

## *A LAODICEAN AND HARDY'S WIDENING GYRE*

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This paper reviews Thomas Hardy's novel *A Laodicean* as a prominent example of the novelist's interest in the conflict between past and present. Hardy tackles this matter in most of his works but the novel under scrutiny displays a convincing picture of characters oscillating between the two with the sense that what lies ahead may be worse than what once was. The research employs pertinent theory to clarify the particularities of the spirit of the age in which the work was composed and to explore how it had an effect on Hardy.

**Key words:** Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean*, past, present, future, tradition, novelty

Thomas Hardy's novel *A Laodicean* is subtitled "A Story of To-day" and was written in the early 1880s (Hardy 1983: 145), which immediately signals to the reader that the story will concern contemporary questions. This moment in Victorian England – the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – can be thought of as a period in which people were growing more conscious of the ramifications of all great changes in technology, following the Industrial Revolution, and in thought, attending, among other things, Lyell's and Darwin's publications. Himmelfarb remarks in her exploration of Victorian thought that the truly significant "events in this period were not crises or riots but books and ideas. The year 1859 saw the publication of two seminal works of modern times, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and Mill's *On Liberty*" (Himmelfarb 2007: 9). Carlyle believed this was a time of "great outward changes" and that it was "sick and out of joint" (Carlyle 2007: 48). He also commented that this sense was to be observed in other nations too – a kind of struggle that affects society completely, a "grinding collision of the New with the Old" (ibid., 48 – 49). John Stuart Mill recognized that a prominent feature of his age was that "it is an age of transition" (Mill 2007: 53). It was a moment in history that saw the substitution of many features of the world Hardy remembered from his childhood with various novelties. Millgate notes that Hardy harboured "a deeply personal need to preserve the

local past, to keep it alive in memory if not in fact” (Millgate 2004: 233) and makes a note of the writer’s own words that describe this local past as “a vanishing life” (Hardy in *ibid.*). This desire is manifested in *A Laodicean* in that it reviews several aspects in which a country community witnesses the ebb of tradition and the flow of novelty.

More particularly, Widdowson observes that the novel “represents the ‘clash’ of ‘the modern spirit’ and a ‘romantic’ medievalism in comic form” (Widdowson 1998: 99). We find Iser’s idea of literature being a kind of interpretation of reality or a reaction to a real world (Iser 1989: 209 – 210) applicable to the current discussion. Hardy was conscious of what “the spirit of the age” would bring about and reacted to it by attempting to protect what he cherished. Additionally, Taylor finds that this story carries a flavour of romanticism which is “subdued by scientific reason and so fortified to meet the future, but which continues instinctively to flourish”; and also deems that it “is an extension of the study of modernism” that was present in different forms in *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *The Return of the Native* (Taylor 1982: 120, 118). We may add that this thread runs through other novels – *Two on a Tower* narrates a peculiar relationship in which the roles of male and female characters are reversed – the man is a scientist, secluded in a tower, and is visited by a much older woman, and they engage in a romantic fascination whose contrast causes surprise in the local rural community. In *The Woodlanders* readers learn about a corner in Wessex that is shielded from the outside world by its woods. The locals are occupied in their age-old lumber business but two characters cause unrest – a doctor who conducts unconventional experiments and is an outsider to the local society, and a young lady who is a native but has received education elsewhere and so occupies a transitional position. This echoes Clym’s story from *The Return of the Native* in which he returns from abroad skilled in a profession, but in his desire to remain at home and help with the education of the natives, he fails tragically, which confirms Yana Rowland’s understanding of Hardy’s characters as being part of a universe they are “doomed to witness, to research, and to adjust to, without being able to significantly alter” (Rowland 2014: 131). The list can be extended with other instances from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Well-Beloved*, and *Jude the Obscure*.

The general impression one gets from most Hardy novels, and from *A Laodicean* too, is that this approaching change is of a scale and nature that carry uncertainty and engender apprehension. This is why I have included a reference to W. B. Yeats’s apocalyptic poem *The Second Coming*. The poet is known to have been fascinated by theories about the

unfolding of time in the shape of two opposing cone-like gyres (Macrae 1995: 153). According to this theory, matters grow worse in time as the gyre moves from the sharp edge of the cone-like shape to the wider base of it, hence the reference to the whirl in the widening gyre of the poem in question (Yeats 1989: 187). Of course, Hardy's novels are not apocalyptic in any way but the overall pessimism and uneasiness as regards changing times with which the reader is presented signal that the future may not bring positivity.

