

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Lincoln		
Unit of Assessment: 27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: The Good Age: Transforming Attitudes to Older Age through Literary Engagement		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 - ongoing		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
CULLEY Amy CROSSLEY Alice	Senior Lecturer Senior Lecturer/ Programme Leader	6 Sep 07 to date 4 Apr 16 to date
ADISESHIAH Siân	Reader	26 Jan 04 – 31 May 18
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - ongoing		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Research by Culley, Crossley, and Adiseshiah on literature and ageing has had an impact on the cultural participation and self-perceptions of older people and improved public audiences' social and historical understanding of later life. The research challenged negative attitudes and stereotypes, increased awareness of the significance of age for reading literature, and inspired creative practice and artistic expression through research-led workshops, reading groups, and public lectures. Researchers also helped shape public debate through their work with national organisations to inform current thinking about later life and the place of older people in our society.		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Impact was underpinned by the research of Culley, Crossley, and Adiseshiah into personal narratives of later life and literary representations of ageing from the nineteenth century to the contemporary. Collectively, this scholarship addresses the relative neglect of age as an identity category within literary studies and advances understanding of the intersections between old age and gender. A key strand of the research is Culley and Crossley's focus on the nineteenth century, a period that significantly influences our contemporary attitudes to ageing but has received little critical attention. Culley's funded research recovers women's personal narratives of late life in manuscript journals, letters, and auto/biographies, which have not previously been the focus of scholarly examination. These unfamiliar sources provide rare insights into the experience of ageing, particularly the gap between self-image and social perception, and offer new frameworks for the analysis of life writing and female authorship, most notably in challenging a narrative of ageing as decline. The work has been supported by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship (£114,724 – January 2020-March 2021), a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant (£3818 – July 2015-July 2018), and a Chawton House Library Visiting Fellowship (July 2014) and has resulted in the publication of a book chapter and an article [3.1, 3.2]. Crossley's monograph and article [3.3, 3.4] establish age-consciousness as an integral part of nineteenth-century debates about masculine identity and provide new understandings of the influence of the Victorian period on modern age categories. Her special issue on 'Age and Gender' for the journal <i>Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies</i> (2017) foregrounded the importance of this earlier period for scholars of ageing, gender, and literature. Culley and Crossley's research coalesced in their co-organisation of the international conference 'Narratives of Ageing in the Nineteenth Century', held at Lincoln and funded by the Lincoln Institute for Advanced Studies (July 2019). The conference opened up dialogues between scholars from the humanities and social sciences and broke new ground in its focus on the representation of ageing across the life course in a variety of media, forms, and genres in the nineteenth century.		

Adieseshiah's research into twentieth century and contemporary ageing, particularly the creative conception of age in utopian and dystopian drama, complemented the work of Culley and Crossley. Adieseshiah and Culley's shared interests led them to co-organise an event for the AHRC's Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities (Lincoln, November 2016) and the British Academy Conference, 'Narratives of Old Age and Gender' (London, September 2019) (Adieseshiah was principal convener and Culley and Jonathon Shears (Keele University) were co-conveners). This landmark conference brought together world-leading scholars from multiple disciplines, creative practitioners, and third sector organisations, to address ageing femininity and masculinity from a broad historical perspective. It engendered new understandings of ageism, narratives of decline versus 'good ageing', late life creativity, ageing and poverty, attitudes to care, intergenerational relationships, and the intersections between ageing, gender, sexuality, and race.

The approach to impact also developed from Adieseshiah and Culley's involvement with the AHRC's Connected Communities Programme. Adieseshiah was a co-investigator and Culley a contributor to the 'Telling our stories' project (£37,000, 2013) which aimed to facilitate and support Lincolnshire communities to research, write, and document their own stories.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All of the research outputs listed here were subject to rigorous peer review by the subject community and academic reviews have endorsed the rigour, significance, and originality of the research. Culley was one of 30 academics awarded a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship for her project 'Narratives of Old Age: Women's Late Life Writing 1800-1850' in 2020. The awards 'are designed to support talented individual researchers with excellent research proposals, and to promote public understanding of – and engagement with – subjects in the humanities and social sciences.' Her book chapter was positively reviewed in *Women's Writing and Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*. Crossley's monograph was praised in *Victorian Studies* for providing 'valuable insights into the ways Victorian culture shaped our modern ideas about adolescence' which 'will certainly interest scholars focusing on aging and literature.'

