recent collection of short fiction *The Woman at the Window* (2009) includes several stories focused on older characters, many of whom are well off and have enjoyed successful careers. See, for example: 'The Grudge', which tells of a feud between a respected ageing poet and his cousin, a member of the House of Lords; 'Three Old Men', about architect and property developer Tom and his old school friends Peter and Rod, an actor and doctor respectively; and the very affecting 'The Ring and the Book', set in the expensive Riviera Residential Home for the Elderly.

on responses to memory, time, and the past by all three writers suggests that they are an important, although often overlooked, aspect of ageing.

4 ‘You shall remember’: Older People, Family, History, and National Identity

The preceding chapters demonstrate that older characters have had significant roles to play in Welsh fiction written in English from the early 1900s right up until the present day. In addition to reflecting the modern phenomenon of ageing populations the world over, I believe that this prevalence and importance of older characters is related to the political, social, and cultural changes of the last 120 years or so and the upheavals of the twentieth century in particular. As discussed in my review of the field of Welsh writing in English (see Chapter 1 – Introduction, above), it has been observed that a recognisable genre of Anglophone Welsh writing did not emerge until the early twentieth century. Furthermore, when it did come, this body of work was often concerned with the situation of the working classes and the socialist politics that aspire to improve their lot. Raymond Williams identifies a ‘specifically Welsh structure of feeling’ to be found in Welsh industrial novels,[1] arguing that this quality was fostered by the hardship of the Great Depression and the fact that these novels ‘are, in majority, written from *inside* the industrial communities’.[2] The critic explains: ‘The privileged distances of another kind of fiction, where people can “live simply as human beings”, beyond the pressures and interruptions and accidents of society, are in another world or more specifically in another class.’[3]

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[1] Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1979), p. 11.
[2] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, p. 7 (emphasis in original).
[3] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, p. 12.

The changes which have taken place on a Welsh, British, and international level since 1900 have been far-reaching and have meant that the experiences of people from different generations – even those within the same family – have often been very divergent. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Welsh writers of English language fiction use older characters to explore and, in some cases, symbolise the changes of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I will argue that the working-class sensibility identified by Williams is of relevance to the special position of older characters within Anglophone Welsh fiction, with age and class becoming entwined in several texts. My investigation is also informed by Williams's conclusion that Welsh industrial novels focus on the family as a device which enables the realist representation of working class experiences within their social and political contexts. Williams argues that writers including Gwyn Jones and Jack Jones use family stories or sagas which follow a family over several generations to meet the challenge of rendering in fictional form both the 'structure of feeling' or 'basic rhythm' of Welsh industrial areas and 'the close and absorbing human relations of any industrial novel'.[4] He explains:

> The immediate family can be seen, from much attested experience, as the local bonding, of love and care, against the general hardship. But then, in one powerful form, what happens to this family, as not only industrial development, and not only industrial conflict, but now industrial depression, at once unites it in a common condition and then pulls it this way and that, dividing or even breaking it, in the struggle for survival.[5]

It seems likely, therefore, that close examination of relationships and tensions between the old and the young in fiction from the field will offer useful findings on the presentation of Welsh working-class experience. My analysis will also consider the significance of the concern within a number of novels and short stories with an

[4] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, pp. 12-13.
[5] Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, pp. 13-14.

ongoing cycle of generations and with public and family histories. In particular, I will explore writers' representations of ageing characters, especially storytellers, who act as remembrancers of the past and the significance of these figures for literary engagement with Wales' subjugated status after the Acts of Union. Building upon this discussion of older custodians of history, the final section of this chapter will explore the use of ageing characters to represent a particular type of Welsh national identity.

Societal Change and Generational Difference

Novels and short stories by Welsh writers contain various instances of older characters who have been aged and their bodies marked by the social and economic circumstances in which they have lived. For example, both Glyn Jones and Menna Gallie's representations of ageing colliers reflect the social, political, and economic changes that have occurred within these characters' lifetimes. In Jones's *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956), Lord Lisvane has risen from the ranks of ordinary miners to a position of political power and respect:

> He was a very big man, tall and broad but loosely built and with very little flesh on him. His swarthy face was long, the face of a great clown, the skin of it very loose, giving endless mobility to his expression. […] It was a wonderful face, expressive, volatile, responsive.
>
> A blue collier's scar was still to be seen on the bridge of the large nose and another on the prominent cheekbone, laid there when Lord Lisvane was Jim Pritchard, a miner, before he became a check-weigher, a miner's leader, a member of Parliament, a peer of the realm. Jim Pritchard the agitator![6]

Not only do the energy and elasticity of Lisvane's face and the strength of his bearing bring to mind the passionate battles he will have fought as a miners' leader, the scars he bears are reminders of the dangers and hardships which were daily realities for the

[6] Glyn Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village* (1956), (Cardigan: Parthian, 2009), p. 236. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

communities which serviced the mines of south Wales. References to the establishment of Plaid Cymru and the semi-autobiographical status of the text place its events in the late 1920s. The upward trajectory of Lisvane's career and his progress from an outsider's position as a political agitator to that of a member of the establishment with a seat in the House of Lords can be read to represent the rise of the Labour Party from its beginnings in the trade union movement to the appointment of the first Labour prime minister in 1924.

Gallie's 1962 novel *The Small Mine* opens with a detailed, eloquent description of the conditions underground – the 'crouching mile, two, three miles [walk] to the cage' and the 'depravity of the darkness' – and goes on to present the effects of mining upon the men who work there and their families.[7] Former collier Steve Williams carries with him the physical evidence of his time in the mines. He can no longer work due to lung damage and has only one 'good eye', presumably due to years spent labouring in the dark (20). Gallie's description of his physique makes it difficult to differentiate between the natural consequences of ageing and those of hard physical labour:

> He put his glass tenderly down on the bar, his hands whiter and softer than Joe's [a young miner], but for ever misshapen, twisted by the years before the coal-dust cemented his lungs. His cheeks were hollowed around the jut of his nose, lines like scars cut down to his lips and he grinned a bedentured, cynical look at himself. 'Women, did I say? With this old corpus? Thing of the past, boy, thing of the past. […]' (6)

However, despite the serious damage which his occupation has done him and his 'cynical' attitude to his appearance, Steve is not bitter. He has been compensated by the National Coal Board for his injuries and is determined to enjoy the money 'while [he] can' (6). Further, he displays wisdom and generosity of spirit as the novel's wise

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[7] Menna Gallie, *The Small Mine* (1962), (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2000), p. 2. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

peacemaker. Not only does he counsel against speculating as to the culprit in the death of Joe Jenkins, when he learns the truth, Steve protects the man who killed Joe, surmising correctly that it was an accident. He also defuses racist tensions surrounding a group of German engineers working in the area.

Steve's tolerance and sound judgment are suggested to result from the fact that he has lived through the early decades of the twentieth century, observing their brutality and bloodshed. For example, he justifies his condemnation of local communist Jim Kremlin's desire to see someone hanged for Joe's death using his reflections on the barbarity of Stalin's regime:

> No, Jim Kremlin, I wouldn't want anybody to swing – not ever, not for anything. I like to think I'm a civilised man, not a barbarian. Your friend Mr Stalin was a great believer in liquidating chaps. A great old executioner he was. I'm not, thank you. (103)

Further, one might suggest that Steve's contentment in the face of serious physical disability is related to the text's 1960s setting. The character and other older members of the community can remember the days before the nationalisation of the British coal industry in 1946. Well aware of the benefits of the National Coal Board for miners' safety and empowerment, they warn Joe Jenkins against taking work in a privately-owned mine. Steve has been compensated for the damage to his health caused by his work, a scenario which would have been unlikely pre-nationalisation, and his grown-up children are all in employment and have spare money to help their parents, again, a very different situation to the poverty of the 1930s and 40s. As Steve puts it: 'Things is a lot different down in these valleys now, isn't it, from what it was before 1945, when Sam by here and me was kids.' (10) Thus, Gallie uses Steve to represent a more civilised, caring, and inclusive era than the recent history of war and genocide in Europe and, closer to home, bloody clashes between striking miners and the authorities, unsafe working conditions, and years of grinding poverty. The contrast

between the culture and conditions of the 1960s and those of earlier decades is not clear cut, however. The events of the text take place in late autumn 1961, at the height of the Cold War, with the Bay of Pigs invasion a recent memory and the Cuban Missile Crisis only a year away.[8] Steve's frequent expressions of anxiety about the atomic bomb reflect these events and create a sense that, although life seems more comfortable and secure than in earlier decades, a new and perhaps more complex threat hovers in the background:

> There's plenty left to be serious about, only it's like we're afraid to be serious. They wrote plenty of books for us about the social revolution and all that, but nobody can write us a comfortable little tract on how to think about the old Bomb; there's no easy answers in this world no more […]. (50-51)

Like his condemnation of Stalin, Steve's observations on the lack of 'easy answers' and the inadequacy of pamphlets of the type produced by political movements of earlier decades to explain away the terrors of the bomb reflect the failures of communism and fascism – the great modern political metanarratives – to deliver the ideal societies that they promised.

Beyond Jones and Gallie's renderings of ageing colliers, writers also link age and hardship in female characters. Set during the Depression of the 1930s, Rhys Davies's unflinching and deeply affecting 'Period Piece' (1958) centres on Marged's discovery of her husband's body hanging in the shed; broken by years spent out of work, Griff has taken his own life. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that Marged is left with three daughters. The youngest is only eight, making it unlikely that her mother is any older than her late forties, and probably younger. However, Davies

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[8] Jane Aaron notes that references to Yury Gagarin's space mission in *The Small Mine* indicate that it is set in 1961, 'in the year in which the book was written'. Observing the tradition of Guy Fawkes's Night (5th November), schoolchildren collect money for their 'Guy' and, towards the end of the novel, the village bonfire provides the setting for various confrontations and revelations. Jane Aaron, 'Foreword', in *The Small Mine* (1962), (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2000), pp. v-xiv (p. v).

mentions Marged's 'strong grey hair' more than once, suggesting someone older.[9] Marged's appearance is in keeping with the poverty-stricken community where she lives. From the 'rickety door of the shed', the 'stunted cabbages', and the 'few unwilling swedes' in the frosty garden to the 'closed half-derelict shops' in the 'wintry street', decay, disrepair, and discomfort reign (399). It is not just the protagonist's hair that is faded, her 'grey eyes shin[e] with a kind of smothered anguish' (400) and her skin is 'a slack greyish yellow' (403). The overriding impression is that years of poverty and hardship have drained the life out of Marged, that they have aged her prematurely.[10] These instances of older characters who carry with them the effects of historical events from texts by Jones, Gallie, and Davies are just a few examples of a trend which can be detected in a significant number of novels and short stories. Such symbolic or representative use of older characters encourages one to read their actions and also their relationships with younger people allegorically. The remainder of this section focuses on Welsh writers' symbolic use of friction between generations in their presentation of societal change.

To return to *The Valley, the City, the Village*, although, as discussed in Chapter 2, a loving relationship exists between the protagonist and his grandmother, a clash between two very different value systems is played out in their ongoing disagreement over Trystan's future career. Mary Lydia Morgan's is a voice of religious devotion and propriety throughout the novel. Her first utterance is the religiously-inflected warning that 'God sees everything' (7), she is disapproving of frivolity, and, while her

[9] Rhys Davies, 'Period Piece' (1958), in *Collected Stories*, 3 vols (Llandysul: Gomer, 1996-1998), III (1998), pp. 399-407 (p. 399). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[10] For another example of an older woman whose aged body serves as a reminder of the difficulties she has endured, see my discussion of the hands of Trystan's grandmother in Glyn Jones, *The Valley, the City, the Village* in Chapter 2 above.

grandson is away at university, she prays every night that he will not fall foul of drunkenness and impurity. This ageing character is also associated with a type of Welsh identity grounded in speaking Welsh, devotion to Nonconformist worship, and a traditional way of life. Before Trystan is orphaned and comes to live with them, his grandmother and Uncle Hughie reside 'in a cottage high up on the mountainside, a place where all the people spoke Welsh and went to chapel' (7). Trystan's walk uphill from the station for a weekend visit reads like a journey back to Wales' rural past, before industrialisation changed the landscape and the lives of the people living within it:

> I got out of the train at Ystrad Halt and climbed the steep path to my granny's cottage. […] Ahead of me I saw her dwelling with a row of martins sitting on the warm roof. In the boughs of her gate-side rowan a blackbird was heard with metallic chink-chink, in the morning silence he made a stithy of his tree. The long green flank of the hill, brilliant rows of whitewashed cottages and lonely steadings scattered upon its slope, curved smoothly down into the broad mining valley, where the small engine, still immobile at the Ystrad Halt, erected a gigantic white elm of steam into the clear sunshine. (7-8)

The loneliness and quiet on the hillside contrast with the noise and activity suggested by references to the pit and the steam engine in the valley below, while the metaphors of the 'white elm of steam' and the rowan tree which becomes a 'stithy', or anvil, impose a natural image on an industrial process and vice versa, emphasising this opposition.[11] Tony Brown states that 'in Glyn Jones' stories, whether set in the sun-filled landscapes of West Wales or the scruffy streets of his native Merthyr, the relation between the individual and the community is […] invariably a problematic

[11] In his discussion of Welsh industrial novels, Raymond Williams identifies the 'profoundly different yet immediately accessible landscape of open hills and the sky above them' as a common quality 'in any Welsh mining valley' and views them as representative of both Welsh history and alternatives to the industrial present: 'There are sheep on the hills, often straying down into the streets of the settlements. The pastoral life, which had been Welsh history, is still another Welsh present, and in its visible presence – not as an ideal contrast but as the slope, the skyline, to be seen immediately from the streets and from the pit-tops – it is a shape which manifests not only a consciousness of history but a consciousness of alternatives, and then, in a modern form, a consciousness of aspirations and possibilities.' Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, pp. 12-13.

one'.[12] In the case of *The Valley, the City, the Village*, Trystan is torn as to whether to please his grandmother by pursuing 'a life of dedication and service' in the ministry or to follow his artistic ambitions and considerable talents by becoming a painter. He associates his grandmother's wishes for him with his Welsh, working-class, Nonconformist background, feeling unable to explain the pressure to conform to his English, middle-class, Anglican headmaster:

> How could I tell him, an Englishman with a class accent, a foreigner, and a member of an alien Church. But somehow I tried to explain that my grandmother felt painting to be almost a frivolous occupation in a world where so much required urgently to be done. (93)

Mary Lydia's desire that Trystan subsume his own satisfaction for the good of others, as she has made sacrifices for her family all her life, can therefore be read to reflect collectivist values which were traditional in close-knit working-class, chapel-going communities.[13] Thus, Trystan's aspirations are complicated by the increasing class mobility of the early decades of the twentieth century and he feels ambivalent about the working-class Welsh identity which he is expected to inherit.

However, the text does not present the opposition between the protagonist and his grandmother as clear-cut. Despite not possessing a vocation to become a minister, Trystan has inherited faith and compassion from his grandmother and associates his artistic impulse with a related empathy for those who are most vulnerable:

> […] I recall merely to myself the faith and judgment of my grandmother; the poverty and communal disasters I experienced in childhood; […]. And the dedication of my paintings in my heart is always to the prisoner with whom I

[12] Tony Brown, 'The Ex-centric Voice: The English-Language Short Story in Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 1.1 (2001), 25-41 (p. 37).
[13] Gwyn A. Williams describes nineteenth-century Welsh Nonconformist chapels as 'full of workers who formed friendly societies and clubbed together to build their own houses'. The historian continues: '[…] they were also highly democratic in their inner life – they grew mainly through terrible doctrinal and semi-political splits – and they were strongly working-class from the start.' Further, Williams notes that the working class of Caernarfonshire – 'the site of the most grotesque concentration of landlordism in Britain' – 'built villages, after often bitter resistance to enclosure, around chapels – Carmel, Cesarea, Bethesda itself.' Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 189 and 199.