It is interesting to note that this novel was written after *The Trumpet Major*, which was composed after considerable factual research. *A Laodicean*, however, seems to have little to do with actual events or places (Lea 1977: 252) and yet Hardy is reported to have said that this work "contained more of the facts of his own life than anything else he had ever written" (Gibson 1999: 63 – 64). Some suggest that he had in mind "his architectural experience and European tours" (Pinion 1968: 37) but I think that this connection can relate to Hardy's outlook and his personal philosophy of history.

The original preface to this novel is noteworthy in the light of the current research as it begins with a comment on changes:

The changing of the old order in country manors and mansions may be slow or sudden, may have many issues romantic or otherwise, its romantic issues being not necessarily restricted to a change back to the original order; though this admissible instance appears to have been the only romance formerly recognized by novelists as possible in the case.

(AL<sup>1</sup>: 33)

Thus, Hardy suggests that the current work will deal with social and other transformations, and that the novel may present a change which does not restore the state of affairs to square one. It is additionally disclosed that the target audience is an older generation – people "whose years have less pleasure in them now than heretofore" (ibid.). In other words, there was a nostalgic motivation behind the writing of this and other Wessex novels, which is one of the reasons the author deems other people felt the same way about the metamorphoses in question. I believe that he conveys his observations mainly along the lines of the choice of characters (their social and professional background as well as behaviour) and technological manifestations of novelty (wire, photography, trains, etc.) as well as people's use or reaction of them. In this paper I shall examine his attitude

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<sup>1</sup> I shall henceforth use this abbreviation to refer to the edition of *A Laodicean* I have listed in the bibliography appended to this publication.

to historical change through the lens of John Stuart Mill, Hayden White, and Robin Collingwood, among others.

It was early in the Victorian Age that Mill reflected in his essay *The Spirit of the Age* on the way people react to change:

Men cleave with a strong and fervent faith to the doctrine which they have imbibed from their infancy: though in conduct they be tempted to swerve from it, the belief remains in their hearts, fixed and immoveable, and has an irresistible hold upon the consciences of all good men.

(Mill 2007: 75)

I can argue that the kind of laodiceanism which was exhibited by Hardy himself, with his sentiment for the vanishing life he cherished, combined with an understanding that change was inevitable, is to be observed in his characters who react ambiguously to the transformations, and that this behaviour fits Mill's description. I shall try to illustrate this push and pull between novelty and tradition in the lives of people by focusing on several characters and their environment.

### **Paula Power**

A central character is Paula Power, a “modern flower in a mediæval flower pot” (AL: 67), as the novel defines her. This, among other reasons, appears to be why critics believe that at “the centre of this curious melange of new and old is Paula Power” (Pinion 1968: 37). Her medieval flower pot is the castle of a declined old family – Paula “lives in the castle with the daughter of the last de Stancy to own his feudal inheritance, and just as the structure contains new and old, so Paula and Charlotte de Stancy represent new and old” (Gatrell 1986: 75). “A clash between ancient and modern” is what George Somerset, the young architect, exclaims when he learns a little bit about the heroine. One could think that this is why Somerset is attracted to her as he is more or less an autobiographical projection of Hardy who, as we shall see, was obsessed with this contrast. The fact that the two descendants of these families live in the castle that was owned by one and then the other is only one of the instances in which tradition and novelty attempt co-existence. In fact, this change of families who are in power is displayed on a smaller scale in the castle but also on a much larger scale as the two families represent two orders – the feudal de Stancy (old order) gives way to the industrial Power (new order) – can be connected to Mill's suggestion that a society is “in its transitional state, when it contains other persons fitter for worldly power and moral influence than those who have hitherto enjoyed them” (Mill 2007: 65). He explains

that the criterion for being fitter for worldly power is “the same as in the middle ages – namely, the possession of wealth, or the being employed and trusted by the wealthy” (Mill 2007: 74). In our case the difference in the two families’ wealth is brought about by the more entrepreneurial spirit of the Powers and the apparent lack of productivity of the de Stancys, which also seems to be the reason for the downfall of Tess’s family who are the supposed descendants of a once noble line that have failed to adapt over time and have turned into mere “waiters on Providence” (Hardy 2008: 39). It must be noted that Mill’s observations suggest that a kind of a social revolution must happen. Maybe it was because some years since the French revolution had passed that he expressed this desire stating that

Worldly power must pass from the hands of the stationary part of mankind into those of the progressive part. There must be a moral and social revolution, which shall, indeed, take away no men’s lives or property, but which shall leave to no man one fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance.

