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Of the Last Verses in the Book: Old Age, Caregiving, and Early Modern Literature

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of old age in the textual representations of the centenarian Thomas Parr, including verse by John Taylor; in *The Old Law* by Thomas Middleton (and others); and in four plays by William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, and *1 and 2 Henry IV*. This examination shows how old age in the early modern period exceeds chronological and numerical definitions and is instead a contested social construction. By historicizing the representation of early modern old age and also by tracking its changing representation throughout Shakespearean reception history, this dissertation argues that depictions of older people are contingent on a period's cultural and political environment. It argues that old age in early modern drama is forged within relationships between older people and their family, community, and country, and shows how caregiving within these relationships is a central concern. I argue that the negotiation over where to locate care for older people—whether within the family or the in the broader early modern network of affective relationships—unfolds in the plays' reception histories, which reflect cultural preoccupations with notions of dependency, caregiving, the concept of old age as a “second childhood,” and the agency of older people. The chapters address the question of who is responsible for the support of older people, how old people are figured as ablebodied or as disabled by their state, how the older person's voice and body are seen as either agentic or powerless, and how older people are symbolically linked to their country's past and future.

Keywords

Early Modern Drama; William Shakespeare; Thomas Middleton; Thomas Parr; John Taylor; Old Age Studies; Age Studies; Aging in Literature; Caregiving; Intergenerational Relations; As You Like It; 1 Henry IV; 2 Henry IV; King Lear; The Old Law; The Old, Old, Very Old Man

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Paul Werstine, for guiding me through this project and whose encouraging and generous feedback and counsel made it possible for me to learn how to write a dissertation and to do a PhD. I am deeply grateful. I would also like to thank my second reader, James Purkis, for reading my work so carefully and for providing such incisive feedback. I am very grateful to both for their patience, generosity, and for being such excellent teachers and guides. Thank you!

Thank you to Naomi Liebler, Madeline Bassnett, M. J. Kidnie, and David MacGregor. Thank you as well to Alison Conway, Joel Faflak, Matthew Rowlinson, and Sasha Torres.

Thank you to Leanne Trask, Vivian Foglton, Beth McIntosh, and Sarah Douglas for everything you do for graduate students and the department.

Thank you to the librarians and staff at the Western libraries, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Bodleian Library, and the British Library, where this research was conducted.

I cherish all the friends I have made here at Western. I would like to thank all of you for your time, commiseration, help, and support. I would also like to thank Nina Budobin-McQuown, Sally Colwell, Lindsey Hritzuk, Mel Leblanc, Zeinab Mcheimech, Megan Selinger, and Rebecca Wenstrom.

To Jan, Albert, and Joey Sugerman, and Ian McCausland, thank you for your kindness, support, love, and care.

This research was supported by an Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

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1 Introduction

This dissertation examines the representation of old age in the textual representations of the centenarian Thomas Parr, including verse by John Taylor; in *The Old Law* by Thomas Middleton (and others); and in four plays by William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, and *1 and 2 Henry IV*. This examination shows how old age was culturally constructed in the early modern period. Old age has increasingly been considered as a construct that belongs within the purview of cultural studies and that can be subjected to the same academic scrutiny that gender, race, and sexuality have received.¹ The motivation for much of the interdisciplinary work in the field of age studies is to combat endemic cultural ageism by restoring age and aging to scholarly attention, particularly in the humanities. Age studies, writes Stephen Katz, “emphasize[s] the ‘inside of aging’ and what it *means* to grow older. Here the humanities have been especially vital as they promote questions of identity, the body, experience, language and metaphor, life-course continuity and disruption, sensation, emotions, and biography” (“What is Age Studies?” para. 8). Just as scholarship in the fields of gender, race, and sexuality has destabilized the biological essentialism and determinism that have attended these concepts, analysis of cultural constructions of old age reveals that the experience and meaning of old age are not fixed, ahistorical, or determined entirely by a supposed biological destiny, but are instead slippery and shifting. These shifting meanings are evident in the reception of

¹ See Chris Gilleard (“Aging and Aging Studies” para. 4) and William Jeffrey Phelan (xi), for example. Margaret Morganroth Gullette has been a leading proponent of the concept that “Human beings are aged by culture” (*Aged by Culture* 12).

Shakespeare, given that his status in the Western canon perpetually reintroduces his work to new generations of readers, critics, and audiences. The ongoing popularity and cultural prestige of Shakespeare's plays have resulted in a trove of reception and performance histories that allow one to track the changing ways in which his older characters are interpreted over broad swathes of time.² Analysis of the reception of Shakespeare's depictions of older characters shows how the plays have helped to shape cultural constructions of old age. At the same time, a given period's attitudes toward old age also affect the reception of Shakespeare's older characters, producing new interpretations of Shakespearean aging that may be inconsistent with the views on old age that existed at the time of the plays' composition. I show the historical process by which cultural constructions of old age become naturalized and entrenched as fixed ideas in dramatic and non-dramatic early modern texts.