> am captured, to the exile with whom I am banished, to the fugitive with whom I flee; to the women who have sacrificed their lives for others; to the incurable, to cripples […]; to the lonely; to the unfulfilled, to suicides, to the repressed, to the unregarded, to the cheaply held. (335-36)

Similarly, Trystan's grandmother is not immune to levity, despite the strength of her faith and her high standards. Her serious attitude slips momentarily when she is listening to her son Uncle Hughie telling irreverent jokes; 'the first reluctant layer of a succumbing smile' appears on her face before she stifles it and exclaims: 'Did you ever hear such rubbish?' (52) Furthermore, given that Mary Lydia taught herself to read and write, one can surmise that it is from her that Trystan and his father inherited the academic gifts that enable them to win scholarships to grammar school and, consequently, to aspire to skilled occupations beyond the reach of many of their working-class background. In addition, 'with the brooding divination of motherhood' Mary Lydia 'sensed' 'an unusual acuity and promises of intellectual pre-eminence in her younger son, [Trystan's] father, and […] determined that under God's will nothing in the mastery of her endurance should be left undone on his behalf' (10). There is an irony, then, in the fact that his grandmother's own intellectual abilities, her determination and sacrifice helped to create the difference in their viewpoints and priorities.

The narrator is troubled by feelings of guilt about the sacrifices which Mary Lydia made. In particular, the sight of her work-worn hands alongside his 'painter's hand, culpable, indulged, and epicene […] in the perfect glove of its skin' excites 'shame and pity' within him. (9) These concerns appear again in relation to other younger characters. The closing pages of the text include an account of Trystan's dream of The Great Judgment, during which the 'voice' – a 'honey-haired kherub' – and his grandmother take turns to pass judgment on various friends and relations (339). In their assessment of the narrator's university friend Nico Mathias, the young

man's roots in rural Llanddafydd are emphasised and another process of social mobility across several generations is in evidence. His grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather all worked on the land there, eventually swapping the role of 'farm labourer' for that of 'farmer' and land-owner, while his father was the schoolmaster of Llanddafydd (346). Trystan's grandmother condemns Nico for 'indulgence', 'forgetfulness', 'neglect', and the lack of 'devotion to a cause', echoing her desire for Trystan to spend his life in religious service. By way of atonement, she tells Nico he must 'know the history of [his] race' and 'learn concerning [his] ancestors', whom she identifies as 'the taeogion of the princely cywyddau' (the serfs or unfree peasants described in medieval Welsh poetry, 348). The events with which Nico must become familiar are historical injustices committed against his forebears in the form of thefts of money or land and attacks on their physical freedom, their capacity to earn a living, or their ability to speak Welsh. Through these recollections, Mary Lydia champions the value of understanding one's family and national past, and the qualities of the Welsh history that she promotes are, again, consciously working-class and Welsh-speaking. Her final words to Nico suggest that he will have an easier life than his ancestors and that he has a responsibility to acknowledge his privileged position and the suffering which he has been spared:

> You are the third generation of your race to read books. You are the second to live without the fear of poverty and old age. You are the first to choose the work you wish to do. In the carouse, in the debauch, in the love-grip, in the sweat of lechery, you shall remember. (348)

Thus, in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, the friction between Trystan and his grandmother over Trystan's vocation, and between the old and the young more generally, is symptomatic of societal changes related to the modern era: namely, a concern with individual identities and fulfilment, and a rise in living standards and change in the opportunities available to working-class people thanks to a succession

of social reforms from the 1906 Liberal Party victory onwards and the growth of a consumer society.

The tensions between members of different generations in *Border Country* (1960) by Raymond Williams bear similarities to Trystan's disagreements with his grandmother in *The Valley, the City, the Village*. This semi-autobiographical novel centres on Matthew's return from London to the fictional Black Mountains village of Glynmawr – based upon Pandy, Williams's own birthplace – to visit his dying father Harry, a railway signalman. Matthew left Wales two decades earlier to attend university and now lectures in history at a London college. The text takes a dual-narrative structure, whereby the account of the protagonist's time in Glynmawr, of Harry's illness and eventual death is interspersed with flashbacks to the arrival of Harry and his wife Ellen in the village before Matthew was born, to the General Strike, and to Matthew's schooldays up until he leaves for university. The central character is a product of the social mobility of the mid twentieth century. Thanks to a scholarship, he received a grammar school education and, as is the case for Jones's Trystan, this education has been the beginning of a move away from the expectations and experiences of his elders and the working-class community from which he hails. As well as becoming physically distanced from his parents, Matthew has entered the territory of the middle classes by gaining a university education and a skilled profession. However, Williams's protagonist still possesses some Welsh and working-class sensibilities. In the opening pages of the novel he appears deracinated in London, despite having lived there for a number of years. In marked contrast to the tight-knit community of Glynmawr, Matthew has to remind himself that 'you don't

speak to people anywhere in England' as he catches the bus home from work.[14] However, he is caught off-guard by the bus conductress's smile, breaks with convention by telling her 'Good evening', and is answered 'with an easiness that had almost been lost' (3). The information that the bus conductress is West Indian suggests that this exchange, apparently so unusual for London, comes out of their shared unfamiliarity with the culture of the city. Similarly, Matthew feels uncomfortable participating in the system of etiquette and exclusivity attached to English academia:

> For years now he had watched his friends getting past closed doors and attendants. It was a way of speaking, easy enough to learn, but he had never tried it. It was easier to reduce himself than to assume a right of entry and a special welcome. […] Everyone, it seemed, put himself behind this kind of screen. England seemed a great house with every room partitioned by lath and plaster. Behind every screen, in every cupboard, sat all the great men, everybody. If you wanted to see them, you could see them; that was what they were there for. But you must cool your heels first; a necessary part of decorum. (331)

This description suggests a system of professional advancement based upon contacts and nepotism and characterised by a cold, formal way of dealing with fellow academics – the traditional British reserve, perhaps. The 'way of speaking' that is the key to success is about both having the right class accent and exhibiting self-assuredness based on the sense of entitlement of a privileged background. That Matthew prefers not to learn the required behaviours suggests his unwillingness to abandon his working-class sensibilities completely and assimilate. Despite this ongoing awareness of his roots, however, the protagonist's relationship with his parents is often distant and strained. For example, when preparing to go shopping for his parents during his stay in Glynmawr, Matthew is confused by his mother's

[14] Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (1960), (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006), p. 3. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

instruction to tell the shopkeeper that his purchases are for Harry because that is the custom of the area. Ellen seems ‘suddenly nervous of him’ and, seeing this, her son feels ‘disconcerted and helpless’ (88).

As is the case for Trystan in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, there is a sense in *Border Country* that the struggles of the older generation helped Matthew to get where he is. The narrative incorporates detailed exploration of the General Strike of 1926, rendering the effects of this crisis both on the community of Glynmawr and on Harry as an individual who, having grown up in poverty, is motivated by an impulse to be endlessly working to survive. The collaborative efforts of Harry and his fellow railway workers during the industrial action can be interpreted as part of the wider socialist struggle for a more equal society which, by the next generation, sees Harry’s son admitted to university and able to enter a profession which would once have been barred to those from a working-class background. The symbolism of the protagonist’s two names is also of significance here. Ellen is set on naming her son Will, after her father. However, Harry is determined that the baby will be Matthew, despite the fact that this is ‘not a name that meant anything in either family’ and, as Ellen puts it, ‘[t]here hasn’t been a Matthew’ (64-65). Harry eventually goes against his wife. However, in keeping with Ellen’s wishes, the boy is known as Will throughout his childhood and in Glynmawr as an adult, but is called Matthew in his life in England. As well as symbolising the conflicting aspects of the protagonist’s identity as he negotiates the metaphorical border country between the working-class and middle-class worlds which he inhabits, between Wales and England, these two names also help the reader to understand Harry’s hopes for his son. The text does not explain Harry’s favouring of the name Matthew, revealing that ‘only he knew why’ (64). However, one might suggest that his desire for his child to have a first name that is

not borrowed from an ancestor or relative is symptomatic of a determination that the boy will have a life which is not predetermined by the circumstances of previous generations. As a child of five or six, Will/ Matthew explains to his older friend and protector Elwyn that his ‘Dada’ taught him to read before he started school, showed him his ‘real’ name on his birth certificate, and reads a book called *English Authors* with him (126-27). This episode suggests that Harry views both learning to read and understanding the name which he has given him as priorities for the boy, and also prefigures the conflicts of identity which Matthew will experience as a Welshman living in England in later life:

> Will smiled, showing his missing front teeth. ‘And we’ve got a book,’ he said, ‘called *English Authors*. We read each other out of it.’
> ‘Aye, English,’ Elwyn said. ‘Only here we’re Welsh.’
> ‘We talk English, Elwyn.’
> ‘That’s different.’
> ‘How’s it different?’ (126-27)

Through Elwyn’s expression of the situation of many Welsh people whose first language is English, Williams alludes to the country’s history as a former principality of England and to both the discomfort which Matthew later feels about his class and national identity and the problems he has in measuring the movements of populations between the two countries in his academic research. Further, when Harry and Matthew discuss the latter’s distance from Glynmawr once he has grown, Harry acknowledges that Matthew has his work and his young family to attend to and states: ‘But it’s what I wanted for you.’ (348) Later, he goes further, saying that he ‘needed it’ (388). There is a sad irony, then, in the fact that it is by achieving the academic and social success which his father desired for him that Matthew has become distanced from his parents.

As discussed above, a similar irony appears in Trystan and Mary Lydia’s relationship in *The Valley, the City, the Village*. However, Jones and Williams’s

renderings of the tensions between generations feel very different due to the formal and stylistic contrasts between the two novels. In Jones's bildungsroman, the first-person narrative is related solely from Trystan's viewpoint and is very much concerned with representing his consciousness, including, as it does, detailed descriptions of his dreams. Despite the narrator's various inner conflicts, his clashes with his grandmother, and the poverty that he witnesses during childhood, the text is often playful in tone. This mood is created by humorous moments such as Uncle Hughie's jokes and Uncle Gomer's stories, colourful descriptions which reflect the narrator's artistic talent, and surreal episodes. *Border Country* is more wide-ranging and earnest in comparison. Williams drafted and redrafted the text several times as he negotiated the difficulties of presenting working-class experience through the bourgeois form of the realist novel. He explained:

> […] I gradually realized that with the degree of change after 1945 the problem was to find a fictional form that would allow the description both of the internally seen working-class community and of a movement of people, still feeling their family and political connections, out of it. That change of experience was exemplified in so many individual lives that it seemed to have a certain social importance. But the forms for it weren't easily accessible. […] So I learnt the hard way the theoretical lesson that if a writer in a certain mode does not have social forms available to him [sic] for development, then his writing experience is likely to be prolonged and difficult, and the work very much more problematic.[15]

As part of the writer's attempts to represent the experiences of individuals and an entire section of society, the narrative point of view switches between different characters and the socioeconomic circumstances of their lives are apparent. For example, when Matthew returns from London to the Black Mountains landscape of

[15] Raymond Williams, 'The Welsh Trilogy and *The Volunteers*: Interview with *New Left Review*' (1979), in *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, ed. by Daniel G. Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 112-42 (p. 113). See also Dai Smith's exhaustive account of the redrafting of *Border Country* in Dai Smith, 'From "Black Water" to *Border Country*: Sourcing the Textual Odyssey of Raymond Williams', *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 12 (2008), 169-91.

his memory, he sees in it the individual lives, activity of work, and infrastructure which he had forgotten:

> He had felt empty and tired, but the familiar shape of the valley and the mountains held and replaced him. It was one thing to carry its image in his mind, as he did, everywhere […]. But it was different to stand and look at the reality. It was not less beautiful; every detail of the land came up with its old excitement. But it was not still, as the image had been. It was no longer a landscape or a view, but a valley that people were using. […]
>
> […] Lorries were moving along the narrow road to the north. A goods train was stopped at a signal on the down line, just beyond the Tump […]. The line-gang were working about a hundred yards from the train, and there was grey smoke from their hut. (89-90)

As Daniel G. Williams puts it, the novel's structure allows 'an emphasis on personal perception but always within a deep social contextualisation that foregrounds social and historical change'.[16]

Border Country also gestures towards colonial influences on the events it describes and to postcolonial readings. For instance, the fleeting affinity between Matthew and the West-Indian bus-conductress emphasises the fact that both have migrated to England from what can be termed former colonies, and, as discussed above, Will's conversation with Elwyn about *English Authors* reflects the situation of the many Welsh people who do not speak Welsh as part of the legacy of English colonisation. This conspicuous presence of the historical circumstances which have played a role in Matthew's movement away from his roots makes the clashes with his parents feel more difficult to resolve than those between Trystan and Mary Lydia. In several episodes which reveal the self-consciousness of Williams's writing, the protagonist appears aware of his role as a representative of an entire subsection of society. For example, when he talks with his father's friend and former colleague

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[16] Daniel G. Williams, '"Writing Against the Grain": Raymond Williams's *Border Country* (1960) and the Defence of Realism', in *Mapping the Territory: Critical Approaches to Welsh Fiction in English*, ed. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2010), pp. 217-43 (p. 236).

Morgan Rosser about his relationship with Harry, Matthew does not speak of 'I', but 'we', meaning men and women of his class and generation who have 'been moved and grown into a different society' following grammar school and university educations (351). Such moments create a sense that Matthew is distanced from Harry and Ellen not just by the personal characteristics and decisions of three individuals, but by the population-level trends which preoccupy the character in his work. Indeed, Matthew observes that his education has left him linguistically and conceptually distanced from his parents:

> Matthew drew in his breath. As he looked away he heard the separate language in his mind, the words of his ordinary thinking. He was trained to detachment: the language itself, consistently abstracting and generalizing, supported him in this. And the detachment was real in another way. He felt, in this house, both a child and a stranger. He could not speak as either; could not speak really as himself at all, but only in the terms that this pattern offered. (98-99)

The difficulties of the educated child growing away from his or her family appear in other texts. In *Feet in Chains* (1936) by Kate Roberts, protagonist Jane Gruffydd's fourth child Owen resembles Williams's Matthew. Set in a small slate-quarrying community in Snowdonia, the novel spans the years 1880 to 1917 and relates the trials and tribulations experienced by Jane, her husband Ifan, and their children in a world that is changing rapidly. As in the texts discussed above, the novel's characters, their actions, and relationships are used by the writer to render the social, economic, and political circumstances of their particular era. Indeed, Gramich describes the Gruffydds as 'a microcosm of Wales, revealing its increasing Anglicization, secularization and migration through different members of the […] family'.[17] Like Matthew (and Glyn Jones's Trystan), Owen wins a scholarship to the 'county' (grammar) school and begins to negotiate the implications for his identity as

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[17] Katie Gramich, *Kate Roberts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 51.

the son of a poor quarryman and a proud, hardworking woman from rural Llŷn. A sensitive child, the boy is soon conscious that his education brings with it a different set of encounters and expectations from those experienced by Jane and Ifan. So that he is close to school, Owen lives in town during the winter. Observing the novelty that tea at his lodging house and a trip to a school awards ceremony represent for his mother and her friend, he feels uncomfortable that what is usual to him is special to the older generation: 'He was in a period of his life when everything hurt him. Seeing his mother and Ann Ifans take such pleasure in something as simple as a lodging house tea and attending a prize-giving ceremony made him feel rather sad.'[18] As in *Border Country*, there is a sense that the privileges to which Owen has won access are carrying him into a different class from Jane and Ifan, and the boy feels guilt and discomfort when he realises this. However, these class dynamics are complicated in *Feet in Chains* by the novel's reflection of the fact that the Gruffydds live in the largely monoglot Welsh-speaking environment that was north west Wales at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the linguistic character of this area and its people, however, government business and education at grammar schools were conducted in English, Wales's only official language at the time.