(Mill 2007: 64)

Among the aims of progress he places the establishment of a new order that is more just and dependent on people’s merit rather than on their heritage. This is where one can spot a difference between his and Hardy’s thinking. While the writer’s works, the novel in question in particular, also give advantage to the progressive part of mankind, they do not speak of or aim at bringing about a revolution with positive consequences. On the contrary, the reception of changes is registered with some anxiety and without any prospect of a promising future.

Shifting our focus back to Paula, her Laodiceanism is manifested not only in her reluctance to be baptized but also in other respects not connected to religion. This swaying between two mutually exclusive opposites is indicated, on the one hand, in her fascination with old architecture, lineage, etc. and, on the other hand, with modern inventions such as the telegraph and the railway. Another instance of her indecisiveness is seen in the time it takes her to choose one of two options for a partner – in the end she chooses Somerset but she still wishes that he were a de Stancy (AL: 437). This lukewarmness, we could argue, is so concentrated in Paula because she is the main character and hence should be the point where an emphasis is placed for the theme that is central to the plot – the conflict between tradition and novelty. This collision, however, is also manifest in other members of her society – in fact, we could say that her lukewarmness is not something negative in the context of other

characters' behaviour – Dare perverts photography, which at the time was more closely associated with science rather than with art, so as to force the events into the course he wants them to take. It can be argued that Paula, being the rich heiress to a fortune made by building railways, is one side of the coin and Dare – the other. The coin exemplifies the ramifications in the psyche and behaviour of one who lives at a time of conflict between old and new.

### **Paula's Name**

To some, she is “one of Hardy's most overtly feminist portraits, as her name suggests” (Hardy 2000: 13). Her name is discussed by many but attention is paid to the surname, as in the cited example, and not to the first name: Koehler, Widdowson, and Barbara Hardy are only some of the scholars that register this. Widdowson, after explaining the obvious symbolic association between her surname and her wealth, adds that in many ways “she is another of Hardy's ‘new women’ (Ethelberta, Tess, and Sue Bridehead), and as such is another destabilizing factor in the transition from ‘ancient’ to ‘modern’” (Widdowson 1998: 103). It is exactly this transitional element, I believe, that can be linked to her first name. *Paula* is a female version of *Paul*. Considering the context of religion and change in the novel, one cannot but be reminded of St. Paul. They share a similarity in that he too was a figure that embodied the transition between the old and new religion of his time, between zealotism and Christian behaviour, a Roman, a Jew, and a Christian in one (Acts 8, 9, 13, 14, 20). At the beginning of the novel, she runs away from the chapel, while towards its end she enters a number of temples in search of her beloved, George, which is similar to St. Paul's change in attitude in a way. Adding to the comments concerning her surname, while I can agree that her character exhibits feminist traits, this is not unique in Victorian literature as such heroines are present in the works of Gaskell (Margaret Hale<sup>2</sup>), Charlotte Brontë (Jane Eyre), Eliot (Maggie Tulliver), and other writers. What is idiosyncratic about Hardy, however, is that he often puts at the centre of

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<sup>2</sup> When talking about a striking female character, railways, and change in the status quo in a Victorian context, I cannot but pursue a juxtaposition between Paula and a notable heroine from Gaskell's *North and South*. The latter is a pertinent point of reference as it portrays the conflict between old and new, agricultural past and industrial present, and other related oppositions. The difference lies in the fact that in this earlier novel (1854) Miss Hale feels the ingress of change when she moves to the industrial metropolis that Milton is whereas with *A Laodicean* and most Hardy novels this advance is represented in a rural community or place of residence.

his novels a female character who is prominent and contrasting to the established social norm, as Widdowson rightly observes in the earlier citation. We need only mention Bathsheba Everdene, Tess, Eustacia Vye, Ethelberta, Viviette, Paula Power, and Sue Bridehead. One critic notes that Paula is similar to many Hardy heroines in that “she has ideas ahead of her time, and this is her tragedy” (Thomas 1999: 110). In fact, some see her as “a prototype New Woman, whose character is more fully developed in the figure of Sue Bridehead” (Thomas 2013: 59) in Hardy’s last and most poignantly tragic novel.