Social constructions of old age change along with changing historical contexts, and these shifts are traceable in Shakespeare's reception history, as performers, critics, and readers respond to older characters in early modern dramatic literature. The second and third chapters take up the reception histories of *King Lear* and *As You Like It* and show how the plays have preoccupied audiences with questions of who will care for older people, and what form this care will take. More specifically, the second chapter traces one trend in *King Lear*'s stage and reception history: the trend in which Lear becomes a character particularly adaptable to clinical paradigms of assessment. I argue that the dominant lens through which actors and critics now interpret Lear is quasi-medical and

² See also Lynn Bradley's study of adaptations of *King Lear* (7–8).

diagnostic, a lens that borrows from gerontology to discover the source of Lear's madness and family strife. Lear has become legible and accessible as a kind of clinical case study that exemplifies a particularly negative experience of old age in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet neither is Lear's relevance as a clinical subject merely an ahistorical reading of an early modern character, nor does Lear's gerontological appropriation necessarily suggest that old age is a transhistorical or universal experience. Instead, Lear's gerontological guise is best understood as part of a process that reaches back to the early reception of the play. The chapter therefore tracks the status of Lear's old age in Nahum Tate's seventeenth-century adaptation, the nineteenth-century performance criticism of the play, and the influence of the critical tradition of character criticism, all of which lead, I argue, to Lear's present incarnation as a clinical subject. The clinical Lear is relevant to literary critics and Shakespeare scholars because Lear's application as a clinical case study is not limited to the disciplinary realms of gerontology and geriatrics. It has extended to actors and literary critics who also draw upon the clinical paradigm to inform their performances and readings of Lear. I suggest that these types of medicalized readings would benefit from returning to Shakespeare's text to analyze the way the play itself represents the physician-patient relationship as having the potential to empathetically engage with Lear even at his most distraught and alienated. Doing so allows readers to confront the play's tragic ending.

The third chapter continues to take up the reception history of Shakespearean old age by examining how Jaques's Ages of Man speech from *As You Like It* has been mediated through visual art. I establish how Shakespeare secularizes the medieval Ages of Man tradition and then focus on how Shakespeare's model of intergenerational

interdependency between Adam and Orlando is transformed in visual depictions of the “Seven Ages of Man” speech from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By examining images produced by visual artists working in these periods, this chapter argues that the pictorial depictions of the first and final stages move away from Shakespeare’s representation of Orlando and Adam’s male version of intergenerational care. Instead, the images establish infancy and old age as belonging to a private sphere of female domesticity. However, these engagements with Shakespeare’s final stage ultimately reveal more about the anxious observer who never empathizes with a state of perceived witlessness or “mere oblivion” in the older person. These visual depictions of the speech essentialize old age as a degraded version of “second childhood” by removing the older person’s voice and hence the ability of the viewer to sympathize with the older subject.

The second and third chapters identify two recurring themes in the reception of Shakespearean old age. The first is the question of who is responsible for the care of older people, the answer to which I argue is deeply gendered. In each chapter, I highlight points in the reception history of both *King Lear* and *As You Like It* when the range of caregiver roles available in the play, which includes male caregivers, is overlooked in favour of the idealization of female filial piety. The second theme is the way in which older people are marginalized and stigmatized: in the case of the reception of *King Lear*, this involves figuring them as a homogenous problem population that burdens the state, and in the case of the reception of Jaques’s speech, this involves figuring older people as voiceless and alienated from empathetic engagement. These concerns—the question of who is responsible for the support of older people, the construction of older people as disabled *vis-a-vis* their state, and the question of how the older person’s voice and body

are seen as either agentic or powerless—set up the direction taken in the latter two chapters of the dissertation.

The methodology of the fourth and fifth chapters changes by leaving aside the focus on reception history and returning to an early modern context. The final two chapters show how the older body becomes a particularly resonant symbol for the state. The fourth chapter draws on the historical turn in disability studies to argue that *The Old Law*, by Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and possibly Thomas Heywood, depicts how old age, citizenship, and “compulsory ablebodiedness” are yoked together in a society that increasingly defines old age through legislation and bureaucracy. In this tragicomedy about the forced execution of the elderly in a city-state named Epire, older characters are forced to perform ablebodiedness over and over again in front of other judging characters. Although the euthanasia law is never actually carried out, by the end of the country’s period of reform the Duke has created a polity in which there are no disabled people and no examples of non-ablebodied old age, while the older characters have been forced to comply with the law by articulating their ablebodiedness and utility to the state. Though my reading initially suggests that *The Old Law* concludes with a more conservative society, ultimately I argue that the theatrical staging of this social transformation serves as a subversive critique of how, in Epire, one’s age and one’s value as a citizen are linked together. Finally, the chapter returns to the question of who will care for older people by showing how the play unpacks the rationale for state responsibility towards the care of a country’s older citizens. I conclude by suggesting that the play seems to anticipate more modern schemes of age-related mass retirement.

If, in *The Old Law*, old age is restructured as a disability and as a “problem” that belongs to the political body of the commonwealth or country, the final chapter argues that the early modern period also possessed a model of aging in which the older body is understood as incredibly and spectacularly productive. The fifth chapter turns to the phenomenon of perceived superlongevity, the real life cases of early modern people who were thought to have lived well beyond the usual limits of life expectancy. The chapter shows how early modern older people are considered to be chronicles, repositories of national history, and argues that old age is enlisted into symbolic, binding, and containing roles at moments of historical anxiety, such as the problem of insecure succession. The commonplace idea that older people serve as preservers and communicators of English history is evident in the real life case of Thomas Parr, who was said to have lived to the age of 152 and who died in 1635. The fifth chapter examines how Parr’s story circulated amongst the court in London and in John Taylor’s poem “The Old, Old, Very Old Man.” Taylor uses Parr as a thought experiment to imagine how superlongevity—the extremely long lives thought to be led by a select few people, frequently those who dwelled in the country—could strengthen the relationship between king and nation, and protect English history from rupture. Taylor’s reparative use of Parr’s old age is particularly timely due to the poem’s composition in the decade leading up to the beginning of the English civil wars.