- 3.1 Amy Culley, 'Ageing, authorship, and female networks in the life writing of Mary Berry (1763-1852) and Joanna Baillie (1762-1851)', in *Women's Literary Networks and Romanticism: 'A Tribe of Authoresses'*, ed. Andrew O. Winckles and Angela Rehbein (Liverpool University Press, 2017) [Book chapter]
Available on request.
- 3.2 Amy Culley, "A journal of my feelings, mind & Body": narratives of ageing in the life writing of Mary Berry (1763-1852)', *Romanticism – special issue 'Romanticism and Ageing'*, Volume 25, Issue 3, 291-302 (October, 2019) [Journal article]
http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/29061/3/29061%20Mary%20Berry_Final-19%20August.pdf
<https://doi.org/10.3366/rom.2019.0434>
- 3.3 Alice Crossley, *Male Adolescence in Mid-Victorian Fiction* (Routledge, 2018) [Monograph]
Available on request.
- 3.4 Alice Crossley, "'I fear I have the heart of a boy": age consciousness and age difference in George Meredith's "The gentleman of fifty and the damsel of nineteen"'. Article appeared in special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* on 'Age and Gender: Aging in the Nineteenth Century' (Summer 2017) edited by Crossley. [Journal special issue and article]
<http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/28623/1/Gentleman%20of%20Fifty%20article%20Crossley.pdf>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The need to address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population is particularly acute within Lincolnshire. The county has an increasingly high proportion of older people – between 2007 and 2015 there was a 3% increase to 22% of population compared to a 2% increase to 18% nationally, with the proportion of people aged 65 and over projected to increase

to 30% in 2039: <https://lincolnshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18624/Appendix%20A.pdf> (pp. 5-6).

The team used their research to benefit the Lincoln community and organisations that represent older people at a regional and national level through:

- a. influencing self-perceptions and changing public attitudes to ageing;
- b. demonstrating the significance of age for reading literature;
- c. inspiring creative practice;
- d. increasing the cultural participation of older people and
- e. informing public debate regarding late life.

The impacts were developed in consultation with Age UK, Lincoln & South Lincolnshire and Excellent Ageing, Lincolnshire.

Researchers **influenced self-perceptions and changed public attitudes** to growing older in the present by drawing on their studies of ageing in the nineteenth century. Culley ran a British Academy/Leverhulme funded workshop for older Lincoln residents (June 2018) 'Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Ageing' using manuscript diaries from her archival research that challenged the reductive association of female ageing with decline, invisibility, and passivity. One participant testified that the workshop '*strengthened a determination not to focus on negativity and decline but rather on the possible benefits that living longer can bring*'. Other readers added that the materials were an '*inspiration*' and that '*the discussion enabled a raising of awareness of how ageing is experienced by different people in different circumstances*' [5.1].

The research also **challenged negative stereotypes and normative cultural narratives** of late life through group reading and discussion that took place as part of a Lincoln Visiting Fellowship for Professor Devoney Looser (Arizona State University), a world expert on ageing and literature in the early nineteenth century. In 2019 Looser and Culley jointly delivered a workshop to Lincoln's Older Readers' 21st Century Literature Book Group, which was founded in 2014 by Adiseshiah and Culley in collaboration with Age UK Lincoln & South Lincolnshire and Excellent Ageing Lincolnshire. The 12 members are local Lincolnshire residents outside of Higher Education, who, in some cases, have not previously been on the University campus nor part of a book group. In the workshop, the group discussed nineteenth-century accounts of 'good ageing' and self-help literature designed for older people. Participants were surprised by the continuities between past and present, with readers noting that the experience had confirmed their views that '*older age has many compensations*' and to keep '*as healthy, active and useful as possible and mak[e] the most of it*' [5.2]. The model has also inspired the development of a similar community book group at Queen Mary, University of London, as the organisers note on their website: '*we were inspired by a reading group on twenty-first century literature for the over fifties at the University of Lincoln established by Siân Adiseshiah and Amy Culley in 2014*' [5.3].

The use of literary research to **stimulate debate amongst older people regarding the value of late life** was central to 'The Good Age: Long Life, Literature and Utopianism', part of AHRC's Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities (November 2016). The event comprised a workshop of 25 members of the public over the age of 60 formulating their own utopian societies and reimagining the possibilities of late life in response to a presentation on literary utopias by Adiseshiah based on her research. The event concluded with a talk by Dame Penelope Lively regarding her memoir on ageing, with 125 in attendance, followed by a public conversation between Lively and Culley informed by Culley's research into women's autobiography in late life. In feedback, older participants encapsulated the benefits of the event in the following terms: '*it validat[ed] my own experiences and their worth*' and '*helped foster a desire to be more proactive in the development of society*', another noted that '*it has stimulated me to [...] seek other*

opportunities to engage my brain! [5.4].