In his theorisation of the operation of nationalisms, Benedict Anderson discusses the role of language in the development of national communities. The historian defines the nation as 'an imagined political community' and explains that '[i]t is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.'[19] Anderson argues that the 'cultural

[18] Kate Roberts, *Feet in Chains* (1936), trans. by Katie Gramich (Cardigan: Parthian, 2012), pp. 81-82. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 6, emphasis in original.

artefacts' that are nationality and nationalism came into being in the late eighteenth century due to a 'complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces'.[20] Among these influencing factors was the evolution of shared written vernacular languages, in particular the standardised 'print-languages' which were developed as a consequence of the advent of printing. Anderson argues that these print-languages nurtured feelings of national affinity in speakers of different dialects, but also created 'languages-of-power' by privileging particular versions of a language:

> Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers […] formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community. […]
>
> […] Certain dialects inevitably were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms. Their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print-language, lost caste, above all because they were unsuccessful […] in insisting on their own print-form.[21]

The historian extends this examination of linguistic hierarchies to encompass not just dialects, but separate languages spoken by members of national populations (particularly linguistic minorities), but not used or recognised by the state.[22]

Thus, the requirement that Owen become fluent in English as part of his assimilation into the community of the county school doubles the class barrier and gap in experiences between himself and his parents. Neither Jane nor Ifan attend his first prize-giving day because they cannot read the English invitation and so do not realise the significance of the event. Furthermore, when her son asks her to come,

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[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 4.
[21] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 44-45, emphasis in original.
[22] Anderson notes that, while the selection of such print-languages and languages-of-state, and the subsequent ranking of dialects and languages 'were largely unselfconscious processes' at the outset, once 'there' they could be 'consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit'. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 45.

Jane refuses due to both her belief that she would feel out of place at the school and her lack of English: 'Me? […] what would I do in such a place, and me not understanding a word of English?' (72) This episode is one of several instances in *Feet in Chains* where Roberts reveals the extent to which Jane and working-class people like her are disempowered by and cut off from powerful institutions because the official, colonial language – the 'language-of-power', to use Anderson's term – is not her language. The most affecting of these incidents is the moment when the protagonist has the news of her youngest son's death in the First World War read to her by the local shopkeeper because the letter she has received from the government is written in English. The expensive paper upon which the missive is printed suggests a superficial attempt by the state to treat Jane's loss with the gravity and respect it deserves. However, the ill-informed choice of language reveals that Jane and mothers like her, and perhaps also their dead sons, have no individual status or needs in the eyes of the British government. Here and elsewhere in the text, the protagonist and her family are shown to be struggling to survive in a society which has not been designed with them in mind. Their poverty, language, and class condemn them to pain and exclusion.[23] Further, for Jane and Ifan's generation, political, economic, and social changes related to the coming of the modern era carry their children away from them.

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[23] The class-values attached to English are also apparent in the behaviour of Jane and Ifan's superficial second daughter. When Sioned sets up home in Caernarfon with her equally shallow husband, as well as buying fashionable clothes and furniture, she Anglicises her name, calling herself 'Janet' and uses pretentious English terms for everyday items, saying 'cake' instead of bara brith, for example.

The End of the Line: Dynasties in Decline

Welsh writers also examine relationships between generations in families from social strata other than the working class. Published the year after *Feet in Chains*, Eiluned Lewis's short story 'The Poacher' (1937) describes the fate of a minor upper class family and hinges on its sensitive presentation of class prejudices. The text is one of a number of novels and short fictions that use older characters and the ageing process to symbolise the decline of family lines, particularly aristocratic dynasties. Its plot is concerned with the mysterious parentage of an unsettlingly beautiful ten-year-old orphan who was adopted in Canada by a wealthy American couple after her British mother died in childbirth. Ernest P. Wilbur and his wife have journeyed to Gloucestershire in the hope of discovering more about their adoptive daughter's origins. All they know is that her father was called Lovell, a name which Wilbur thinks is 'kind of aristocratic'.[24] It is later revealed that the girl's birth mother Frances Lloyd was a member of an aristocratic family from the Welsh border country. However, her biological father Ned Lovell is 'half gypsy' and the poacher of the story's title (180). By presenting the narrative from the point of view of independently-wealthy bachelor Richard Woodly, Lewis is able to capture both the romantic and class-inflected expectations of the child's adoptive parents and, ironically, Woodly's own snobbish response to the couple: we learn that he 'didn't care for Americans' (173).

The writer creates two contrasting settings on either side of the English/ Welsh border for the establishment and solving of the text's central mystery. Woodly first meets the Wilburs in a village church on 'a certain fine, sunny [spring] morning' as he

[24] Eiluned Lewis, 'The Poacher' (1937), in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 172-84 (p. 175). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

holidays in Gloucestershire (172). In contrast, he encounters Ned Lovell and learns of his identity and back-story at an inn on the Welsh side of the border one wet and windy afternoon the following October. Woodly hears the strange tale of the Lloyds of Pencader and of Miss Frances Lloyd's involvement with Lovell from the landlady of the inn, who was once the family's housekeeper. Mrs Evans describes a dynasty in decline, with only four members left at Pencader during her time in service there: Miss Frances, who would later die in Canada; Frances' mean and miserly father Jasper; Hetty, who was Frances' aunt and Jasper's sister; and Frances' aged grandmother, who had deteriorated both physically and mentally:

> Old Mrs Lloyd, Jasper's mother, was still living there. She'd been a beauty in her time, but her poor old brain had run all to seed till she forgot the faces of her own family. She'd a liking for raw eggs – 'to clear her throat,' she used to say. She would steal about the outhouses looking for them and hoard them all about the place in chests and old cupboards. (181)

This description of Mrs Lloyd's faded good looks and muddled behaviour echoes the state of the family home – a symbol of the clan's wealth and continuity if ever there was one. During Mrs Evans's time, the once-grand estate was overgrown, dilapidated, and disordered. She tells Woodly: 'I could never abide the place, with the trees crowding close all round and the plaster peeling off the walls.' (181) In addition, the fact that Mrs Lloyd's dementia causes her to forget her own relatives strengthens the symbolic link between her deterioration and the family's decline. Indeed, when the ageing woman finds herself unable to place her son, she asks politely who his father was. Jasper's nasty retort is deeply ironic given that the family is teetering on the brink of extinction: 'Well mother, […] if you can't tell me, I don't know who can!' (183) Furthermore, Hetty's single and childless status, which is a contributing factor in the dwindling of the family line, is emphasised by the fact that her mental

instability has left her stuck in her teenage years, playing fantasy games which evoke the Lloyds' former glory and being scolded by her niece for it:

> She's never been right in the head, poor thing, thinking she was still seventeen and always talking of going to her first ball. She'd spend hours of the day at a big old chest up in the attic trying on her grandmother's frocks.
>
> The Lloyds had been big people in the old days, and there'd been fine goings-on. […]
>
> Poor creature, it did her no harm! But Miss Frances, she couldn't abide to see her aunt bedizened in that way. She'd lock the cupboard and hide the key till Miss Hetty would come whimpering to her for it. (181-82)

Thus, the ageing process and hierarchy of generations in the family are upset, reflecting the fact that the dynasty is breaking down and no longer able to sustain itself. There is also a sense that the family's decline is linked to a wider reordering of society which saw the landed gentry lose wealth and influence throughout the twentieth century.[25] It is interesting that the illegitimate heir to Pencader was fathered by a man who, as a traveller and a poacher, lives outside both mainstream social structures and the law. Further, the child has disappeared to the United States, perhaps symbolising the decline of old world powers and the rise of the new. Indeed, the cutting-short of the aristocracy's influence is also reflected in the situation of Woodly himself. A middle-aged bachelor living on inherited money at 'a pleasant estate in Wiltshire', he keeps himself to himself, 'never interfering in other people's affairs', and is unlikely to produce an heir (172).

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[25] Tax rises in the early decades of the twentieth century, prompted in part by a change in the political landscape following increased enfranchisement, hit landowners hard. Peter Clarke explains that the 1909 'People's Budget' was necessitated by the Liberal government becoming 'committed to financing a naval race with Germany at the same moment as the bills were coming in for its new programme of social reform.' Clarke continues: 'The People's Budget […] found the bulk of the new revenue it needed by a sharp rise in direct taxation, especially by increasing the progressive impact of income tax on higher incomes, notably through a supplementary "supertax" on the very rich.' The financial cost of the First World War resulted in further tax rises in the interwar period, with unearned income charged at the highest rate: 'The standard rate of income tax, which the People's Budget had so daringly raised from 1s (5 per cent) to 1s 2d (6 per cent), reached 6s (30 per cent) in 1919-22 and stood at 5s (25 per cent) at the beginning of 1924. On each £100 of unearned income or investment income, £25 went in tax, of which £10 simply serviced the national debt.' Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 57 and 128.

Although a period of more than seventy years separates the publication of 'The Garden Cottage' (2009) by Emyr Humphreys from that of 'The Poacher', Humphreys's short story makes similar symbolic use of an aged aristocrat. The character of Sir Robin Williams Price – 'the last of the Williams Prices of Plas Gilwern' – serves to represent both the dying-out of his family line and the wider decline of the land-owning gentry of which he was once a part.[26] His recollections read like a study of the British upper-classes during the twentieth century or a catalogue of financial disasters since the First World War. From the Depression and foot and mouth disease to the destruction of country houses and the class mobility of the 1960s, Sir Robin has been touched by it all.[27] It is revealed that the elderly gentleman lost his inherited assets as he tried to preserve a way of life that no longer existed. The farmland and houses have all been sold, with the exception of what was once the gardener's cottage, where Sir Robin now resides. Ironically, the family seat has been converted into an 'upmarket old people's home', reflecting Wales' ageing population (188). Although Sir Robin blames himself repeatedly for his losses, there is a sense that he is not only the last of the Williams Prices of Plas Gilwern, but also one of only a few surviving examples of an aristocratic breed which is unsuited to life in the modern era. One of his visitors tells him that he has been 'the victim of social and economic forces' (197), while Sir Robin gives his own self-deprecating analysis of the wider context of his financial decline:

> In those days back in the fifties, there was still a network of country houses around. Even butlers. We still had a butler. […] Strange isn't it? People still thought of themselves as 'well born' in those days. […] The sixties blew all that sort of thing away, just after we were married. We weren't really equipped to deal with all the equalitarian pressure around. No education. We'd been

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[26] Emyr Humphreys, 'The Garden Cottage', in *The Woman at the Window* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 185-99 (p. 191). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.
[27] For a discussion of 'the Establishment debate of the late fifties and early sixties' see Chapter 15, 'A Gang of Low Schoolboys', in Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had it So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), pp. 547-93. See also Footnote 25, above.

> brought up to believe we were the best by right of birth, which was rubbish of course. Nothing worse than impoverished country squires. Dabbling in this and that and succeeding in nothing. (195)

On the surface, Humphreys's text is more lighthearted in tone than Lewis's mystery story. However, as the extent of his financial decline is revealed, Sir Robin's vulnerability becomes apparent. The ageing character's assessment of his physical state contradicts his visitors' impression of a cheerful figure brandishing a teapot, instead connoting the lonely, stripped-down life he now leads, his frailty and isolation echoing the precarious position of his class:

> Much too conscious of my skeleton these days, […] I suppose it comes of being so thin. It's all I've got left. The connection between my spine and my cortex. It's not the time of year, of course, but even on a fine day like this, I see it like a solitary cabbage stalk with a mangy green head standing all alone in a bare windswept field. (194)

Further, the complete destruction of the dynastic fortune is mirrored by Sir Robin's lack of any remaining family. His daughters, once 'two delightful little girls', spent a fortune on horses before turning on their parents, while his wife has recently died, leaving him alone and broken in every sense (195). Whatever Sir Robin's mistakes, Humphreys's presentation of the character's physical decline and lonely old age elicit sympathy from the reader and encourage one to view him as a victim of circumstance, collateral damage in the social and economic changes of the twentieth century.[28]

Glenda Beagan's 1988 short story 'Scream, Scream' does not deal with the end of an aristocratic line, but rather a farming family which has worked the same land for generations. Set on a women's psychiatric hospital ward, the text features a range of female characters – both patients and carers, all of whom have losses and

[28] For analysis of a trope similar to that found in 'The Poacher' and 'The Garden Cottage' in an Irish fictional genre, see Maria O'Neill, 'The Ageing of the Anglo-Irish Gentry as Portrayed in the "Big House" Novel', in *The Aesthetics of Ageing: Critical Approaches to Literary Representations of the Ageing Process*, ed. by Maria O'Neill and Carmen Zamorano-Llena (Lleida, Catalunya: University of Lleida, 2002), pp. 97-110.

sadnesses with which to come to terms. For example, there is 'the wife of the managing director who is childless and bereft', Nurse Sandra who has 'been walking on the edge for weeks now', and Linda, the hell's angel and former heroin addict, whose twenty-three-year-old body is about to give up.[29] Into this grim setting comes Mrs Jenkins, an older woman from an ancient farm 'in the middle of nowhere' (32) who has let out a scream which lasts for hours '[e]very three years since 1953' (33). The farm of Sgubor Fawr and the Jenkins family are firmly embedded in both the Welsh landscape and the country's history:

> A farm so old it's like a great fungus, an excrescence of the land, breeding barns and byres full of rusting threshing machines and ancient harrows and flails. Enough to fill a museum with fascinating glimpses of our agricultural past. But this isn't the past. It's the present. Little has changed at Sgubor Fawr since Owain Glyndwr rode by, swelling his army with the sons of the farm, only one of whom returned, an ancestor of Mrs Jenkins' lawful wedded spouse. (32)

The likening of the farm to a fungus implies that it has been there so long that it has lost its man-made qualities and become an organic feature of the land, while the reference to Owain Glyndwr suggests that the Jenkinses have inherited a particular type of Welsh national identity grounded in the territorial struggles and heroism of legendary figures from the past. Even the 'threshing machines and ancient harrows and flails' can be read as alluding to a Welsh cultural icon in their similarity to the miserable barns and haylofts of Caradoc Evans's Manteg. Thus, the revelation that Mrs Jenkins's sustained cry is 'the scream of the last of the Jenkinses of Sgubor Fawr' indicates that it is not just the Jenkins lineage that is dying out, but a way of life related to Wales itself, and that this loss is expressed in the scream (32). Indeed, Mrs Jenkins has led a spatially narrow, old-fashioned life, never leaving her rural existence

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[29] Glenda Beagan, 'Scream, Scream' (1988), in *The Medlar Tree* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 26-33, p. 31. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

in Sgubor Fawr except to be taken to the psychiatric ward and for a rumoured trip over the border to Shrewsbury in 1953, after which she had her first episode of screaming.