The chapter then moves back to Shakespeare and the history play. In *2 Henry IV*, Clarence describes older people as “time’s dotting chronicles.” Yet there is nothing politically neutral about chronicles and how they portray the historical process. The capacity of the elderly to be the memory-keepers of a culture is potentially threatening to

the political establishment if the older characters offer contesting versions of history that undermine the political narrative that legitimates the present administration. The chapter shows how *1* and *2 Henry IV* are preoccupied by historiography and how the plays sort different sources of history into the credible and the credulous. The more naïve characters are aligned with a credulous belief in the ability of unseen forces, like prophecy, to direct historical events and their consequences. The more savvy characters perceive that humans shape historical events, and their shrewd understanding of historiography allows them to be more politically successful. This is why Hal must banish Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*: the knight's status as a potentially subversive living chronicle represents a threat to the official discourse of history that Henry V wishes to preserve. Falstaff's subversive presence is reflected in his transgressive performance of old age. In addition to posing a threat to Henry V's narrative of personal and political redemption, Falstaff also represents a break with an older and more transcendent model of aging. The power of the individual to shape history in his or her own favour is mirrored by Falstaff's attitude to his age, and Falstaff embodies a newer, more self-directed type of aging that resembles Hal's self-possessed and strategic self-comportment. Falstaff's insistence on strategic aging, rather than chronological aging, mimics the play's broader focus on the power of individuals to shape their own fate, rather than the influence of the stars, the seasons, or the expectations of others.

All of these works show how early modern old age is inextricable from people's experience of rank, gender, literary tropes, prevailing medical paradigms, and changing economic systems. The remainder of this introductory chapter therefore reviews the historical and literary contexts that provided early modern people with their set of

cultural references for old age, connecting the early modern context to the specific themes that will recur over the course of chapters two to five.

1.1 Defining Early Modern Old Age

The difficult question of when to place the onset of old age recurs throughout the texts under consideration in this dissertation. For instance, the plot of *The Old Law* revolves around the trauma caused by imposing an overly schematic and generalizing threshold of old age. Falstaff is repeatedly told by the Lord Chief Justice that he should act his age, and Lear is reprimanded by his Fool, “thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (1.5.43–44). When were early modern people considered old? Historians of old age have examined whether pre-industrial aging was accelerated; that is, whether people considered themselves old at younger ages than they do today. Countering a widespread assumption that early modern people lived shorter lives and perceived themselves as old earlier, Pat Thane suggests that sixty often served for the onset of old age (24). In terms of demographic data, the low life expectancy rates in the period skew the understanding of how long people lived. As Steven R. Smith writes, “While the rapid growth rate of the early part of the century slowed around 1650, the population remained youthful. Because life expectancy at birth was low (somewhere in the late twenties or early thirties), it has often been assumed that few people lived to enjoy or to suffer old age” (“Age of Transition” 193). However, Smith clarifies, this statistic is misleading, due to high child mortality rates: “In the seventeenth century, perhaps 30 percent of all children born died in infancy; this was by far the most significant factor affecting age distribution and life expectancy” (194). Smith judges that “the best estimates indicate that many people did live to be sixty or more” (193–94).

Though life expectancy may have been shorter, Shulamith Shahar resists the notion that the onset of old age was placed earlier in the lifecycle than it is now:

Contrary to the accepted view that people in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were considered old from their forties, in fact they were classified as old between the ages of 60 and 70. Though in some of the schemes for the division of the life course into stages old age begins at 40, in others its onset is at 35, 45, 50, 58, 60 or 72. . . . The authors conveyed the symbolic identity of each stage in human life, and a judgement of its virtues, rather than an evaluation based on a biological or social reality. . . . According to medieval legislative texts . . . the onset of old age is between 60 and 70. (43)

Determining a chronological threshold for early modern old age is as difficult as it would be to identify a standard onset for old age in the twenty-first century. Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith warn against taking any of the numerical thresholds of old age found in the period's literature too much at face value:

It used to be too easily assumed, often on the basis of literary evidence, that just as people in the past were extremely short in stature by modern standards, so were they likely to be 'old' when still young. . . . However room must still be made, not only for the relativity of individual experience, but for the undoubted fact that, historically, definitions of old age have been attached to any of the decades after 40, according to context. . . . Early modern observers found it natural that rich and poor should age at different rates; differences were also recognized between men and women. (6)

Older characters age at different rates and in different ways as well. King Lear self-defines as “a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less” (4.7.69–70). Falstaff is deliberately vague when he implies that he may be “some fifty, or, by’r Lady, inclining to threescore” (*1 Henry IV* 2.5.386–87). Threescore is the threshold for female old age in *The Old Law*, a definition that is passionately rebutted by Agatha. And Thomas Parr was reported to have died at the age of 152, not because of a decline associated with old age, but because of a jarring relocation to London’s unhealthy environment.

To emphasise the social construction of old age does not require that one deny the biological reality of human aging (see, for example, Small 4, Thomas, “Age and Authority” 205, Botelho, “General Introduction” xi). The physiological aspects of early modern aging are frequently explained by changes in the humors, humoral theory being the central medical paradigm for the causes of health and illness in the body. Humoral theory is rooted in Hippocrates’s medical writings from 400 BCE (Burrow, *Ages* 14–15) and Galenic medicine from the second century, where “one finds the parallels between ages, seasons, and humours plainly stated, always in terms of the four qualities” (15). Each humor relates to a season, and aging affects one’s temperament as one’s balance of humors changes from hot and moist to cold and dry. While moistness was occasionally suggested as the reason why “elderly people were thought to accumulate excessively [sic] phlegm in their bodies, causing frequent colds, watering eyes, running nose and flow of saliva,” for the most part aging was described as the process of losing moisture over the course of a life, becoming increasingly dry and cold, and therefore increasingly melancholic (Schäfer 14. See also Phelan 41, 42; Smith, “Age of Transition” 200–201).