A further direct impact was to **improve public awareness of the significance of age for reading literature**. Culley and Crossley presented their research as part of the Lincoln Book Festival (September 2019). The Book Festival audience remarked that they had not previously considered ideas of literature and ageing, while the talks **inspired creative practice in late life**, with one participant noting *'I'm going to write a novel about growing older in a positive way'* and another that it *'helped crystallise some thoughts I have been having about growing older as a woman and writing about it'* [5.5]. The Book Festival event raised £140 for Oxfam [5.6].

Late life creativity was also the focus of a public talk chaired by Culley, following a lecture by Looser, 'Ageing in Public: Seeing Women Writers Across the Life Course' (July 2019) with 46 in attendance. Audience members gained new understanding of late life creativity and older women's invisibility, with feedback comments [5.7] including: *'I'll now consider age of author in relation to literature'*, *'I will now read books written by the older women [sic]'*, and will think *'about how writers are marketed.'* In response to the question of how the talk had impacted their views of late life, one member of the public noted *'I think that age should not be the reason why you do or do not achieve anything'*. **Increasing the cultural participation of older people** also underpinned Culley and Crossley's literary work with Age UK, Lincoln & South Lincolnshire during the Covid-19 pandemic that responded to the intensified problem of social isolation for older community members. A dedicated Facebook site 'Readers' Corner, Literary Lincoln' was established April-October 2020 through Age UK by Culley and Crossley [5.8].

Researchers **influenced public debate** through the British Academy Conference, 'Narratives of Old Age and Gender' (London, September 2019) (principal convener Adiseshiah and co-conveners Culley and Jonathon Shears, Keele University). This two-day interdisciplinary conference was attended by 72 delegates and ended with a roundtable involving Age UK and National Pensioners Convention discussing the implications of gender for campaigns and policy focused on the rights and representation of older people. Delegates attended from charities, campaigning groups, and arts education, with one participant commenting that the conference *'helped me put into words things that I felt instinctively, but didn't know how to articulate and backed it up with history and research [...] I don't feel so alone now! [...] I feel so much more confident to make connections with other people and organisations and talk about the things that need to change.'* In feedback, delegates commented that the conference inspired them to *'think about contact with [a] wider range of stakeholders'* and to *'look closer at [the] social impact'* of research [5.9]. On the basis of her research and involvement in these projects, Culley was invited to **contribute to policy discussions** by providing comment to the British Academy as part of their response in 2019 to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee – Ageing: Science, Technology and Healthy Living Inquiry [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 **Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Ageing** Feedback forms for workshop 6 June 2018. (pg. 1, 5, 3)

5.2 **Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Ageing** Feedback forms for reading group session 17 July 2019. (pg. 1, 2)

5.3 **Queen Mary, University of London's Public Engagement blog** 'Reading Emotions: Setting up a Community Book Group' 19 June 2015: <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/publicengagement/blog/2015/items/reading-emotions-setting-up-a-community-book-group.html> (pdf available). Letter of support from **CEO of Age UK, Lincoln & South Lincolnshire**, 6 July 2015.

5.4 **The Good Age: Long Life, Literature and Utopianism events, AHRC Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities**. Feedback forms from the workshop and evening talk 17 November 2016 (pg. 2, 4, 6). Film recordings of the workshop and evening talk (on file and available on request).

- 5.5 **Victorian Writers and Writing** Feedback forms for **Lincoln Book Festival** talk 25 September 2019. (pg. 2, 4)
- 5.6 Email from **Deputy Manager of Oxfam Bookshop** 26 September 2019.
- 5.7 **Ageing in Public: Seeing Women Writers Across the Life Course** Feedback forms for public lecture 17 July 2019. (pg. 4, 15, 18, 1)
- 5.8 **Facebook site 'Readers' Corner'** - <https://www.facebook.com/literary.lincoln.3>
- 5.9 **British Academy Conference, Narratives of Old Age and Gender** Feedback forms for conference 12-13 September 2019 (pg. 1, 2, 3). Audio recording of day one of the conference. Social media – #NOAG2019 (pdf available).
- 5.10 Email invitation to contribute to House of Lords Inquiry, 20 August 2019.