Furthermore, Beagan's description suggests that the scream is collective. Mrs Jenkins's 'wizened face' is hidden as her open mouth 'take[s] over, engulfing all' (31). The scream gathers up and releases the fear and pain of the other women on the hospital ward, staff and patients alike:

> It's as if the scream slowly inhabits them all, slowly expresses them all. It's as if the terror slowly seeps out of it, while another nameless quality enters. […] It is a medley of voices, the cry of aftermath, of battle and birth, of sap and sinew. Mrs Jenkins cannot know that her scream is a beneficence, that she takes from all of them their fears, relaying them back, transformed, intensified and finally transcended […]. It takes courage, this truth, this scream. (31)

The references to 'birth', 'sap', and 'sinew' imply that Mrs Jenkins's scream expresses particularly female experiences. In addition, the concept of birth links back to the tragedies of several of the women on the ward, who have experienced childlessness or an upset in their transition into adulthood. So, Linda is wracked with guilt because her addiction killed her baby, 'no amount of jewels and furs and foreign holidays can compensate' for Mrs Jessop's infertility, four stone and anorexic Sioned 'won't grow up', and Dr Patel has 'torn up her roots and crossed the world to do just that' (31). In this context, Mrs Jenkins's mysterious and apparently traumatic trip to Shrewsbury can be interpreted as involving a miscarriage or the loss of a child. As in 'The Poacher' and 'The Garden Cottage', then, the termination of a family line is linked to the ending of a way of life. If one also views Mrs Jenkins's trip to Shrewsbury as her first brush with modernity, the symbolism of her trauma deepens. The voice echoing around the corridors of the modern, urban setting of the hospital with its references to late-twentieth-century culture – the hell's angel, the anorexic,

and the wife of the managing director – expresses its distance from the rural, legendary Welsh past that is dying at Sgubor Fawr.

Inheritance, Ancestry, and the Cycle of Generations

Welsh novels and short stories often reveal an awareness of or concern with the unstoppable progress of time as it is evidenced by the cycle from one generation to the next. On several occasions in *Feet in Chains*, for example, Jane Gruffydd glimpses the past, present, and future of her community in the Snowdonia landscape:

> She gazed at the distant village lying in the stillness of the afternoon. Up on the left was the quarry and its tip which thrust its snout down the mountainside like a snake. From afar, the stones in the rubble tip looked black, and they glittered in the sunshine. This was the quarry where Ifan's father had been killed. Who, she wondered, had emptied the first waggon of waste at the base of that tip? He was certainly in his grave by now. And who would be the last to throw his load of rubble from the top? (25)

In this passage, the repetitious nature of work at the quarry and of its appropriation of the time and energy of generations of local men are emphasised, suggesting the unchanging economic situation of the families in the village of Moel Arian. Such convergences of people from the past, present, and future in a particular place can be read as examples of the phenomenon of the literary chronotope identified by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin describes the chronotope as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.[30] He continues:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.[31]

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[30] M.M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (p. 84).

[31] Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 84.

Furthermore, Bakhtin argues that chronotopes have ‘intrinsic *generic* significance’ because ‘it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions’.[32] In addition, they are ‘the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel’:

> The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. […]
>
> […] All the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.[33]

A particular chronotope recurs in novels from across the field of Welsh fiction in English. The room in a family home decorated with portraits of deceased and often older ancestors is utilised by writers to present in a condensed form the principal concerns of their narratives in the manner which Bakhtin describes. Of particular significance for this discussion is the use of this chronotope to render the emotions prompted by characters’ awareness of the cycle of generations. In *Border Country*, Harry’s bedroom is lined with photographs of his parents and parents-in-law. The text’s first meeting between this ageing character and his son occurs in this setting. Harry is lying ill in bed, hardly able to speak due to ‘the pain and the danger’ (20). As the two men sit in silence, Matthew considers the photographs:

> On the walls hung pictures of his grandparents: placed, in each case, so that the eyes seemed to be watching the bed. […] The women he looked at quickly, in their high black dresses, with the brooches at their throats. Ellen’s mother, very like Ellen now, but easy and smiling, without strain. […]
>
> […] Will Lewis, Ellen’s father, whom Matthew had never known though for years he had carried his name. A sharp, dark, inquisitive face, this hill-farmer turned miller; intelligent or cunning from alternative sides of the bargain. […] Beside him, Jack Price, at sixty: the Jack Price his grandson remembered. Here again was complexity. The mediocre photograph had the life of a fine portrait. At first it was only his son’s head on the pillow, the strong, rough features partly hidden by the moustache and the line of beard

[32] Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, pp. 84-85 (emphasis in original).
[33] Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’, p. 250.

> fringing the jaw. […] Then the eyes, colourless in the hazy enlargement, but not his son's eyes, clouded, unfocused; eyes still with the devil in them, the spurt of feeling and gaiety. (20-21)

Even before the subject of the portraits is introduced, there is a preoccupation in this episode with the extent to which Harry and Matthew resemble and have inherited characteristics from previous generations. So, as Matthew watches his father struggling to manage his pain, observing 'the hurt strength of the face', he 'seem[s] to feel the pressure on his own face, as if a cast were being taken' (19). The reference to a cast connotes the production of a duplicate, while restriction and discomfort are also suggested – Matthew can 'hardly breathe', prefiguring his conflicting feelings and the friction between himself and his family regarding his movement away from his Welsh birthplace and working-class background. This concern with inheritance is also apparent in Williams's description of the portraits, dwelling as it does upon the similarities between the dead ancestors and their living children, but also on their differences. Interestingly, these distinctions take the form of variations in demeanour, perhaps grounded in different experiences, rather than actual genetic contrasts. Ellen looks 'very like' her mother, except that she is 'strain[ed]' where her mother appears relaxed and happy. Similarly, it is in the temperaments detectable in the eyes of Jack Price and of Harry that father and son contrast. Thus, Williams's portrayal of the family portraits reflects the fact that differences between older and younger generations and the combination of choice and circumstance which creates them are the main causes of tension in *Border Country*. There is also a level of ambiguity in this passage which is in keeping with the complexity with which issues of inheritance and change are treated throughout the text. The fact that the ancestors appear to be watching the bed can be interpreted as suggesting either a protective attitude towards Harry as he lies ill or judgment and disapproval. Furthermore, it is unclear whether

the photographs of Ellen and Harry's fathers depict inspiring, benevolent men or more threatening figures. Will Lewis is 'intelligent or cunning from alternative sides of the bargain', while Jack Price's eyes have both 'the devil in them' and, more encouragingly, 'the spurt of feeling and gaiety'.

Similarly, in Bruce Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* (1982), another novel set on the Welsh/ English border, family portraits also excite mixed emotions in the descendants of their subjects and are associated with anxieties regarding inheritance. The photographs which 'cover[…] every spare stretch of wall' in their ancient family farmhouse are, at times, a source of comfort for Chatwin's ageing twin protagonists,[34] as the process of 'finding likenesses between people born a hundred years apart' distracts them from the fear that they will die childless (5-6). However, on other occasions the faces of their dead antecedents foreground their own shortcomings:

> Each time they tore a page from the calendar, they had forebodings of a miserable old age. They would turn to the wall of family photos – row on row of smiling faces, all of them dead or gone. How was it possible, they wondered, that they had come to be alone? (213)

Like Sir Robin Williams Price in 'The Garden Cottage' and Beagan's Mrs Jenkins Sgubor Fawr, Lewis and Benjamin Jones are in danger of becoming the last members of their family line. There is a sense in the above description that the fecundity of previous generations – evidenced in the number of ancestral images on display – adds to their sense of failure and isolation. Indeed, it is only with the discovery of a long-lost nephew that the brothers are freed from 'the shame and the sterility' (6). Furthermore, Benjamin and Lewis's desire to have a descendent to bequeath their possessions in their old age is motivated by a need to give their lives meaning on an individual level, but also to meet a collective responsibility to those who have gone

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[34] Bruce Chatwin, *On the Black Hill* (1982), (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 4. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

before them. It is, therefore, the act of observing physical similarities between their parents and their nephew, of comparing their mother's 'sweet smile with Kevin's', that reassures them that 'their lives had not been wasted and that time, in its healing circle, had wiped away the pain and the anger, the shame and the sterility, and had broken into the future with the promise of new things' (6).

Kate Roberts also uses a wall of family photographs in her portrayal of the pressures which family history and expectations can exert on younger generations. Throughout *Feet in Chains*, Owen feels conflicted regarding the extent to which he should allow duty to his family to dictate his actions and decisions about his future. From his birth, Jane and Ifan look forward to the time when their second son and his older brother William can start work in the quarry and contribute financially. For this reason, when Owen becomes the first member of the family to win a scholarship to the county school, his mother is torn between feelings of pride and anxiety because taking up the bursary will prevent him starting work in the quarry. The boy is only too aware of her feelings:

> He was disappointed that no one seemed particularly glad that he seemed to have won the scholarship.
>
> Somehow or other, no one ever seemed to be glad at all in his home. […] Perhaps it would be best for him to go to the quarry like Will. It would be less painful in the long run. (45)

In addition, once he finishes school, Owen's choice of career is determined in part by the traditions of his family. The only vocations 'thought to be suitable for him' are teaching or the ministry. However, the latter option 'didn't run in the Ffridd Felen family, and Owen had never been drawn in that direction', so he trains to be a teacher (90). One miserable Christmas Day, he directs his frustrations with family duty and expectations towards the images of his forebears which hang on the walls of his parents' house:

> ‘Yes,’ said Owen, thinking and pondering what a strange thing family was. Portraits of some of the family were looking down on him now from the walls of the room. Sometimes he felt like smashing them up so that he could forget his family history. And yet, it was impossible to cut himself off from them, as impossible as it was to cut himself off from the pain caused him by some of them who were still alive. (146)

Significantly, the consequences which Owen fears if he neglects his duties include the judgment of himself and the Gruffydd family as a whole by other members of their tight-knit community. This concern with meeting prescribed moral standards has been passed on to him by his mother and is part of a wider association of older generations with propriety in Welsh fiction. Having been judged by her neighbours and in-laws since she arrived in Moel Arian as a young woman, in later life Jane has grown to fear her neighbours’ disapproval. Thus, when her errant, spendthrift daughter Sioned is abandoned by her equally shallow husband, Jane thinks of the disapproval which will be directed at the family as a whole before she considers how Sioned and her small child will survive. Owen has similar fears. He becomes uncomfortable to the extent that he can’t eat when Sioned and her husband come to visit, fearing that they will disgrace the family by attending chapel in their ostentatious wedding clothes.

Other examples of older characters who are associated with propriety include Mary Lydia in Glyn Jones’s *The Valley, the City, the Village*, whose anxiety over her grandson’s moral and spiritual condition is discussed above, and Flossie Jenkins, the mother of the young miner whose death forms the focus of the narrative in Menna Gallie’s *The Small Mine*. Flossie’s desire that her close relations appear respectable by following accepted behavioural conventions is evident in her concern that her son Joe is dressed properly for a choir rehearsal at their chapel: ‘Look here, Joe, I don’t think that black shirt and white tie is quite the thing for chapel, is it? And your Italian shoes as well! Better put on a white shirt, good boy, and a nice striped tie.’ (5) It is unsurprising that the older people who express such prescriptions for proper conduct

in Welsh fiction in English are usually women. As Mary Poovey has observed, propriety is often presented as a specifically female trait. The critic argues that the 'feminine' behaviours expected of British women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and figures such as the Angel of the House and what she terms the 'Proper Lady' evolved out of a need by patriarchal society to control, defer, and sublimate women's sexual desire.[35] Further, Poovey asserts that, although these proper behaviours were at first presented as ideals to which women should conform, they were eventually internalised and accepted as innate by women themselves:

> By the end of the eighteenth century, then, the qualities that a century earlier had been described as necessary defenses against women's appetites were increasingly considered to be 'natural' female traits, invaluable to society as a whole. […]
>
> Because their contributions to society were rewarded both by men's grateful approval and by a sense of their own worth, women had a clear investment in accepting the naturalization of the feminine ideal.[36]

Thus, Mary Lydia, Flossie, and Jane Gruffydd can be viewed as inheritors of the tradition of feminine propriety, although their attempts to transfer their concerns with appearing respectable on to their male children and grandchildren are suggestive of changes in gender roles and relations since the late eighteenth century. Moreover, in a Welsh context, this ingrained feminine propriety was reinforced by religious influences. Fears of judgment and demands for proper behaviour are linked to religious observance and the attendance of chapel services in *Feet in Chains*, *The*

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[35] Poovey explains that, in a period of 'gradual intensification of capitalism and the transformation of the basic middle-class economic unit from the co-operative household to the individual competitive man', uncontrolled female sexuality was equated with a fear of voracious consumption by women, who were 'consumers rather than contributors to the household economy' and might 'devour' a husband's property – the 'visible sign of [his] inner worth'. Further, it was imperative that transfers of wealth between families through marriage and the bequeathing of a man's estate on to his (male) descendants were not compromised by women acting upon inconvenient attachments or producing illegitimate offspring: 'Because of the complex economic and psychological roles of property, a woman could, by one act of infidelity, imperil both a man's present security and his dynastic ambitions.' Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 5.

[36] Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, pp. 14-15.

Valley, the City, the Village, and *The Small Mine*. In addition to the above examples, in the opening chapter of Roberts's novel, newly-wed Jane knows that she is being 'examined carefully' and judged by other women in the congregation at her first prayer meeting since her arrival in Moel Arian from Llŷn (6). Similarly, in Trystan's final dream in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, the 'Great Judgment' takes place in a chapel and is reminiscent of the Christian belief in a final judgment day, while Mary Lydia's rulings (outlined above) combine the twin concerns of projecting moral rectitude and emulating the characteristics of one's ancestors. This focusing of respectable behaviours on acts of religious worship and observance is in keeping with Poovey's analysis of the origins of 'feminine' behaviour. She identifies religion, particularly 'the ascendance of Puritan and then Evangelical principles', as a key factor in creating the values of propriety and the stereotype of the Proper Lady to which women of the eighteenth century aspired.[37]

I will return to the association of ageing characters with the chapel later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note that, like the ambivalence attached to the emulation or otherwise of one's ancestors in *Border Country* and Owen's conflicting feelings regarding family duty in *Feet in Chains*, the presentation of qualities of propriety which are performed and promoted by older people in Welsh fiction written in English is neither wholly positive nor completely negative. I have outlined the

[37] Poovey argues that Puritanism both reinforced the link between women's chastity and men's property and helped to establish the home, domestic duties, and the reputation of her family as the appropriate sphere of influence for a proper lady: 'One of their legacies, the elevated and spiritually significant position of the home, reinforced women's social importance when separation between the home and the workplace became the middle-class rule rather than the exception. So completely was their spiritual office fused with their superintendence of family integrity that, by the early decades of the eighteenth century, women could even take pride in sacrificing the sexual desires for this "higher" cause.' With the 'rapid spread of Evangelicalism after 1740', the critic explains that: 'Evangelicals not only generalized to society as a whole the virtues the Puritans had associated with the domestic sphere; they also provided women with practical opportunities for exercising their influence outside their own homes. The reforming zeal of the Evangelical sects focused on both spiritual reformation and social improvement.' Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, pp. 7-8.

complexity of Mary Lydia's relationship with her grandson in *The Valley, the City, the Village* above. Given the extent to which Trystan adores his grandmother, the sacrifices which she has made for him, and the fact that her concern that he remains sober and chaste comes from devout faith and love, it is impossible to view her wishes for him as motivated by a superficial desire for him to appear pious. However, the presentation of the narrative from Trystan's point of view encourages the reader to sympathise with the difficulties he has in reconciling his grandmother's aspirations for him with his own interests. His guilt and anguish are palpable throughout the text. For example, he describes Mary Lydia's request that he compare his possible entry into the ministry to the religious calling of the community's new preacher as being 'like a blow to [him]' and says he is 'tortured' by the choice he must make. (98) Further, the narrator does not emulate the insobriety, promiscuity, and religious doubt of some of his friends at university. Instead, his self-destructive act of failing to complete his final examinations is a consequence of his not being permitted to attend art school as he wishes. Thus, Mary Lydia's upright, inspiring propriety is problematised in *The Valley, the City, the Village* and both the reader and the protagonist are denied a clear solution to the conflicting values at play.