The humoral change causes age-related personality changes, and thus “the aged would tend toward developing signs of melancholia, even if they lacked this predisposition in their original genetic makeup” (Ellis 19–20). These physiological explanations for the expression of age-related personality traits can be read either as biologically deterministic or as fundamentally changeable, since the possibility of altering the balance of one’s humors through aging or medical intervention remained possible (Larkey xix). Analysis of artistic representations of old age shows, however, that old age is rarely reduced to purely physiological factors, and the role of old age in early modern drama tends to exceed humoral explanations for aging. Furthermore, humoral explanations for old age were not always relevant in the day-to-day assessments of early modern old age: the administration of the poor laws, for instance, was not determined by humour but by functional age and immediate and obvious economic need, as will be discussed in the next section.

Age-related identities were also disseminated through the early modern inheritance of medieval Ages of Man schemes, which will be taken up in greater detail in chapter three’s discussion of *As You Like It*. These schemes, often expressed visually and used to facilitate religious meditations on aging and mortality, represent the human body as it moves through a series of life stages from infancy to old age and sometimes death. These schemes give a shape to life: whereas a wheel conveys the circularity of the lifecourse, a staircase offers the step-by-step conceptual shape for aging process. In Ages of Man schemes, “The natural laws of human development not only govern the growth and decay of the body; they also affect character and behavior. Each Age has its own passions and preoccupations, and hence its own characteristic virtues and vices” (Burrow, “Young

Saint” 391). The shape of a life generally follows predictable patterns: “Whether conceived as a wheel, a staircase, or a passage through the seasons or through the planets, human life was generally seen to have distinct phases of rise, zenith or stasis, and decline” (Phelan 140). Though Jaques’s Ages of Man speech in *As You Like It* makes use of a seven-age version, the seven-stage scheme was by no means the only model available. These models could divide the lifecycle into anywhere between three and twelve stages of aging (Beam 99).

The Ages of Man emphasize the human body’s microcosm/macrocosm relationship to the surrounding world, as these schemes are “supported by analogies in nature or history. The four ages correspond with the Four Seasons, the Six ages with the Six Ages of the World, the Seven ages with the Seven Planets. Thus the Ages form part of a larger order and obey . . . the Law of Nature” (Burrow, “Young Saint” 391). The seven-stage planetary model came to prominence when the twelfth- and thirteenth-century translations of Greek and Arabic texts introduced “a rival scientific theory of the ages of man to England: the astrologers’ scheme of the seven ages” (Burrow, *Ages* 19). Ptolemy described how “established principles of planetary motion and correlated influence” affected age-related behaviour (Phelan 107). Saturn is the planet associated with old age, not only because it correlates with the humoral qualities of old age but also because the myth of Saturn, or Cronos, “the god of time” (Ellis 22), is rife with intergenerational conflict. In this myth, Titan permits Saturn to rule Olympus only insofar as he produced no sons. As a result, Saturn eats all his own offspring except Jupiter, who ultimately castrates his father and banishes him from Olympus (21). As Anthony Ellis writes, this

story carries with it a kernel of intergenerational conflict that resurrects itself in the performance of melancholy older male characters:

If this unsettling myth is kept in mind, we can appreciate how fully the old melancholic body on stage could evoke the memory of Saturn, with its attendant lore on anxiously maintained authority and quashed generations. Many dramatic fathers do indeed resemble Saturn figures who resist the claims of the rising generation even as they come slowly to sense the inevitability of their demise. Only in comedy, of course, the painful costs of the learning process stop far short of the Saturn myth's mixture of cannibalism and mutilation. (23)

In these schemes, with man operating as a microcosm of the larger cosmic order, notions of harmony and morality are bound up with the process of aging. A “normal” ager reassures one that the world operates in harmony, and an anomalous ager threatens a world of moral and cosmic discord. Shakespeare explicitly takes up Ages of Man imagery in *As You Like It* when Jaques cynically secularizes what had, in the medieval period, been a transcendent reminder of one's relationship to God throughout one's life and particularly when one was close to death. The notion of that the body's aging is a microcosm of wider environmental and cosmic forces is also taken up in chapter five, as I show how Falstaff rejects the tradition of viewing aging as a moral progression through time.

Despite the authority of humoral theory and the schematization of aging offered by the Ages of Man tradition, the boundaries and definitions of early modern old age remain contested and fluid. Though old age could be explained by humoral changes in the body, it is also frequently portrayed as something imposed on the individual by

external and often hostile social forces, as will be shown in *The Old Law* and the discussion of Falstaff's interactions with the Lord Chief Justice. Depictions of aging in early modern literature usually draw attention to the socially constructed aspects of old age, reflecting, as Paul Johnson writes, that "Exactly when the individual ageing process makes an adult 'aged' or 'elderly' is a matter of social convention and legal and administrative definition" (3; see also Campbell 2). Katz emphasizes the political importance of exploring the social construction of old age, that "if one considers the life-span to be more than an indisputable biological fact, and examines it as a discursive or imagined production, symbolic of a culture's beliefs about living and aging, then one can also glimpse something of the larger social and ideological orders from which such beliefs derive their significance" ("Imagining the Life-span" 61). Despite the physiological realities of aging, the rhetoric surrounding old age is equally influenced by culturally specific attitudes such as perceived gender differences in aging, religious attitudes toward the spiritual purpose of old age, or perceptions of the political role of older people as counselors.

The undeniably physical aspect of aging does not mean that every person ages in the same way. Aki C. L. Beam outlines the various yardsticks by which early modern women's old age was measured:

physical aging, as youthful beauty declined and women began to exhibit visual signs of old age; functional aging, as women lost their roles of mother and wife, and no longer worked or participated in the community; biological or medical aging, as they experienced age-related infirmities and the loss of sensory and

mental functions; and finally chronological or calendar age, in many ways the easiest to chart (114)

In addition, according to Beam, one experiences a psychological old age when one self-defines as old and a cultural old age when one is “treated as old” by others (114).