Paula is fascinated with her old castle as she wants to restore it but also introduces upgrades and wants some additions which would make it eclectic. Pinion sees in this the “attachment of the new industrial magnates of England to feudal architecture and aristocratic trappings” (Pinion 1968: 37) or, in other words, it is a mark of the times. On the other hand, the desire for making eclectic additions to her property may be a sign of confusion as to what she likes or who she is; but it could also signify a less conventional personality type – one that is more fragmented in their preferences simply because there is a greater range of things to choose from. Her refusal to be baptised in the chapel erected by her father is a breakaway from tradition just as the building itself was a move away from canon – we know that Paula’s father “was a great Nonconformist, a staunch Baptist up to the day of his death” (AL: 62). Somerset’s initial reaction upon seeing the building is the self-explanatory exclamation “what a monstrosity” (AL: 43) and the narrator explains that it is “a recently-erected chapel of red brick, with pseudo-classic ornamentation” that was erected in “187-” (AL: 43) which he later labels as “that utilitarian structure” (AL: 56).

### **Dare**

Dare is “one of the few wholly unsympathetic characters in Hardy” (Larson 2009: 71) that symbolises change in a strictly negative way. He is an illegitimate son to the de Stancys, someone who studies chance and uses it not only in gambling but also to manipulate people’s lives for his benefit. As his name suggests, he is willing to take risks and play with fate. He is recognised as having a “strongly allegorical role” and is associated with “the almost frightening potential of new technology such as photography and telegraphic communication” (Larson 2009: 82). His figure is mainly linked to the photographic manipulation that puts Somerset in an unfavourable position. Hardy’s particular choice of words concerning this falsification deserves attention:

Of all the thoughts which filled the minds of Paula and Charlotte De Stancy, the thought that the photograph might have been a fabrication was probably the last. To them that picture of Somerset had all the cogency of direct vision. Paula's experience, much less Charlotte's, had never lain in the fields of heliographic science, and they would as soon have thought that the sun could again stand still upon Gibeon, as that it could be made to falsify men's characters in delineating their features.

(AL: 332 – 333)

The phrase “heliographic science” shows the attitude to photography that was prevalent in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – this age was dominated by science and, some suggest, the faith in it supplanted that in God (Larson 2009: 71). The amazement of the two ladies at the manipulation is indicative of a disenchantment and disillusionment with this new faith. What is more, we could compare, as Jackson has done, the ease of perverting science with the reliability of old portraits – the ones that Somerset views in the castle all show resemblance to the de Stancys and even though they, being paintings, are more likely to be associated with art or fiction, they are more reliable signifiers than photographs, at least in the context of this novel (Jackson 1984: 99). Thus, it could be said that Dare employs various forms of science – photography and a kind of mathematics, or a theory of probability, as he is said to study “Moivre's Doctrine of Chances” (AL: 152). In other words, he uses those to secure that course of events which is favourable to him and adapt an environment to himself or vice versa so as to survive. This, in the light of Darwin's theory, discloses yet another aspect of Dare's modernity.

### **Somerset**

Somerset is yet another peculiar character who is marked by the conflict between new and old. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator philosophizes that his story – “the soaring of a young man into the empyrean, and his descent again” (AL: 40) – is an old one. Additionally, we are reminded of some aphoristic observations on the difference between young and old people (*ibid.*). This establishes one of the main binary oppositions in the novel – that of young versus old, tradition (*habit*) versus novelty (change in custom). The appearance of such a comment in the introduction of a character suggests that their story will echo the interaction between the two poles of the above oppositions. Furthermore, the title of the novel and the entire context of the story hint that neither of the two will take the upper hand as oscillation between extremes reigns in the lives of most characters.



Immediately after this, the narrator references the process of training a young horse which, thanks to “the knotted whipcord”, always results in the latter’s

... level trot round the lunger with the regularity of a horizontal wheel, and in the loss for ever to his character of the bold contours which the fine hand of Nature gave it. Yet the process is considered to be the making of him.