The benefits and constraints of inheritance and propriety also appear in Siân James's contemporary short story 'A House of One's Own' (1996). The text's anonymous Liverpudlian narrator has been left damaged by a childhood of loss, hardship, and abuse. To cope with her painful memories, she has 'always needed lots of company, lots of comfort […] lots of men and lots of booze' and has had her children removed by social services as a result.[38] However, circumstance has offered

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[38] Siân James, 'A House of One's Own', in *Not Singing Exactly: The Collected Stories of Siân James* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1996), pp. 61-70 (p. 63). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

this forty-something protagonist a fresh start in the form of a cottage in the fictional small town of Brynhir in Gwynedd, left to her by her recently deceased great uncle. In a similar vein to Raymond Williams's *Border Country*, Eiluned Lewis's 'The Poacher', and Glenda Beagan's 'Scream, Scream', the text makes a distinction between England and Wales, the urban metropolis and the semi-rural small town, with the Welsh setting bringing with it a sense of the country's history. Thoughts of Uncle Trefor preoccupy the narrator as she settles in his home of more than half a century. She interrogates his diaries, his neighbours, and her own memories of his one brief visit to Liverpool in an attempt to gain an impression of his character. The image passed on to the reader is that of an almost stereotypical figure who encapsulates various common characteristics of the north east Wales of an earlier era. Old age becomes a symbol for Uncle Trefor's links with this past; even in the narrator's memories of him as a middle-aged man in the 1960s 'he already seem[s] old', wearing 'the heavy black suit […] and the shiny black boots' of a quarryman dressed for chapel (62). His diaries – which are written in English, although he read and spoke Welsh – contain notes on his work in this most traditional of professions, alongside reviews of the sermons he attended at the local Methodist chapel. Thus, Uncle Trefor is a link back to the time when almost everyone in north east Wales spoke Welsh, slate quarrying was the area's main industry, and Nonconformist Christianity provided the guiding principles and social centre of many people's lives.

The information which James's narrator gleans about Uncle Trefor also creates an impression of his values, which are linked implicitly to his Christian faith. We learn that, when an inheritance legal loophole meant that he no longer had to pay rent on his home, he sent the surplus ten shillings to the narrator's widowed mother, every week without fail 'for years' (61). His home is frugal but 'scrubbed' and well-

maintained (62). He was teetotal and a good neighbour, although '[n]o one knew him well' (65). It seems, then, that Uncle Trefor was generous and empathetic, hardworking and respectable: a mixture of genuine kindness and reserved propriety. However, there are suggestions that his dealings with the world were bound by the rules of proper behaviour to such an extent that he missed out on the rewards of personal relationships and lived a life that was narrow in experience. For example, Netta Morris, the 'cross old woman' next door, reveals that, although he 'always carried [her] ash-can out the back' (63), Trefor never invited her in for a cup of tea 'in fifty years' (70).

This examination of the constraining effects of propriety continues through the narrator's response to living in Trefor's home. In keeping with the text's concern with financial inheritance and the lingering presence of her great uncle in the house, the protagonist begins to adopt some of his behaviours. Despite describing herself as an alcoholic and a 'big, bad sinner', she realises that she has 'hardly had a single drink' since moving to the house (64-65). Furthermore, she confides in the minister of Trefor's chapel and finds herself buying respectable clothing and developing a cleaning habit:

> Last week I bought a large, dark green waterproof coat which cost twenty-three pounds. I could hardly believe what I was doing. I've never before owned such a remarkably boring and hideous garment. Oh yes, I know it will be useful – it doesn't stop raining in this place – and practical too because it will hide all the tat underneath, but since when have I gone in for being dry and respectable? […] I also bought a window cleaner called Mr Brite and some new bags for Uncle Trefor's old Hoover. Am I becoming a fuckin' housewife? (63-64)

However, although her new sobriety means that she has a chance of getting her children back and being associated with Trefor's 'famed respectability' will help her to get a good job locally, the text's conclusion suggests that the central character will not emulate his proper behaviour entirely (70). She has found a new friend and

drinking partner in a local woman who shares some of her attitudes and experiences, and is concerned that a life too close to Trefor's will prove unfulfilling:

> Maybe I'll go to the Maesgwyn Arms and maybe they'll give me a job […] and maybe I'll contact the authorities and maybe I'll get my kids back and maybe we'll manage, as he did, keeping things in good order and repair. For years and years and years. Being bored and bored and bored. Is that all there is to life? I'll have to ask the Reverend. […] I don't want to be respectable, Reverend, just half-way decent. (70)

The story ends on a positive note, with the narrator inviting Netta Morris in for tea and, thus, crossing an interpersonal boundary that her uncle never could. The distinction which she makes between being 'respectable' and being 'decent' encapsulates the combination of rigid social rules and true human kindness which characterised Uncle Trefor. It suggests that the route to a life well lived involves accepting some parts of one's family inheritance and rejecting others. In addition, the fact that the character of Uncle Trefor is associated with Wales's past and aspects of traditional Welsh culture means that the act of choosing which of the values of previous generations to emulate can also be interpreted as a metaphor for negotiating the constraints and consolations of Welsh national identity itself. I will return to this concern in the final section of this chapter.

Storytellers and Custodians of the Past

As touched upon earlier in my discussion, the field of Welsh fiction in English includes a large number of ageing characters who act as links to the past and remembrancers of community or family histories. Examples already discussed include: Old Nanni in Caradoc Evans's 'Be This Her Memorial' (1915); Miss Eurgain in *The Black Venus* (1944) by Rhys Davies; and the protagonist's grandmother Mary Lydia in Glyn Jones's *The Valley, the City, the Village*. In addition, older people are

often storytellers, passing on their narratives and knowledge to younger generations. In some instances, these characters and the tales they tell are narrative devices above all else, enabling writers to reveal plot elements buried in the pasts of their texts in a realistic manner, for example, in the case of Mrs Evans the housekeeper's recollections of the aristocratic Lloyds of Pencader in Eiluned Lewis's 'The Poacher' (discussed above). However, other texts suggest that these chroniclers of the past and the act of sharing stories have an important role in Welsh families and communities.

The action of Kate Roberts's 'Death of a Story' (published in 1959, but set significantly earlier) involves the arrival of visitors at the home of Begw and her parents a few nights before Christmas. Related from the young girl's point of view, the evening's conversation centres on the stories told by neighbours from her village in north west Wales. Elderly Dafydd Siôn recounts the well-worn tale of an 'evening long ago' when he lost his way on the mountain that overlooks the village.[39] Following this contribution, Bilw, a much younger man, tells a humorous story about a pudding which was burnt the night before because he fell asleep instead of watching it on the stove. At bedtime, Begw questions her mother about their neighbours:

> 'Is Dafydd Siôn tired?'
> 'He isn't tired of telling that story, I should think.'
> 'He was tired of walking, for sure.'
> 'Yes, but he was young at that time.'
> 'Is Bilw young?'
> 'Yes, and Siani, and they'll forget the pudding before next Christmas.'
> 'Why doesn't Dafydd Siôn forget losing the way on the mountain?'
> 'Oh, Bilw will be retelling the story of the pudding here when he's eighty.' […]
> She kissed her mother and called 'Good night' to the others.
> 'Good night, Begw.' (188-89)

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[39] Kate Roberts, 'Death of a Story' (1959), in *The World of Kate Roberts: Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 183-89 (p. 185). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

Begw's mother's answers suggest that the repetition of old stories by ageing characters and the addition of new material into the local canon help to create a sense of continuity and cohesiveness in their small community. Furthermore, Dafydd Siôn and Bilw are reminiscent of the figure of the *cyfarwydd* or storyteller in medieval Welsh society, who entertained members of rich households with a repertoire of tales remembered from oral and written sources.[40] It is also significant that Begw's excitement about the evening at home with family and neighbours is contrasted with her anxiety about giving a recitation at a literary meeting on Christmas Eve. The disparity in tone and subject matter between the poem which Begw must deliver and the stories recounted by Dafydd Siôn and Bilw is particularly telling. Where Dafydd Siôn's anecdote is filled with local details such as place names, references to family members and to the familiar 'quarry supper' he ate before he ventured onto the mountain and Bilw's story deals with everyday domestic life, Begw objects to her rhyme's trite humour and distance from her own experience:

> *I am bigger than Dolly,*
> *And Daddy's bigger than me,*
> *But Daddy isn't growing*
> *And neither is Dolly, you see.*
>
> Everybody knew, surely, that she was bigger than any doll (she didn't have one of her own) and that her father was bigger than her. And she'd never called her father 'daddy'. (183)

Thus, in this short fiction, the stories that are worth sharing and remembering are those which are related to the local community's culture and experience, and the places where its people live out their lives.

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[40] 'The *Cyfarwydd* […] relied on material other than that of his own imagination, taken from the repertory of other story-tellers or from written sources. Qualities essential for his success were a formidable memory, great physical stamina and an unerring dramatic instinct.' Meic Stephens (ed.), *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 130.

The knowledge and memories of older storytellers are associated with place in works by other Welsh writers too. In Margiad Evans's 'The Sea' (1948), for example, the unnamed protagonist searches for the sea and a keepsake to take home to his nephew during a brief visit to a bleak, grubby port town on England's south coast.[41] There is a strong sense of place in this short story; water and fish seem to infiltrate everything in the town, but the sea itself remains elusive:

> With the small hyphenated steps of a nervous creature, he hurried through the streets asking the way to the sea.
>
> The people he asked looked at him as if they had forgotten something.
>
> 'Oh,' they said, 'you'd be meaning the harbour?'
>
> They always said 'harbour'. They seemed to avoid the other word.
>
> In the end he said, 'Yes'. They were quiet people with voices soft as rain water, shopping in hat shops and fish shops and chemists and grocery stores. The fish on the slabs had a raw, abysmal smell and on many blackboards were scrawled in chalk the words, 'Trawler Owner'.[42]

Having only managed to glimpse the sea 'a long way off' from the harbour 'by leaning forward and manoeuvring his nose' to catch sight of it 'between two stunted towers' (187), a chance conversation with a very old woman provides the central character with an insight into its history and people, as well as a suitable memento for his nephew in the form of '[a]n old story' (188). The ageing character tells of the drowning of her sea captain father and his crew when she was a child. Thanks to its links to the locale in which he finds himself, the protagonist finds her tale very affecting, internalising her memory so that it becomes his own: 'Because he had just come from the place where it had happened he seemed to remember it too.' (190) He is also fascinated by the woman herself:

> He couldn't help looking at her. She had a long, pale, sealed face, very pale blue eyes and the peculiarity of possessing only one lip – the bottom one. It

[41] Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan suggests that the town is inspired by 'one of those, such as Portland and Dartmouth, which Margiad Evans visited after her husband joined the Navy'. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Notes' in Margiad Evans, *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 193-214 (p. 213).
[42] Margiad Evans, 'The Sea' (1948), *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 186-91 (p. 186). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

> supported a single tooth. The voice which came from this singular mouth was lonely and strange.
>
> 'That's a beautiful little dog,' she remarked, looking at a white spaniel which, he saw with astonishment, was sitting close to his feet […].
>
> […] Her odd speech, though so loud was at times clouded. It was a duet for one voice, and it seemed to convey to him physical impressions only, so that he knew he would never forget what this old lady looked like down to the utmost detail.
>
> 'Yes, a bonny doggie. […] My father's was one like that. A spaniel – Old Jessy. […]' (189)

The older character's unusual, disfigured appearance, her strangely captivating voice and the focus given in Evans's description to the uncommon mouth from which it emanates bring to mind the classical figure of the Sybil, a prophet and teller of tales. Summarising Ovid, Marina Warner explains that, as a young woman, the Cumaean Sibyl agreed to sleep with Phoebus Apollo in exchange for eternal life, but forgot to ask for eternal youth to accompany it. She was therefore doomed to shrivel and shrink with her great age before her body disappeared completely, but took comfort in the fact that her voice would survive: 'But still, the fates will leave me my voice, and by my voice I shall be known.'[43] Medieval legends tell of the Sybil living on in a cave in the Umbrian mountains, while Petronius' *Satyricon* describes her voice trapped inside her tomb at Delphi, still talking within. Warner identifies 'the paradox of the Sibyl of myth': 'she is exiled, even abandoned, her voice is muffled, even muted. Yet from inside the "manacle" of the monument, she goes on speaking.'[44] Evans's description of the ageing woman with the singular, powerful voice, sharing her family history and that of the town is reminiscent of the Sybil's voice from the past, living on beneath the rock. Furthermore, there is something of the Sibyl's pagan magic in the seeming ability of the older woman by the sea to conjure with her voice. Not only are her

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[43] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, XIV, trans. by Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 314-15, cited in Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 10.

[44] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 11.

recollections planted in the mind of the protagonist, but the dog that he is 'astonished' to find at his feet appears like the ghost of her father's own spaniel from her memory.