Analysis of early modern representations of old age shows that, paradoxically, one of the few firm statements one can make is that the definition of old age is always fluid and contested. Rather than trying to establish a specific number that would have signified one’s general life expectancy or unequivocally determined when one was considered old, it is more productive to look at the wide-ranging ways in which old age was identified, experienced, policed, idealized, celebrated, and degraded. Ultimately, Thane points out, early modern people lived their lives knowing of their potential to be old, whether or not they reached later life or not (6). For the purposes of this dissertation, determining a chronological threshold of old age is less important than preserving the sense that early modern people did live to be “old,” that they were also preoccupied by moralizing about, caring for, criticizing, celebrating, and preventing old age, determining its causes, deploying it figuratively in artistic works, and creating definitions of old age that were just as varied and contested as they are in the twenty-first century.

1.2 Gender, Rank, and Old Age

The representations of old age under consideration in this dissertation are heavily influenced by one’s gender and one’s class or rank. The works discussed in the following chapters also show the intersectional impact of old age and gender on the characters’ experience. In *The Old Law*, Agatha, the only lower-ranking female character in the play, is one of the conduits through which Middleton’s critique of legislated ablebodiedness

becomes clear. Excluded from access to the court, unintentionally included in the euthanasia plot, and alienated from the oversight of the Duke, Agatha is even more vulnerable to her husband's machinations to have her executed. The impact of rank on the experience of one's old age is also explored in *King Lear*, as Lear's fall from royal authority introduces him to the experience of marginality and poverty in old age, and allows him to empathize with the "Poor naked wretches" who suffer as he does (3.4.32). However, lower-ranking people were not automatically considered condemned to a negative experience of old age. Part of the effect of Thomas Parr's presence at Charles I's court is due to Parr's status as a husbandman from the country. His social status and rural lifestyle were believed to be the cause of his superlongevity and were offered as an ideal for the supposedly more dissolute courtiers and city-dwellers in London.

Still, the quality of people's old age often depended on their social status. Positions of authority and esteem were most often held by older men, and "Age seems almost to have been a requirement for certain positions of honor and responsibility, such as the Archbishopric of Canterbury. . . . That men of sixty or older were named to this post indicates that people were not considered worn-out and useless at that age" (Smith, "Early Stuart England" 126). Keith Thomas describes early modern England as a gerontocracy, though he qualifies this claim by noting that despite the fact that older people were among the most powerful, they were also the most vulnerable, commanding the most respect while also suffering terrible neglect ("Age and Authority" 211, 219, 244). Philip Collington summarizes this "central paradox at the core of this nation's social structure: the more gerontocratic the society, the more gerontophobic its disempowered young, who taunted their elders for, among other things, their lechery,

impotence and likelihood of being cuckolded by youthful brides and lusty interlopers” (191–92).

The economic changes that accompanied the transition from the medieval period to the early modern period also affected the social meaning of old age. Chris Gilleard remarks that the identity of old age transformed “within the context of a number of profound cultural, economic, and social changes in European society” (“Aging and Old Age” 26). He lists the general economic developments that altered the experience of old age along with so many other aspects of early modern people’s lives:

From a society dominated by the demand cycles of a subsistence-based agricultural economy with systems of governance framed by local feudal custom and canon law, Europe changed to a society increasingly governed through the secular authority of the state and subject to the new demands of a more complex, mercantile economy. Parallel to these economic changes there was a gradual shift in the intellectual center of gravity of society away from the church and its rural monasteries toward the new institutions of intellectual and economic exchange in the towns and cities. (26)

Gilleard argues that during the shift to modernity, “Qualitative moral yardsticks were replaced by more quantitative, materialist ones” and that these changes affected how the identity of old age was perceived as well (26).

Old age also became a condition that warranted coverage by the Elizabethan poor laws. Economic hardship suffered by the aged poor was addressed by the implementation of these laws, which “provided marginal support to the indigent old and the unemployable” (Ellis 10). Lynn Botelho shows how the poor relief system depended on

both a growing centralization of government and also greater local administration of power, as well as changing roles for local officers, such as “the churchwarden as a parish officer whose brief also included the relief of the poor” (*Old Age and the English Poor Law* 19). The Poor Laws established a welfare system where the responsibility was placed on the parish to administer the relief itself while being accountable to higher ups, but, as Paul Slack writes, “in the last resort, in most places, the responsibility for poor relief lay in the hands of churchwardens, overseers and vestries in the 9000 parishes of England and Wales” (25). Rate payers were canvassed, and relief was distributed by the overseer of the poor on an ad hoc basis. Slack describes how the funds were distributed:

The money was put to a variety of local purposes. It could be used defensively, to avoid future expense: to bind poor children as apprentices, remove pregnant strangers, or even buy housing for native paupers somewhere else. It could be employed to give benefits in kind as well as in cash: shirts, shoes, or lodging; bread or fuel (the latter more commonly than the former by the end of the seventeenth century); medical aid—bone-setting in the seventeenth century, inoculation in the eighteenth [Pelling, 1985; Thomas, 1980]. It ought to have been used, under the statutes, to provide work, and sometimes was: some parishes had stocks of flax or wool which the poor could spin, and bought spinning wheels or other tools for the able-bodied [Melling, 1964, 16–17, 113; Webb, 1996, 130–1].