(AL: 40)

This prepares readers for what may happen if the expectations that this dreamer harbours are not fulfilled. Additionally, the described process offers a philosophy voiced by Hardy’s narrator. If the colt in the story stands for Somerset, then the training of the horse, or its breaking, could be equated to a young person abandoning their aspirations for something more than the established norm. While the latter sounds like some form of cultivation, we are told that it moves one away from Nature. The logic of the process in question seems to imply that one has not been created to conform to a cyclical movement in a rut established by a majority. Also noted is the irony of the rooted belief that one’s fashioning according to a standard (their becoming similar to others), brought about by violence (“the knotted whipcord”), is what “is considered to be the making of him”. All this showcases an anxiety as regards the potential for cultivation, which is supposed to facilitate progress and not obliterate individuality, and how pernicious adherence to tradition may prove.

### **Environment and Time (The Castle and its Inhabitants)**

The castle is worthy of examination as we follow the characters in its spaces, witnessing its history, new improvements and restoration. It is another meeting point of old and new and its burning at the end of the novel could be a moral meaning that the two should be appreciated separately as their combination leads to detrimental results for both sides. This medieval flowerpot contains not only a modern flower (Paula) but also, as Somerset observes when he first enters the building, other *inhabitants* – a telegraph and a new clock. We are introduced to a description of some architectural features that mark the grand centuries-long legacy of the castle, which appears to be pierced by an electric wire that enters through the arrow-slit “like a worm uneasy at being unearthed” (AL: 53 – 53). This episode may reflect a young architect’s surprise at the discrepant intrusion of modern technology in this history-infused building but it could also be indicative of a reaction to one manifestation of the conflict between novelty and tradition. Either way, he does not utter any exclamation at the sight of the

telegraph but the narrator's words have negative overtones. Maybe there are other openings in the building of a castle that can allow a cable to pass but the choice of an arrow-slit could signal the potential intentions of indirect suggestion that the castle, or, rather, the order that it stands for, has been pierced from without. The wound, then, is inflicted by an outsider to the castle, which is possibly in the process of being conquered. Considering the context of the novel, we could say that Paula is the one who fits this description. As pointed out above, she is from an industrial family and acts in a spirit different from that which abides in the local community and that which has hitherto possessed the castle. The latter is seen in her shrinking from a religious ceremony, and the former is made evident in the innovations noted. In addition to the telegraph, George notices that the clock is "not, as he had supposed, a chronometer coeval with the fortress itself, but new and shining, and bearing the name of a recent maker" (AL: 54). Miss de Stancy then observes that the old clock erected by her great grandfather in the eighteenth century was replaced because of Paula's belief that since time is "so much more valuable now, [it] must of course be cut up into smaller pieces" and the new device delivers, as it tells the seconds while the old one "only told the hours" (AL: 64). This awareness of change is the type of consciousness that Mill labels as a mark for an age of transition (Mill 2007: 51 – 52). Naturally, it is likely that this recognition of a novel way of more precise measuring of time was a by-product of the Industrial Revolution – goods had to be produced within certain temporal slots and the movement of these goods shipped by trains and other more modern vehicles had to be scheduled, for instance.

It is also noteworthy that during this first visit to the castle, George finds a number of paintings, the works of renowned painters such as Holbein and Vandyck, of "the past personages of the de Stancy line" in a very poor condition, with many of the frames "dropping apart at their angles" (AL: 54 – 55). The dilapidated state of the painting accords with the motif of an old family in decline – a topic that the writer touches upon in other novels such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Furthermore, the problematic condition of the frames echoes the relationship between the current state of the de Stancy line and their former castle. A frame is a kind of container – it delimits and supports what is inside. In this case, we are offered for consideration the likenesses of members of an old family no longer being supported and held in place. The old family is no longer supported or surrounded by its original vessel (the castle), which is also "in such a dilapidated and confused condition" (AL: 59). There is a trace of the de Stancys in the castle – the presence of Charlotte, whose face George

considers upon their first encounter as “a defective reprint” of the “de Stancy face with all its original specialities” (AL: 57). Somerset is also surprised to notice that she has “a touch of rusticity in her manner” (AL: 59) – “he could scarcely believe this frank and communicative country maiden to be the modern representative of the de Stancys” (AL: 61). Besides, the young architect is also disappointed to find out that she does not know the names and histories of some of her ancestors. What is more, after remarking that these works no longer belong to her family, she adds with serenity “and perhaps it is just as well that they should have gone.... They are useless” (AL: 61). To value something on the basis of how high a degree of utility it has is definitely in accordance with the spirit of the age that this “story of to-day” is a part of – the spirit of utilitarianism.