Although very different in tone and content to 'The Sea', Jack Jones's *Rhondda Roundabout* (1934) also features an older remembrancer of the past whose knowledge and stories are rooted in his home town. The novel is superficially light-hearted, but the humour of Jones's episodic renderings of the various religious congregations, political parties, sports clubs, and amateur dramatic societies which shape his fictional valleys neighbourhood exists alongside a serious concern with the suffering of Welsh mining communities during the Great Depression and the actions which individuals might take to change these circumstances. Evans the draper becomes a valuable source of information and advice for the text's young protagonist, the Reverend Dan Price of Beulah Congregational Chapel, as he attempts to comfort and support the Rhondda valley's poor, sick, and unemployed whilst also meeting the more secular demands of the chapel elders. The older character has spent decades observing the fluctuations in his community's fortunes through the microcosm of his business:

> My boy, I've been thirty-eight years in this shop. I've seen good times, middling times, and – and times like these […].
>
> […] There was a time when there was plenty to do here for myself, my son, and six girls. Then we were running about all day like scalded cocks. Now there isn't enough for that one girl to do, let alone me.[45]

As he shares his memories of major events that have shaped the valley, including mining disasters, religious revivals, and the Tonypandy Riots, it becomes apparent that Evans's wisdom is inseparable from these experiences and the place where they

[45] Jack Jones, *Rhondda Roundabout* (1934), (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), pp. 82-83. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

happened. Indeed, he tells Dan: ‘I’m part of the Rhondda, for if I was taken out of sight of these mountains, I wouldn’t be worth a tater, boy.’ (84)

Such is Evans’s affinity with the valley that he displays an extrasensory ability to detect trouble in the area and pinpoint it geographically. When an explosion takes place at the nearby Glamorgan Pit, the draper is aware of it before news reaches his shop:

> ‘Hush,’ growled the old man. He sat on the high office-stool listening for about ten seconds. Then he opened the little window and looked down the valley, then muttered: ‘No, it’s not down that way.’ Then he looked up the valley for the space of a few seconds. ‘Yes,’ he cried, ‘It’s up that end, whatever it is. […] Boy, there’s something wrong up that end.’
>
> ‘How do you know?’
>
> ‘I don’t know how I know, unless it is through sitting here like I have all these years, where the good and the bad have been felt by me long before it gets to be known out there on the street. But this, whatever it is, is bad.’ (201)

Evans’s intuition here has a preternatural quality not unlike the strange power of the older woman’s voice in ‘The Sea’. However, Jones’s character also displays a weary cynicism which is appropriate to the text’s grounding in the very specific socio-political context of the early 1930s. He often speaks sarcastically and, despite his faith and sincere admiration of Dan’s ability to bring ‘God down amongst us’ in his sermons (84), is quick to dismiss the minister’s idealistic hopes that the chapel can ‘put the Rhondda on its feet again’ because he has watched others try and fail in the past (198). In keeping with this cynicism is the older man’s choice of reading matter. He has been finding solace in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton for several years. In particular, when his plans to retire to a coastal location outside the Rhondda were destroyed with the financial crash of 1929, he found himself able to accept his lot philosophically:

> I was going to make a pile and then go to live retired amongst the retired publicans, preachers and schoolmasters and the rest of ‘em at Porthcawl […]. But I was saved from that by the slump. Them shares are not worth threepence

> a bundle today, and I'm as contented, more contented if anything, than I was when they were worth thirty-three shillings apiece. And that chap who wrote them books had a lot to do with it. […] No, the Rhondda'll do for me, thank you. (84)

When Evans lends Burton's work to Dan, one can, therefore, interpret this act as symbolising the passing on not just of the older man's stories about the Rhondda's past, but also of his attempts to make sense of the tragedy and suffering that have characterised the place during his lifetime. However, the text's conclusion suggests that, although he is at peace with his personal losses, Evans cannot accept the hardships which continue to blight his valley. When Dan offers to pray for him on his deathbed, he insists that the minister pray for his home instead: 'No, no, never mind me, my boy. I'm all right. My troubles are nearly over. Say – say a word for the Rhondda, please.' (271)

Not all texts involving older storytellers are as positive about sharing stories and revisiting the past. 'The Great Master of Ecstasy' (2009) by Glenda Beagan is concerned with the pain that can be caused when history is resurrected. The short story's teenage narrator searches for the family of her recently-murdered mentor and friend Kieran, piecing together the story of his childhood in the process. Her search takes her from Blackpool to north east Wales, where her friend had formative experiences. She learns that, after the death of his mother, nine-year-old Kieran moved to his ancestors' farm, Celynnen. Not long after he arrives, the boy begins to see ghosts in the landscape, including the lead miners who once worked on the hills above the farm and a fierce pagan deity. At the centre of this text is Betty, Kieran's grandmother, who recognises her grandson's second sight – inherited from her family – and encourages it. Although she admits she 'didn't have the gift at all', the older woman 'knew all the old stories' about the local tradition of the 'Guardian', whereby in every generation a member of the family takes responsibility for performing pagan

rites to ensure the health of the land.[46] Having told Kieran these stories, Betty shows him a 'very primitive, and very sinister' human skull that represents the Guardian; the boy is terrified and is hospitalised following a seizure (55). Although Kieran recovers, his Uncle Bryn bans him from visiting Betty, causing Kieran to run away and beginning a 'whole family saga of pain and recrimination' (65). Through these events, the text questions the wisdom of resurrecting forgotten knowledge. When the narrator comments that '[s]ometimes things that are buried are best left that way', she is thinking of the pain that her visit has caused Betty, Bryn, and the rest of their family, forcing them to relive the circumstances of Kieran's disappearance (57). However, this statement could as easily refer to Betty's feelings of guilt about having told the boy her stories of the Guardian. Thus, there is a suggestion here that sharing old knowledge preserved by storytellers like Betty can damage family or community cohesion, rather than encourage it. Yet, by the end of the text, this interpretation is revealed to be over-simplistic.

Beagan's text sets up an opposition between the old wisdom derived from pagan beliefs which Betty tells stories about and more mainstream knowledge that is held to be historical fact. This contradistinction appears not only in Bryn and Betty's disagreements, but also in Bryn's refusal to acknowledge his nephew's visions of the past. However, in the text's final pages, it is revealed that Bryn's attitude has softened thanks to research carried out by his daughter Mari:

> Perhaps the change in him began when Mari'd got interested in researching the history of the mountain, not just the factual, verifiable material, but the local tales, the legends. Folklore, if you like. And he saw, at last, that the factual history and this other, less tangible history were maybe not so foreign to each other after all. (59)

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[46] Glenda Beagan, 'The Great Master of Ecstasy', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 7-73 (p. 56). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

In particular, Mari is able to discover the ancient origins of Christian rituals performed at Celynnen by unravelling the implications of Welsh, Saxon, and Mercian place names whose meanings had been forgotten in the anglicised north Wales borderland:

> With a name like Craig Rwlff, you're reminded. It's a kind of language fusion. It's Wolf Rock, really. Sort of Wenglish. In Welsh it would be Craig y Blaidd. Just think how far that name goes back. And at Ffynnon Wna, right up till the First World War, there used to be this tradition of taking all the horses up there to walk them through the well water. The vicar would be there, and he'd scoop up water on to their backs with a special bowl that was kept in the church. It was a Christian festival, of course, […] but some people think it goes right back to the Romano-Celtic goddess, Epona. (54)

This persistence of ancient pagan knowledge echoes Kieran's second sight and the fact that he becomes what is described as an 'urban shaman' in adulthood (42). Furthermore, Betty's decision to encourage his gift and to pass on her old stories is vindicated by the fact that Kieran goes on to live a relatively happy existence, that he 'made a life for himself, that people loved him, and appreciated the things he could do' (50). This comfortable mixing within Kieran's consciousness of traditional, pagan knowledge and the societal norms of the early twenty-first century is similar to the intermingling of different languages, cultures, and religious beliefs in the customs that have left their mark on Celynnen. It appears, then, that there is a place for unofficial, oral histories in contemporary society. Moreover, although the gift of extrasensory perception appears in both male and female members of the family, the fact that it is Mari rather than one of her brothers who, like her grandmother, disseminates the pagan knowledge which is embedded in the landscape suggests that such storytelling is a particularly feminine activity. Indeed, the narrator is struck by the fact that she meets and hears Kieran's back story from '[f]our generations of the women in Bryn's family but he wasn't there' (50). Thus, the text foregrounds a persistent matrilineal succession which can be likened to the folklore surrounding Celynnen, enduring

despite its unofficial status. The image of Betty and her female descendants coming together and sharing their story is also reminiscent of the multi-generational structure of formative female relationships proposed by Kathleen Woodward (and discussed in Chapter 2 above), with the older woman positioned as a source of knowledge and emphasis placed upon the importance of history and time to the development of this insight.

Older People and Welsh National Identity

In the earlier sections of this chapter, I have demonstrated that Welsh writers of fiction make symbolic use of older people, their relationships with younger relatives, and the cycle of generations of which these characters form a part in order to represent the history and societal changes of the twentieth century. In addition, I have established that ageing storytellers in Welsh novels and short stories are connected with places and their histories, that they are important to community cohesion and continuity, are regularly associated with the ancient, the pagan, or the preternatural, and that their knowledge is often of unofficial, oral histories. In this final section, I will consider what it is about Welsh literature and culture which prompts so many writers to include these older storytellers, custodians of and links to the past in their work.

The capacity to remember events from the far-off past which have either been forgotten or were never known to most members of a family, community, or society is, of course, an ability particular to those of advanced age. A number of theorists and critics have explored the significance of memories to the development of national traditions and identities. Anderson describes the acts of remembering and forgetting

which are required of populations in order that they can imagine themselves as a community of similar individuals and, therefore, as a nation.[47] A classic example is that of the Brothers Grimm, who collected oral folk tales as an act of German nation-building.[48] Considering the evolution of Welsh national traditions and identity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Prys Morgan observes that the 'unprecedented outburst of interest in things Welsh and highly self-conscious activity to preserve or develop them' were motivated by a perceived 'decay or demise of an ancient way of life'.[49] He goes on to state:

> The Hon. John Byng visited Bala in 1784 and again in 1793 and complained that 'Within ten years there seem'd an alteration in the manners of the people.' Signs of Welsh merriment were gone, the Welsh were becoming like the English, and all the curiosity of travel was undone. Decay and revival are curiously intermixed, because very often those who bewailed the decay were the very ones who brought about the revival. […] In [the eighteenth century] Welsh scholars and patriots rediscovered the past, historical, linguistic and literary traditions, and where those traditions were inadequate, they created a past which had never existed.[50]

Further, Morgan asserts that the 'critical stage' at which Welsh scholars became concerned at the disappearance of a distinctively Welsh way of life was 'marked […] by a loss of self-confidence' and 'central to the loss of self-confidence was the loss of a sense of history'.[51] He explains that the image of Wales in popular culture at the time 'was of a quaint back-of-beyond where gentlemen with hardly a shirt to their backs reeled off endless family trees going back to Aeneas from Troy, a land of unchanging backwardness, whose people had plenty of ancestry but no national

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[47] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 199-203.
[48] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 192.
[49] Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 43-100, p. 43.
[50] Morgan, 'The Hunt for the Welsh Past', pp. 43-44.
[51] Morgan, 'The Hunt for the Welsh Past', pp. 44-45.

history.'[52] Kirsti Bohata's readings of Welsh texts in light of postcolonial theories are also of relevance here. Considering Welsh writers' 'construction of Wales as a colonized or otherwise subjugated nation […], through their utilization of Forestry Commission plantations […] as potent symbols of the appropriation of Welsh land by the London government',[53] she contends that a number of writers seek to preserve memories of lost places as a political act against this colonisation:

> […] each writer – Tryfan, D.J. Williams, Gwenallt, Islwyn Ffowc Elis and, in different ways, Harri Webb and R.S. Thomas – is writing *against* the loss of a culture, against the loss of memory of a place; so, in (re)populating the places that have been both portrayed as empty and actually emptied by the policies of central government, these writers seek to re-member past and place and so to change the present and future of Wales. […] bell hooks […] emphasi[zes] that for African-Americans (and other colonized or postcolonial peoples) 'our struggle is a struggle of memory against forgetting' and this statement has deep resonance in the context of the projects of [these] Welsh writers […].[54]

The arguments of Anderson, Morgan, and Bohata are helpful in interpreting the role and importance of ageing storytellers and symbolic/ representative older characters in Welsh fiction. Anderson's discussion suggests that acts of forgetting and remembering are ideologically inflected and have been utilised by nation states, not necessarily knowingly, to render acts of aggression more palatable, shoring-up their own power in the process. Relatedly, Bohata demonstrates that refusals to forget that which has been erased by acts of colonisation are employed by Welsh writers, as they have been by colonised and postcolonial peoples more generally, as a strategy of resistance. As with Anderson's work, Morgan's observations indicate that historical memory is subjective. There is also a suggestion here that conceptions of national and family history have played a part in Wales' national identity and collective self-confidence since the eighteenth century.

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[52] Morgan, 'The Hunt for the Welsh Past', p. 45.
[53] Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 101.
[54] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, pp. 102-03, emphasis in original.

A number of the novels and short stories considered earlier in this chapter betray an awareness of the ideas expressed by Anderson, Morgan, and Bohata. For example, in Beagan's 'The Great Master of Ecstasy', characters articulate anxieties about the unreliability of memory and the subjectivity of what is recalled and forgotten. At the story's conclusion, Bryn contemplates his daughter's comments on the function of memory: 'Only the other day she'd been talking about memory, how it works. And sometimes how it doesn't. How memory can get it so desperately wrong because we see our own lives with only partial vision. We can get the substance but miss the essence.' (72) The narrator's account of her search for information about Kieran's past contains such slips of memory and indications of bias in her presentation of events. For example, her recollection of her conversation with Kieran's relatives mistakenly includes Bryn, who, in reality, was conspicuous in his absence:

> Sometimes an absence can mean more than a presence. Sometimes someone who isn't there can dominate those who are. Bryn wasn't with us in Betty's kitchen […] but it felt as if he was. […]
>
> […] Four generations of the women in Bryn's family but he wasn't there. It seems right, though, that in the picture I still retain so clearly of them, I can see him in that room with us. Just goes to show how your memory can play tricks on you. (49-50)

However, given that the inaccuracy of this memory reflects the way in which Bryn's rift with Betty has dominated the family for years, it appears that the narrator has remembered the 'essence' of the situation, if not the substance. Moreover, the narrator's worry that she is 'getting the order of things all wrong' and her realisation as the story unravels of how much she had failed to understand about Kieran, how she had been 'missing the whole point', suggest that this is a self-conscious text which contemplates the difficulties involved in representing people and events accurately (64-65). Similarly, Betty and the narrator's concern that by telling stories and

revisiting the past they are causing pain to others can also be read as a comment on the role and responsibilities of writers, who are themselves custodians of the past.

During the protagonist's dream of the 'Great Judgment' in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, the 'Voice' of the 'kherub' intoning the names of Nico Mathias's ancestors is reminiscent of Prys Morgan's discussion of the eighteenth-century stereotype of Wales as a country where pretentious gentlemen 'reeled off endless family trees going back to Aeneas from Troy' because they had 'had plenty of ancestry but no national history':

> Voice: You are John Nicholas Mathias, an engineer?
> *Nico nods.*
> Voice: You are the son of Nicholas Mathias, the schoolmaster of Llanddafydd?
> *Nico nods.*
> Voice: The grandson of John Mathias, farmer of the same parish, the great-grandson of Nicholas Mathias, farm labourer, the great-great-grandson of Nicholas Mathias, farm labourer, all of the same parish? (346)

However, in Glyn Jones's novel, the knowledge and formidable presence of the narrator's grandmother prevents any slippage into the realms of stereotypes or pomposity. Instead, this older custodian of the past tells Nico of the hardships endured by his antecedents and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the history she describes is of working-class struggle and specifically Welsh in character. Furthermore, Mary Lydia's dignity and stoicism make the reader more likely to treat the events she describes with seriousness, as does her urging the wayward Nico to 'learn and remember' the struggles of the past (348).[55] Thus, Jones appears to be writing against both the idea that Wales has no individual history beyond family histories and the

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[55] See also Jones's 'Price Parry' (1944), in which the pompous titular character takes great pride in his family tree, which traces his descendance from the legendary Rhodri Fawr, 'King of Kymry'. At the text's conclusion, Price-Parry destroys the family tree, having received a warning against vanity from beyond the grave. Glyn Jones, 'Price Parry' (1944), in *Collected Stories*, ed. by Tony Brown (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 161-72 (p. 164).

danger that the country's past, particularly events involving the oppression or appropriation of working people, might be forgotten as a consequence of the type of colonial activities described by Anderson and Bohata.