(27)

Parish relief did not operate as an early modern equivalent to a modern retirement pension (13). Instead, as Slack shows, “Some paupers received a weekly pension, agreed once a year, usually at Easter. Others were granted relief for shorter periods of time,

when ill or unemployed or simply ‘poor’: these were termed ‘casual’, ‘extraordinary,’ or ‘discretionary’ payments” (27). Parish pensions supplemented a number of other means of support and receiving poor relief could constrain people’s freedom, since those who received it were tied to their parish, and to leave made them liable for vagrancy charges (Botelho 13, 12). However, though the early modern poor laws have been held up as a system that stigmatized the poor and the old as dependent populations, the relief payments were still significant policy interventions that helped the poorest people avoid total penury (Thane 9).

1.3 Wisdom versus Second Childishness in Old Age

I shift now from economic and material matters to some of the conceptual tropes that recur in the depiction of early modern old age. One of those tropes is the wisdom frequently attributed to the old; another is the wisdom trope’s counterpart, second childishness. Wisdom frequently acts as the legitimizing feature that determines whether a character is perceived as possessing or performing a “good” old age. Early modern representations of old age tend towards this binary portrayal of old age: sometimes it is an idealized period of wisdom and religious devotion, and sometimes old age is a degraded period of decline and physical suffering when one is at risk of foolish, doting behaviour: “a period of wisdom or of folly” (Thane 55). One could pick and choose classical authorities for both negative or positive viewpoints, with Cicero defending old age as “a time of ease, joy, and contentment,” and Aristotle supporting the notion that old

age is “akin to a disease” (Taunton, *Fictions* 12. See also Collington 189).³ Wisdom is a particularly important component in the positive formulations of old age. The anxiety caused by the prospect of losing wisdom (through what would now be considered dementia, or through the early modern belief that those who behaved foolishly in youth were liable to suffer a foolish old age) is a central feature in some of the most virulent critiques of old age featured in this dissertation. As mentioned above, the fool advises Lear that he has erred in becoming old without acquiring the wisdom that would have protected him from the conspiracies of his daughters.⁴ The texts reveal the fear underpinning what may happen if one loses the ability to perform the wisdom of old age that merits one’s status in a community, which is precisely what occurs during Lear’s “mad” episodes. Jaques’s harsh condemnation of second childishness condemns the older person to “mere oblivion.” The older people in *The Old Law* are reintegrated into society in the end because of their perceived ablebodiedness, which is, for the men in particular, dependent on their ability to serve their country by being restored to their previous positions as wise judges. Thomas Parr’s superlongevity is celebrated for allowing him to live through a remarkable span of English history and to collect historical wisdom. And Falstaff deliberately perverts the role of the wise counsellor in his relationship to Hal by

³ Herbert Donow also notes the contradictions endemic to representations of old age: “Reading renaissance writers on old age, we recognize that, like writers of other periods in Western culture, they expressed contradictory attitudes about old age, with some contending that the years bring political and social power, and others seeing only advancing frailty” (734).

⁴ See Naomi Liebler on how wisdom becomes a new type of “currency” that is passed from old to young instead of property (“The Oldest Hath Born Most” 117–18).

embracing the idea of the role of the elder as mentor to the younger generation, and then gleefully setting a terrible example.

The anxiety caused by the prospect of losing wisdom also underpins one of the most frequent tropes of old age in the period: that of second childhood, still a common idiom. The commonplace that old age repeats childhood was already a stereotype by the early modern period and “can be traced as far back as Aristophanes” (H. Smith 239). The trope recurs in every text analyzed in this dissertation. Frequently, second childhood is used pejoratively, as Goneril does when she claims that “Old fools are babes again and must be used / With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused” (1.3.20–21). Second childhood also marks the second half of what some early modern commentators viewed as the progress of old age. Old age was sometimes subdivided into multiple, smaller stages: an earlier, more active period that is followed by a second period of extreme old age when one loses community status and enters into the experience of Jaques’s “second childishness.”⁵ In *Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight: Of Melancholike Diseases; of Rheumes; and of Old Age* (published in French in 1597, and translated into English by Richard Surphlet in 1599), André Du Laurens divides old age into three stages, plainly connecting the final “decrepite” stage with second childishness: “all the actions both of the bodie and minde are weakened and growne feeble, the senses are dull, the memorie lost, and the judgement failing, so that then they become as they were in their infancie” (sig. Aa4r). Henry Cuffe, in *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life: Together with the*

⁵ Steven R. Smith identifies in multiple treatises on aging the position that old age may be subdivided into a more active period and a period of general withdrawal (“Age of Transition” 196).

Originall causes, Progresse, and End thereof (first printed 1607, this edition 1633),

describes this division as caused by the gradual loss of heat:

this last part of our life is resembled unto *Winter*, for that although it be in it selfe hot and moyst, (as life consisteth wholly in these two qualities) yet in comparison of the former ages, and in regard of death, unto which it leadeth us, is accounted cold, and this hath also its degrees or parts: the first wherein our strength and heat are evidently impayred, yet not so much, but that there remaineth a will and readinesse to bee doing; and this lasteth usually from our fiftieth yeere unto our three-score and five. The second part of this last part of our life, which they call decrepit old age, is when our strength and heat is so farre decayed, that not onely all ability is taken away, but even all willingnesse, to the least strength and motion of our body: and this is the conclusion and end of our life. (sig. I4v)⁶

Once one moves into second childishness, one is confronted with a perceived loss of reason and identity.⁷ The loss of wisdom associated with extreme old age, and the

⁶ Quotes from Du Laurens and Cuffe have been modernized.