After this first visit, George contemplates Paula’s mixed nature and “the incongruities that were daily shaping themselves in the world under the great modern fluctuations of classes and creeds” (AL: 67). In other words, the particular experience on a small scale generates reflections about general large-scale matters. What he witnesses in the comradeship between Miss Power and her “company-keeper” Miss de Stancy, he recognizes as “an engaging instance of that human progress of which he had expended many charming dreams in the ears when poetry, theology, and the reorganization of society had seemed matters of more importance to him than a profession which should help him to a big house and income, a fair Deïopeia, and a lovely progeny” (AL: 68 – 69). Apart from the obvious autobiographical tinges that can be sensed in Somerset’s pursuits, we are presented with another example of how the young architect establishes connections between the particular and the general in the sphere of human progress.

### **Matthew Arnold’s Influence**

Millgate validly points out Hardy’s reading of Arnold’s essay on Heine and its discussion of the want of correspondence between ancient and modern (Millgate 2004: 175). In Arnold’s *Heinrich Heine*, the German poet is described as Goethe’s most significant successor in “the war for liberation of humanity” which is about the “liberation of the modern European from the old routine” (Arnold and Goethe in Arnold 1863: 6, 9). One’s understanding is expanded by Arnold’s famous comment:

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules, which have come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward, yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation,

that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that, for them, it is customary, not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit.

(Arnold 1863: 7 – 8)

In other words, a discernible feature of the modern times is the realization that tradition is like a foreign body to one's actual life – something so different that its presence contrasts starkly with one's current life. While this may be valid for any age, we must take into account that the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw great changes in many fields, as mentioned earlier, and these vast transformations certainly contributed to a faster awakening in this regard. In a context of this kind one can easily fit the instances of novelties contrasting with traditions – be it in the religious custom Paula refuses to take part in (which in itself is a departure from an established tradition of the Church of England), or the explanations regarding the importance of time and the preciseness of the new clock as opposed to the old one. Both are cases of someone realizing that what has the status of an established norm is not relevant to their actual life. They are examples of awakenings of the modern spirit.

Arnold also notes that “the process of liberation, as Goethe worked it, though sure, is undoubtedly slow” (Arnold 1863: 10) which may accord with Collingwood's remark that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “modern thought” developed updated views of nature and history which led to a realization history develops is not cyclical but rather in a spiral movement, among other things (Collingwood 1949: 12 – 13). He explains that

Changes that appear to be cyclical are not really cyclical. It is always possible to explain them as cyclical in appearance only, and in reality progressive,... or objectively, by saying... that what has been taken for a rotary or circular movement is in fact a spiral movement...

(Collingwood 1949: 14)

In other words, advancement does not necessarily follow a straight progressive line but sometimes meanders, which is why when the future carries more uncertainty, people grow pessimistic toward what is looming on the horizon. The great number of novelties encountered by the characters of *A Laodicean* and the pace at which they changed or disrupted people's lives led to similar negative anticipation. Returning to more philosophical overtones of conclusion, Arnold's comment also echoes Mill's earlier implication that the process of outgrowing various forms of past legacy takes time (Mill 2007: 79) as well as Carlyle's time-conscious beliefs that “the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each

begins and perfects on himself" (Carlyle 2007: 48). While these thinkers expressed a view of social development at the beginning of the Victorian period that is similar to the one in Hardy's work in terms of speed, the hopeful charge in what Hardy wrote appears to be absent. This can be confirmed by a consideration of *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Hardy's last novel. It takes the Malthusian ideas expressed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* to new extremes of bitterness and leaves Hardy's readers in a still widening gyre from which there seems to be no escape.

Neither tradition nor novelty are particularly well-received within the boundaries of the world of *A Laodicean*, which is not surprising, considering the lukewarmness this title suggests. Sadly, even those of Hardy's characters who embrace novelties such as more accessible education in rural areas grow disillusioned over time and this results in hopelessness, as is the case with *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's last novel.

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