Like Mary Lydia, Uncle Trefor in Siân James's 'A House of One's Own' (discussed above) is representative of a particular version of Welsh national identity grounded in the past and associated with the Welsh language, Nonconformist Christianity, traditional industry, and respectable behaviour. Trefor's story is also bound up with postcolonial questions regarding the ownership of Wales. By reading her uncle's diaries, James's narrator learns that, when his landlord died in the 1950s, there was a dispute over the will and Trefor was advised not to pay rent until the matter was settled. Years passed with no resolution and Trefor kept the house in a 'good state of repair' (64). The local minister updates the narrator on more recent events:

> I can put your mind at rest […]. Mr [Trefor] Roberts owned this house. The court granted him the title deeds because he'd maintained it in good order and repair for over twenty years. […] I've got the facts at my fingertips because I often use it as a text for my sermons. It has a great moral significance in my opinion, who owns Wales, for instance, who are the rightful inheritors. (65)

The minister's comments link the individual case of Uncle Trefor's home to broader concerns about the ownership of Wales itself. The text indicates, therefore, that it is those who live and work upon and maintain the land who should possess it, rather than those designated its owners thanks to financial transactions and – quite possibly – earlier seizures of land for industrial and imperialist purposes. However, this implication is complicated by the narrator's unease at the prospect of emulating Trefor's tidy and respectable way of life. Although it was his concern with 'keeping things in good order and repair' which ensured that her uncle eventually achieved ownership of his home, the narrator fears being 'bored and bored and bored' by such

an existence (70). The distinctions made by the text between England and Wales, the urban metropolis and the semi-rural small town, encourage the reader to make other comparisons. While the character of Trefor is associated with the colonisation of Welsh land and, in his role as a quarryman, had his labour appropriated for others' financial gain, the narrator has been the victim of abuse and has been damaged and deprived by poverty. Her noisy and improper coping mechanisms – the drink, the sex, the chaotic home life – suggest that there are ways beyond Trefor's example of responding to and resisting acts of appropriation and colonisation.

Sheepshagger (2001) by Niall Griffiths also confronts the politics of landowning, this time in the mountains of mid Wales, reflecting anger in recent decades over the shortage of affordable housing in rural areas resulting from second home ownership. The novel is an account of the life of isolated and violent protagonist Ianto and offers the reader a range of indications as to the reasons that this damaged young man commits several gruesome murders. One of the circumstances revealed by the narrative is the fact that the upland farmhouse that has been in Ianto's family 'for generations like, hundreds of years' is repossessed despite his grandmother's desperate attempts to reverse the farm's failing fortunes.[56] The house becomes a holiday home for affluent English visitors and Ianto is left homeless. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the strange interlude towards the end of the novel when, having killed two English hillwalkers in an abandoned silver mine, Ianto finds temporary assistance at the home of an elderly woman who speaks only Welsh. The episode feels surreal and hallucinatory in places. Ianto stumbles upon the older character's cottage as he roams an area which he apparently knows well – the

[56] Niall Griffiths, *Sheepshagger* (2001), (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 9. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

mountain near his ancestral home, yet the house is unfamiliar to him. When the protagonist steps inside, it is as though he has walked into the past. The cottage is 'illuminated only by the frisky firelight', has whitewashed walls, an oak door, and an old-fashioned slate bench – no doubt made from local stone, while an analogue clock ticks in the background (212). The elderly woman is as comforting as her home, betraying no shock at Ianto's filthy, bloodied appearance and instead offering help in 'a small croak of a voice as of a warm wind rustling rushes' (212):

> Her small eyes in nests of wrinkles, she looks him over now, the appalling condition of him, and still the small serene smile does not flee her face. She asks for a third time:
> — Ga'i eich helpu chi? [Can I help you?]
> Ianto shakes his head. — I can't understand what yewer saying. English? Saesneg?
> She shakes hers too: — Dim Saesneg. Cymraeg yn unig. [No English. Only Welsh.]
> He doesn't know how to reply, what to say. She looks him over again then says softly to herself:
> — Te. Te, a dŵr gwresog. [Tea. Tea and warm water.] (213)[57]

Like her house and possessions, the ageing woman's status as a monoglot Welsh speaker suggests that she is a symbol of the Welsh past. The help that she provides Ianto adds to this impression. She washes the young man's face three times – an act which Griffiths explains is a Celtic blessing – and gives him tea and a plate of the 'flat currant scones' commonly known as Welsh cakes (213).[58] The writer's use of religious language adds to the encounter's air of sacred ritual and the elderly woman tells Ianto 'Bendith Duw' (God bless) as he leaves (214). Thus, this older character who is a link to the past is associated with speaking Welsh, Christian faith, and the trappings of traditional Welsh domestic life.

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[57] The English translations of the older woman's words are my own.
[58] Ian Peddie, 'Warmth and Light and Sky: Niall Griffiths in Conversation', *Critical Survey* 20.3 (2008), 116-27 (p. 122).

Ianto’s inability to understand the older woman can be read as symbolising the extent to which he has been distanced from his ancestral, economic, and cultural inheritance by the loss of the family farm through a process of appropriation which the text encourages the reader to associate with colonial acts from the past. Furthermore, Ianto’s behaviour after he leaves the cottage suggests that he rejects her care and all that it symbolises, or that the history, identity, and faith that she signifies cannot help him:

> He finishes the cakes [a parting gift from the elderly woman] then […] begins to whine in the back of his throat a desperate mewling and he falls to his knees in the mud on top of the mountain and scoops up a handful of drenched dirt out of the saturated grass and rubs it in his hair and his face spoiling it again and he forces another fistful into his mouth immediately spewing it back out along with bile and tepid tea and half-digested chunks of dough and peel and raisins. […] he claws and tears at the ancient earth and growls into the very fertile rain-clogged soil some disjointed noises, entreaties beseechings nonwords and nonsense:
>
> — *NNNNNNN* yew fuckin bastard, […] *why* yew fuckin all I’ve ever fuckin wanted is yew fuckin bastard fuck yew cunt yew fuckin lissen yew fuckin never yew fuckin *NNNNNN* me yew fuckin fuckin … (215)

By dirtying his face, throwing up the tea and Welsh cakes, and railing against God, Ianto is refusing and opposing the older woman’s nurture and blessing and, it follows, the elements of traditional Welshness that she represents. Further, the fact that the protagonist claws at and tries to ingest the earth on the mountain from which he has been evicted again suggests the connections between this loss of land and his loss of culture and national identity.

Thus, both ‘A House of One’s Own’ and *Sheepshagger* use representations of older people’s links to the past and their exchanges with younger characters to question conceptions of traditional Welsh national identity, their suitability to modern life, and the willingness and ability of younger generations to assimilate them. Ned Thomas expresses the pressure of inheritance felt by some politically-engaged Welsh

people, characterising the decision to embrace Welsh (especially Welsh-speaking) identity as a difficult one which can lead to unhappiness. He argues that remembering the Welsh past means remembering 'very largely, hardship and poverty and injustice, and these are things that it is human to want to escape from and forget as soon as you can.'[59] Moreover, 'taking responsibility for the transmission of [the past's] values'[60] involves bequeathing struggle to younger generations:

> Are we to foresee a decade in which there will always be a handful of young people in the prisons of Wales […]? Anyone who sees to it that his [sic] children grow up speaking Welsh, as I do, must think of this too. What if they were to take the language and the condition of their people seriously?
>
> One is giving them a part in a sadness and in a struggle, the end of which cannot be foreseen; but one is also giving them access to a tradition of great moral and emotional strength.[61]

This responsibility weighs heavy on Owen in *Feet in Chains*. In addition to feeling anger towards the portraits which represent his family's history and the duty he holds to his relations, both living and deceased, at the end of Roberts's novel, this thoughtful young man recognises the extent to which his knowledge of the hardships endured by previous generations and an inherited stoicism prevent him from rebelling against his circumstances:

> And his eyes were opened to the possibility of doing something, instead of suffering mutely. It was high time for someone to stand up against all this injustice. To do something. Thinking about it, that was the trouble with his people. They were heroic in their capacity to suffer, and not in their capacity to do something to oppose the cause of their suffering. William was the only one of his family who had shown opposition to things as they were, unless you could say that Sioned had. […] Even Twm had turned his back on home and shown that he could leave it, at any rate. Only he, Owen, was cowardly, that was the truth of the matter. (203)

The capacity to suffer without complaint which Owen observes in his 'people' – suggesting both his family and his countrymen and women – is reminiscent of the

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[59] Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), p. 65.
[60] Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, p. 77.
[61] Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, pp. 125-26.

diligent frugality of Uncle Trefor in ‘A House of One’s Own’. Furthermore, in *The Valley, the City, the Village*, Trystan’s knowledge of his grandmother’s historic fortitude in the face of poverty is an important motivating factor in his feelings of guilt and uncertainty as to his future path. It seems, then, that stoicism in the face of hardship sits alongside characteristics such as propriety and religious observance in some conceptions of Welsh identity and that an ambivalence to the prospect of inheriting or performing such traits features in fiction from across the chronological scope of this study.

A consideration of the importance of older characters generally and aged storytellers in particular to Welsh fiction in English would not be complete without some discussion of the fact that the most positive renderings of elderly people in the field, and the majority of the older custodians and symbols of the past, are women. Research by Marina Warner and Kirsti Bohata is helpful in explaining this tendency on the part of Welsh writers. In her work on fairy tales and their tellers, Warner identifies older women as major creators and recounters of these stories, as well as sources for and narrators in the written collections that grew out of the oral tradition. According to Warner’s account, these female storytellers have held a range of associations, both complimentary and derogatory, but have generally been of lower-class status and have performed the caring, domestic, and semi-skilled work which was for so long the province of poor women:

> Prejudices against women, especially old women and their chatter, belong in the history of fairy tale’s changing status, for the pejorative image of the gossip was sweetened by influences from the tradition of the Sibyls and the cult of Saint Anne, until the archetypal crone by the hearth could emerge as a mouthpiece of homespun wisdom. […] The interconnections of storytelling with heterodox forms of knowledge, with illicit science and riddles […]

> emerge, only to be themselves domesticated, contained by the context of the children's nursery.[62]

Warner acknowledges the ambiguous position of these women and their stories. She explains that the phrase 'old wives' tale' was 'superficially pejorative', meaning 'a piece of nonsense, a tissue of error, an ancient act of deception, of self and others, idle talk'.[63] However, the persona of the ageing working-class female storyteller was adopted frequently by upper-class writers in order to confer upon their versions of fairy tales an authenticity associated with 'the sacred appeal of oral transmission'.[64] For example: 'Mlle Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon (1664-1734), a cousin and close friend of [writer of fairytales Charles] Perrault […] defended the form with fighting spirit precisely because it conveyed the ancient, pure wisdom of the people from the fountainhead – old women, nurses, governesses.'[65] In the case of Welsh fiction in English, the connotations of the older, labouring class, female storyteller or link to the past make her a powerful choice of character for writers concerned with Welsh history and identity. Her association with oral tradition gives the histories that she recounts and represents a sense of validity, be they community histories or the histories of Wales that have been in danger of being forgotten – histories remembered by Caradoc Evans's Old Nanni, Glyn Jones's Mary Lydia, and Glenda Beagan's Betty, and symbolised by Niall Griffiths's nameless old woman, for example. In addition, Warner's assertion that lower-class older women deal in 'heterodox forms of knowledge' is reminiscent of the impression given in texts such as *Feet in Chains* and *The Valley, the City, the Village* that the Welsh experiences understood and remembered by older female characters are threatened with erasure by colonial

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[62] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. XX.
[63] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 19.
[64] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 25.
[65] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 19.

activities; furthermore, this knowledge is rendered more heterodox because it is usually working-class and linguistically, as well as culturally, Welsh.

Bohata links postcolonial theories about domestic spaces to the politics of the Welsh language:

> The idea that the domestic, as opposed to the public, sphere may constitute an important site of resistance is […] recognized in studies of diasporic peoples or of those who have experienced cultural dislocation through colonization. In such cases, the home may become the only place where a subaltern culture may be transmitted. Passing on an unofficial, 'native' language such as Welsh, at a time when parents were actively choosing *not* to pass on the language to their children, can be viewed as an explicit act of resistance to cultural imperialism.[66]

The critic goes on to observe that, for minority groups whose culture is threatened by a more dominant group, 'the home as a site of cultural authenticity or refuge becomes a politically powerful one – Welsh after all is revealingly known as a "language of the hearth"'.[67] In light of this statement, the older woman working in the family home – or the 'crone by the hearth', as Warner calls her – becomes the ideal person to pass on the Welsh language and other 'subaltern' knowledge to younger generations, given both her proximity to the young as they grow up and her possession of the memories and understanding which they might inherit. In her application of postcolonial thinking to Welsh literature, Bohata also considers the construction of literary characters as 'national allegor[ies]' through the motif that she describes as 'Wales-as-woman':

> Although a common trope in the nineteenth century, the figure of woman-as-nation is complicated in a Welsh context by the construction of the Welsh people as a feminine race, which would naturally benefit from the masculine guidance and rule of a colonial power, in line with wider imperial discourse employed in India and Greece, for example. Thus to construct Wales-as-woman is not only to make use of a common motif, it is also to negotiate the

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[66] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, pp. 71-72, emphasis in original.
[67] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 102.

> complex array of gendered roles associated with the figure of a woman with reference to wider national and international power-relations.[68]

Bohata examines the various incarnations of the figure of 'Dame Wales', which she argues embodied both 'irredentist and subordinate or loyalist agendas'.[69] These manifestations of Dame Wales include a 'regal figure' played by Lady Bute in the Welsh National Pageant of 1909 and a 'national-costumed peasant' from cartoons by J.M. Staniforth that appeared in the *Western Mail* in the 1900s. Interestingly, the latter variation was often drawn as an ageing woman: 'while she would occasionally appear in the guise of an enraged and protective mother, she was most often depicted as a ridiculous matron of rather lowly origins, whose natural place in the social hierarchy emphasized Wales's subordinate position within the UK.'[70] If Wales has been signified by female characters in allegorical texts that negotiate the country's colonised status, then writers who create inspiring or sympathetic renderings of older women who are symbols or custodians of Welsh history and identity can be seen to be using the associations of the female gender and, indeed, those of old age to foreground, question, and resist the effects of the country's colonial past. In particular, the image of an older person brings with it a sense of history which is the foundation of many incarnations of Welsh national identity. Furthermore, the fact that many of these ageing women are working-class serves to connote the consequences of

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[68] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 72.
[69] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited,* p. 73.
[70] Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 74. Relatedly, Jenny Rowland argues that the *Canu Heledd* reflect an ancient Indo-European myth common in Celtic sources in which 'the land or kingdom is a goddess who is wedded to the rightful king and who mourns his death and the resultant devastation of the land'. Rowland suggests that the anonymous poet's reflection of this motif has contributed to the cycle's enduring reputation: 'The laments in Canu Heledd for the passing of the old order are deeply moving and take on an added dimension in the light of their mythological prototypes. It might in fact be argued that the poet succeeded so well in portraying Heledd and her grief because of his instinctive recourse to this potent idea of land, king and sovereignty. […] popularized versions of Canu Heledd have elicited a good deal of contemporary response unlike the other *englyn* cycles. It may in part be due to the concept of the union with the land that the link between the loss of Welsh sovereignty in the border region and the steady erosion of Welsh culture and language is readily perceived and lamented again in the guise of Heledd.' Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the 'Englynion'* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 145 and 149.

capitalist imperialism on the Welsh population, as well as those of colonisation. Finally, as an older, working-class woman this figure is disadvantaged three times over. She is an underdog and, so, in her stoic endurance of hardship, her resolute repetition of stories from the past, and her experience of a traditional way of life, she is a symbol of the survival of an embattled culture, class, and identity.