⁷ Susannah Ottaway describes how this period is depicted in the eighteenth century:

at the very last stage of life, what historical sociologists such as Peter Laslett term the ‘fourth age’, ageing men and women were expected to fall into total dependence. Strikingly little was written about this very last stage of life in the eighteenth century. Dependent old age might last a day or a decade, but either way, this was simply a period through which to suffer; nothing could be said about it other than to avoid it as long as possible, and to try to bear it gracefully when it arrived, wishing for a good death, rather than an extension of an old age that could no longer be good. (“Introduction” 2:xiv)

prospect of entering into a period of dependency, are the anxieties at the heart of the illustrations of second childishness examined in chapter three.

Erasmus satirizes the association of the loss of reason with old age in *The Praise of Folly* (published in 1511 and 1512) by having “Folly” enthusiastically endorse the concept of the infantilized older person. The titular character argues that she turns up, delightfully, in infants and adolescents before falling away from people as they mature, when “Their energy slackens, their gracefulness stiffens, their vigor withers away. The further they are withdrawn from me, the less they are alive, until they finally reach . . . burdensome old age, hateful not only to others but even to itself” (20). Folly claims that her reappearance in the old is a gift to help them tolerate old age’s burdens: “just as the gods of mythology help the dying by some metamorphosis, so I too bring those who already have one foot in the grave, back once more as close as possible to childhood. Thus, the widespread notion of *second childhood* is quite accurate” (20). Erasmus also satirizes the trope of the search for eternal youth, having Folly explain that she effects the old person’s transformation into a child by having people drink from the river Lethe “so that they may drink large drafts of oblivion and thus by gradually dissipating their cares grow young once again” (21).

Folly anatomizes the qualities supposedly shared by children and older people and lists the negative stereotypes associated with old age, that of the *senex amans*, the old man in love, and the stereotype of old people’s garrulousness, claiming, “In this respect old age even surpasses childhood: infants are sweet indeed, but speechless, deprived of one of the chief blessings of this life, namely gossiping” (21–22). Clarence H. Miller

points out Folly also degrades the *puer senex* trope (the wise young man, discussed below) when she critiques the appearance of wisdom in children (22n7):

Also keep in mind that old men are immoderately fond of children, and, conversely, children are delighted by old men—‘so birds of a feather flock together.’ After all, what difference is there between them, except that an old man has more wrinkles and has had more birthdays? Otherwise they agree exactly: both have whitish hair, toothless gums, a small bodily frame, and a liking for milk; both stutter and babble and engage in tomfoolery; both are forgetful and thoughtless; in short, they resemble each other in every respect. And the older they get the nearer they come to childhood, until like children, without being bored by life or afraid of death, they depart from this life. (22)

Folly defends herself by equating her influence with the actions of the gods in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, justifying that she “restore[s] the same man to the happiest part of his life. In fact, if mortals would refrain completely from any contact with wisdom and live their entire lives with me, there would not be any old age at all. Instead, they would enjoy perpetual youth and live happily ever after” (22). Wisdom, Folly’s natural enemy, is what ages people. She argues that “these grave and sober personages who devote themselves to philosophical studies or to serious and difficult tasks seem to enjoy hardly any youthful years at all; they grow old before their time because they are forever worrying and beating their brains out about knotty problems, so that their vital spirits gradually dry up, leaving them exhausted and juiceless, as it were” (22–23). Of course, Erasmus’s satire ultimately validates the virtues of wisdom and its association with old age, revealing the superficiality of the cult of youth: “Now, if you all subscribe to the opinion that nothing

is more desirable than youth, nothing more horrible than old age, you can easily see, I imagine, how much you owe to me, since I preserve the one and prevent the other” (24).

Though Erasmus’s satire is ultimately aimed at elevating the virtue of wisdom, Folly’s vicious reduction of extreme old age to the state of foolish childlike behaviour conveys the pejorative attitudes underpinning the trope. As Jenny Hockey and Alison James write, in their analysis of twentieth-century uses of “second childhood,” the association between children and older people persists not only because they “share the experience of dependency” (135), but because the trope carries with it the anxiety caused by a reversal of parent-child relationship: “Old age is no longer simply set alongside childhood; it becomes childhood. As adults we have become metaphoric parents to those aging ‘babies’ who have ‘gone gaga’” (136). Furthermore, they argue, construing old age as a second childhood establishes a power differential between age groups, with the infantilization of older people “operating as it does in the interests of one group, adults, at the cost of others, children and elderly people” (137). Childhood and old age are so persistently associated with each other because

the apparent ‘limitations’ of childhood are mapped on to a parallel series of ‘inadequacies’ believed to characterize old age. Within stereotypical images of old age as ‘childlike’ are embedded, therefore, the metaphoric strategies which create social distances between the worlds of adulthood and old age. By linking old age with childhood, the hegemony of adulthood remains unchallenged. (137–38)

By applying Gramscian theory to the relations between the socially constructed stages in the life cycle, the authors show how rational, individualistic adulthood is an ideological category that shores up its own authority at the expense of childhood and old age.

Ultimately, they argue, the construction of old age as a social childhood is “the basis for the denial of elderly personhood” (143).

For Hockey and James the use of this trope is wholly pejorative. Herbert Covey, however, has traced the trope across a broader historical period and finds that though

The theme is enduring, what changed were the meanings attached to it. . . . Ancient and medieval references to the second childhood seem to emphasize the tragedy of the decline. The concept of foolishness relative to the second childhood was also common during this period. Later modern references seem to stress the humor and social alienation of its perceived onslaught. (“A Return to Infancy” 88)

Covey suggests that the trope was used as a shorthand to recognize the symptoms of dementia (84). It could also be used to criticize older people for individual moral failings. Helen Small interprets Lear’s association with second childhood this way; both Goneril and the Fool imply that Lear enters into a second childhood because of his personal mistakes, “by errant choice, not by necessity” (75). The appearance of second childhood in this dissertation will show that the *topos* is frequently used in order to express fear: the fear of old age as a period of vulnerability when one is dependent on another. The trope characterizes old age as an uncertain time in one’s life that can turn out either positively or poorly. This outcome depends on the presence of another who will either provide love or abandon the older person.