This focus on history and looking back to the past could be problematic, however. There is a danger that, by contemplating the value of an awareness of the past and encouraging admiration for characters who remember and have weathered hard times, writers of Welsh fiction will tend towards nostalgia. Yet, a number of factors prevent the texts I have selected for analysis in this chapter slipping into sentimentality. Firstly, in many of these novels and short stories, the events and characters which make up the narrative are situated within a clear conception of the particular socioeconomic and political circumstances of their settings. For example, the poverty, cultural and linguistic alienation, and physical danger experienced and remembered by older characters in *Rhondda Roundabout*, *Feet in Chains*, *The Valley, the City, the Village*, and *The Small Mine* make it very difficult for the reader to think fondly of the histories rendered within them. Furthermore, the ambivalence of younger characters to the prospect of inheriting knowledge and characteristics associated with traditional Welsh identity works against the temptation to cast the past as preferable to the present. In addition, Welsh writers have created older characters who look ahead to the future as well as back to the past. In particular, both Emyr Humphreys and Christopher Meredith write of older men who, having spent many years working elsewhere, return to Wales in the hope of making a contribution to their communities. In Meredith's *The Book of Idiots* (2012), the older candidate at the job interviews in

which narrator Dean participates apparently wants the post so that he can return to Wales from Edinburgh. The younger, preferred candidate actually goes as far as to argue that the older man is the best person for the job, telling the narrator:

> 'That old guy, he's your man. Thing is is, he's brilliant. He'll be taking a pay cut to come here.'
>
> 'We noticed. […] That bothered us actually. Maybe he'll try and haggle, and Grice won't have that.'
>
> 'No. Didn't you ask him? His wife died. He wants to move back to Wales. He wants to build here. He's genuine, man. He's a gift.'[71]

It seems, then, that there is a selfless element to the older candidate's desire to work for Dean's employer: he wants to enrich his country's future, even if this means he'll be worse off financially.

Similarly, Humphreys writes of an older man drawn to the Welsh landscape of his youth by the desire to reinvigorate economically depressed areas of the country. 'The Man in the Mist' (2003) charts the progress of Gwyndaf Rondel and Glyndwr Brace, old friends who shared a childhood in rural north Wales. Both forge successful careers in London, narrator Gwyn as a historian and Glyn as a BBC newsreader. Success comes easily to glamorous Glyn and the qualities that make him popular are linked to the Welsh identity in which he takes great pride. He shares his name with the legendary Owain Glyndwr and, thanks to an idealism associated with his 'nonconformist background', is wedded to the BBC's public service commitment 'to inform and educate and entertain in precisely that order'.[72] His success also stems from his 'mellifluous' voice, reminiscent of such romantic Welsh figures as Richard Burton and Dylan Thomas (91). However, Glyn's career peaks and falters. A 'whispering campaign' against him asserts:

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[71] Christopher Meredith, *The Book of Idiots* (Bridgend: Seren, 2012), pp. 144-45. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

[72] Emyr Humphreys, 'The Man in the Mist', in *Old People are a Problem* (Bridgend: Seren, 2003), pp. 79-108, p. 89. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetic cally in the text.

> Glyn Brace's voice was too deliberately melodious and his manner too ingratiating for contemporary taste. He was a has-been covered with an evangelical mildew […] and the public had no desire to be preached at and certainly not by a fading Welsh *jeune premier*. (91, emphasis in original)

Out of fashion at the BBC in London, a move to Cardiff and a foray into documentary programme-making delay Glyn's professional demise temporarily. Welsh history and culture provide his subject matter and he scores a hit with an investigation into the life of one of his own ancestors. Humphreys's character is, therefore, another older chronicler of the past.

Glyn is eventually bullied into early retirement by a populist new Head of Programmes who also has an affair with his wife. At this point of professional and personal chaos, he buys a dilapidated cottage in the valley where he grew up. Taking Gwyn to see the place, Glyn expresses his desperation to halt the degeneration of his birthplace:

> 'You know what we've been doing? […] We've been going up in the world and leaving an empty desert behind us…'
>
> I wasn't entirely certain what he was referring to. Looking down the valley there were several ruined farmsteads that had been abandoned in our lifetime; and two quarries closed. I couldn't see how we, he and I, Glyn and Gwyn, could be held responsible for that. Economic and social forces. Global forces at work like the mills of God grinding out change. […] He was in a mood to rebuke himself. And in order to do that he had to take the responsibility for the decay of our valley and our traditional way of life on his own shoulders. (98-99)

Given the extent to which Glyn's professional and personal identities were grounded in his Welsh heritage, it is logical that he would attempt to compensate for being superseded at work and in his marriage by dedicating himself to preserving and improving Wales' landscape. The idea that such regenerative projects might help older individuals recover from personal loss is also present in *The Book of Idiots*, as we learn that the older man who wishes to come back to Wales is grieving the loss of his wife. 'The Man in the Mist' is unforthcoming on the subject of Glyn's success in

either soothing his soul or contributing to his country's future. In the text's final lines, he appears as a mysterious figure in the mist on top of a crag. Having withdrawn into an ascetic existence, Glyn apparently does little more than 'keep an eye' on the sheep on the mountain (106). Knowledge of Humphreys's own life and oeuvre suggests a self-consciousness to 'The Man in the Mist'. The writer spent a decade working as a producer at BBC Wales and is a 'distinguished television dramatist whose Welsh-language work has frequently been screened on *S4C*, and who has contributed notable programmes on Welsh history, myth and literature to Channel 4'.[73] Further, Humphreys's non-fiction work, *The Taliesin Tradition* (1983), is a product of his concern that Wales' culture, history, and identity are not forgotten and his belief that, following in the bardic tradition, writers, ministers, and politicians can foster remembrance and resistance. The writer's commitment to this cause is, in turn, apparent in his fiction. Given this background, the characterisation of Glyn suggests an anxiety within the text about the ability of writers to fulfil the role of custodians of the past. The fact that Glyn is derided at the BBC for a somewhat exaggerated display of Welshness suggests that there is a danger that conceptions of national identity grounded in history and traditional culture can lead to inauthentic performances.[74] In addition, the character's lonely position at the end of the text calls into question the efficacy of individual crusades to halt the erasure of Wales's traditional culture and improve the country's prospects for the future, be it by wandering the hills and guarding the sheep, or by writing about Welsh myth and history. Thus, although

[73] Stephens (ed.), *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales*, p. 336.

[74] For an example of an older character who has cultivated his Welshness to advance his career, see Kingsley Amis's *The Old Devils* (1986). The novel's events centre on the return of poet and 'up-market media Welshman' Alan 'Alun' Weaver and his long-suffering wife Rhiannon to south Wales after several decades in London. Pathologically dishonest in his marriage and his dealings with his friends, Alun is also guilty of pretension and fakery in his professional life. His writing is a poor imitation of the work of the late, great Brydan (a thinly-veiled reference to Dylan Thomas), his romantic mane of white hair is dyed for effect, and his research trips and creative endeavours are planned with TV coverage in mind. Kingsley Amis, *The Old Devils* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 14.

Humphreys advocates cultivating a sense of the past to safeguard Welsh identity in the present and the future, the self-awareness of this short story prevents it from becoming nostalgic. Instead, the task of fostering a sense of national identity based on tradition and history in an ever-changing world is implied to be complicated and difficult for writers, as well as for their characters.

Humphreys is not the only writer to avoid nostalgic representations of Welsh history by creating a self-conscious text. As discussed above, ‘The Great Master of Ecstasy’ engages with the difficulties and responsibilities that writers might face in recounting past events accurately. Thanks to this self-reflexivity, the ambiguity surrounding the benefits of revisiting past events in the text is foregrounded and a fond imagining of the past is avoided. Furthermore, Kate Roberts expresses anxiety about her presentation of the history of her family and the area where she grew up in her autobiography *Y Lôn Wen/ The White Lane* (1960). Although the text’s opening chapter, entitled ‘Pictures’, comprises episodic descriptions of the writer’s earliest memories, most of the narrative is devoted to recording the history and way of life of the Snowdonia village of Rhosgadfan and its environs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The text evidences a concern on Roberts’s part with honouring the lives of the people who lived and worked in the village and chronicling a culture that had changed beyond recognition. The writer expresses her intention to ‘record the facts’ of a number of accidental deaths witnessed by her family, for example,[75] and also defends her decision to include a chapter on the games that she remembers playing in childhood, because ‘they are as much a part of our culture as anything, and maybe the facts will be of help to historians one day’.[76] In her final chapter, Roberts

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[75] Kate Roberts (1960), *Y Lôn Wen: Darn o Hunangofiant/ The White Lane: A Fragment of Autobiography*, trans. by Gillian Clarke (Llandysul: Gomer 2009), p. 294.
[76] Roberts, *Y Lôn Wen/ The White Lane*, p. 118.

turns back to her own life and reflects on the autobiography itself, contemplating the difficulty of writing the 'truth': 'But as when I was a child, I am musing and worrying. Have I told the truth? No. I comfort myself that it is impossible to tell the truth in an autobiography.' Concluding that '[t]omorrow will come, and [she] can go on asking questions', Roberts ends her work, apparently content with this lack of a definitive rendering of the past.[77]

[77] Roberts, *Y Lôn Wen/ The White Lane*, p. 302.

Conclusions

Margaret Morganroth Gullette states that: ‘The meanings of age and ageing are conveyed in large part through the moral and psychological implications of the narrative ideas we have been inserting into our heads, starting when we were very young indeed.’[1] Encouragingly, writers of Anglophone Welsh fiction take a wide range of approaches to the subjects of ageing and later life. This multiplicity is promising and, taken as a body of work, the texts examined in this study encourage a view of diversity and possibility in old age. The variation in images of ageing to be found in the field is also in keeping with Welsh writers’ persistent undermining and complicating of stereotypes of old age. Acts of ageism and othering are revealed and condemned. Moreover, by giving focus and, in many cases, voices to those who are marginalised, writers including Trezza Azzopardi, Margiad Evans, B.S. Johnson, Kate Roberts, and Dylan Thomas award them dignity and individuality. Further, representations of ageing in Welsh fiction are characterised by frequent glances to the role of social and economic factors in older experience, encouraging readers to consider the responsibilities of the wider community to its older people.

Those writers who have placed older characters at the centre of their narratives employ a range of formal and stylistic techniques to present their experiences and concerns, from the high modernism of B.S. Johnson and the political realism of Raymond Williams, to Trezza Azzopardi’s use of fragmentation and the preternatural

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[1] Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 11.

elements to be found in the work of Margiad Evans. Furthermore, in their creation of ageing protagonists, writers have attended to physical and social ageing and have attempted to render older subjectivity, by portraying changes in the experience of time, for example. Although texts engage with postmodern concepts of gender fluidity, there is a recognition in several presentations of older experience that ageing is always an embodied experience. Reflecting a focus within Welsh writing in English on subjugated groups and those on the peripheries of society, writers have not neglected those who are at the frailest end of the ageing spectrum and are, therefore, the most vulnerable and marginalised.

The cultural specificity of the texts analysed in this study is also key to their presentation of ageing and intergenerational relationships. B.S. Johnson, for example, renders the experience of reverting to one's first language in a time of illness, while Glenda Beagan, Emyr Humphreys, and Christopher Meredith portray returns to places from childhood in later life, some of which are accompanied by a reengagement with the Welsh language. Older characters and their relationships with members of younger generations also symbolise the societal changes of the twentieth century; they act as links to and remembrancers of national, community, and family histories. These characters, particularly older working-class women, often perform the role of storyteller, becoming a modern-day *cyfarwydd* and revealing knowledge that has been forgotten or suppressed. In addition, they tend to signify a conception of Welsh identity grounded in speaking Welsh, devotion to Nonconformist worship, a related concern with propriety or respectability, and a stoic determination to survive. Texts featuring such storytellers and symbolic characters reveal anxieties about the effects of basing national identity on a particular vision of Wales' past, while the younger characters who stand to inherit these values frequently react with ambivalence.

However, in texts by writers such as Rhys Davies, Emyr Humphreys, Glenda Beagan, and Christopher Meredith, ageing characters are shown to engage with contemporary issues and to look ahead to the future, as well as back to the past.

Although I have taken a different approach to the subject of ageing in each chapter of this thesis, a number of threads run across it, some of which warrant further research. For example, ageing is shown to be a gendered experience and a culturally contingent process in numerous works of Anglophone Welsh fiction. Older women's voices could be a focus for additional research, given the positive and negative associations of gossiping, the power of the Sybil, the knowledge of the storyteller, and matrilineal transmissions of wisdom from one generation to another. Relatedly, my discussion touches briefly on ageing men and retirement, but this experience and connected changes in older men's relationships to domestic spaces could be investigated further elsewhere. Indeed, the concept of home as a stabilising and individualising force in later life reverberates throughout this study; I believe that additional research into the links between age, gender, housekeeping, propriety, and class suggested by my analysis of texts such as *Feet in Chains* by Kate Roberts and Siân James's 'A House of One's Own' would pay intellectual dividends.

Fictional texts by a number of Welsh writers concern themselves with the matter of parenthood in old age. In addition to the attention paid to changes in relationships between mothers and their children in Rhys Davies and Kate Roberts's dementia narratives ('Betty Leyshon's Marathon' and 'Old Age' respectively) and in 'Home, Sweet Home' by Allen Raine, Glyn Jones's 'Wat Pantathro' and *The Book of Idiots* by Christopher Meredith include representations of ageing fatherhood. Furthermore, texts by Siân James and Kate Roberts that are not discussed within this

study suggest that there is more work to be done in this area.[2] In a related trope, a number of the older characters discussed return to places from their childhoods in later life. In several short fictions not included in the scope of this thesis, this motif is complicated so that ageing protagonists return to their siblings or other relatives when they are nearing death.[3] Given the importance of child narrators and the affinities between older people and children to be found in Welsh fiction in English, I think this subject deserves further investigation. Finally, due to the mixed methodology and range of theoretical concepts employed throughout this thesis, some of the approaches taken might be extended to aid the comparative analysis of representations of old age in other primary texts. In particular, while I discuss Kate Roberts's use of uncanny elements and gothic tropes in 'Buying a Doll', my wider reading and the growth in critical interest in the gothic and the uncanny in Welsh literature suggests that this approach has more to reveal about ageing in the field.[4]

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[2] See Kate Roberts, 'The Treasure' (1972), in *The World of Kate Roberts, Selected Stories 1925-1981*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 326-31, and Siân James, 'Too Much Excitement, in *Not Singing Exactly: The Collected Short Stories of Siân James* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1996) pp. 53-60.

[3] See Margiad Evans, 'Mrs Pike's Eldorado' (1948), in *The Old and the Young* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), pp. 174-85, Kate Roberts, 'Return' (1972), in *The World of Kate Roberts*, trans. by Joseph P. Clancy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 344-48, and Glenda Beagan, 'The Edgeness of Water', in *The Great Master of Ecstasy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009), pp. 253-62.

[4] See, for example, Jessica George, '"Mixed-Up Creatures": Identity and its Boundaries in Arthur Machen's Weird Tales', *Almanac: Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English*, 15 (2010-2011), 29-46, Jane Aaron, *Welsh Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), and Katie Gramich, 'Gothic Borderlands: The Hauntology of Place in the Fiction of Margiad Evans' in *Rediscovering Margiad Evans: Marginality, Gender and Illness*, ed. by Kirsti Bohata and Katie Gramich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 53-68.

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