A variation on the second childhood topos is the *puer senex*, or wise youth.⁸ According to Teresa Carp, “This motif was particularly popular if not stereotypical in hagiographical literature of the central and late Middle Ages. Hagiographers used it as a foreshadowing device and to reinforce the pious belief that sainthood was predestined and manifested at a very early age” (737). The possibility of possessing the wisdom of old age in youth reinforces how wisdom served to recuperate old age from its pejorative connotations. As Johnson writes,

Since in almost all medieval discourses about old age the body takes central place, it might be thought that the physical and mental deterioration of the body in old age would generate a consistently negative image. While this is generally true of medical texts and of moralistic and didactic writings, transcendental religious texts saw old age as the symbol of spiritual integrity and wisdom. According to St Augustine, the body could not be both young and old, but the soul could—young through alacrity, old through gravity. Hence the construction in many saintly life histories of the idea of the boy-old man (*puer-senex*), the child or youth who prematurely had been granted the wisdom of old age. (13–14)

⁸ E. R. Curtius collects the numerous appearances of this trope, “in which the polarity youth-age works toward a balance” (98). He notes that it recurs in the early modern period “as a eulogy schema for both profane and Christian use” (100). David Troyansky writes that this trope is used to explain non-conforming age behaviour: “Secular medieval narratives employed the idea of the ages of life to judge individuals according to their conformity with or transcendence of cultural norms. Transcendence usually involved the *puer* or *puella senex*, who in youth already displayed the virtues or wisdom of the old” (“Older Person” 42).

Achieving wisdom in old age is also strongly linked to moral rectitude and is shown to be the product of a well-conducted life. However, the increased wisdom attributed to older people has also been read as a means to discipline and constrain the political voice of the old. Kathleen Woodward argues that the association of old age with wisdom can act “as a screen for ageism,” since “wisdom has almost always been understood as predicated on a lack of certain kinds of feelings—the passions in particular, including anger” (56. See also Martin 68). From this perspective, the forced wisdom of the old denies older people political agency.

1.4 Early Modern Prescriptive Literature on Aging Well

The importance of securing a good old age by disciplining one’s behavior recurs in the plays. In *The Old Law*, Lisander, who is nearing the age of eighty and therefore vulnerable to the euthanasia law, engages in a variety of activities associated with youth—drinking, dancing, and fencing—and has dyed his beard in order to appear younger. Instead of sympathizing with his plight, the morally upstanding Cleanthes lectures him for not conducting himself in a way befitting a person of his age. A good many of the clinical readings of Lear’s old age, I will argue, are preoccupied with Lear’s personal failure to successfully complete old age as a developmental stage, and therefore these readings focus on the way Lear brings about his own tragic end by failing to plan responsibly for himself. The Lord Chief Justice also schools Falstaff for behavior that is inconsistent with the sobriety and dignity that the Chief Justice believes is the proper purview of his age. These prescriptive attitudes are also found in the early modern advice

literature that offers defenses of old age and advice on how to age well.⁹ Thane argues that

In philosophical, theological, and, often, medical texts, from the ancient world at least to the eighteenth century, representations of old age are as often metaphorical as literal: a good, or bad, old age is represented as the reward or punishment for conduct through the life course. Such texts or visual images aimed to teach good conduct and/or temperate living, rather than to represent old age ‘as it was.’ (6)

Though these texts can be read as conduct manuals that discipline the behaviour of older people, they also offer the sense that one can exercise personal agency over the aging process. The treatises aim to “teach [the readers] how to come to terms with [aging’s] unavoidably terminal consequences. The assumption was that idealisations of masculine elderliness (from Cicero, Plutarch, Plato) and Biblical examples of long lived helped those on the frontiers of old age to withstand its anticipated trials” (Taunton, *Fictions* 8). Cicero’s *De Senectute* (c. 44 BCE) was a highly influential defense of old age that was first translated into English by Caxton in 1481 (Thane 40), and was again Englished by Thomas Newton with the title *The Worthye Book of Olde Age* (1569, and translated by

⁹ J. L. Helm summarizes the early modern attitude to what is now called gerontology:

Did there exist a Renaissance ‘art’ of gerontology? The answer is that there did not if we measure Renaissance ‘gerocomy’—Galen’s, Cornaro’s and Bacon’s regimens of optimism, temperance, and hygiene in old age—beside the post-modern exacting clinical and interdisciplinary study of senescence. Yet the idea of such an art is parallel to the entire sweep of Renaissance thought: in the same way that the recovery of Classical learning and literature revived early-modern European culture, the reclaimed Graeco-Roman *ars senectutis*, epitomized in Cicero’s *Cato Maior*, apologist for the aged state as it was, carried within itself an impulse towards rejuvenation and prolongevity. (41)

him again in 1577). Cicero, writing in the voice of Cato the Elder, encourages people to regulate their behaviour throughout their lives, arguing that this will help ensure one's old age is a positive experience:

I am praising that old age which has its foundation well laid in youth. Hence it follows—as I once said with the approval of all who heard it—that that old age is wretched which needs to defend itself with words. Nor can wrinkles and grey hair suddenly seize upon influence; but when the preceding part of life has been nobly spent, old age gathers the fruits of influence at the last. (75)

Per Cicero, old age is not the period of decline that many make it out to be; instead, as Maria Teresa Ricci observes, he offers old age as “a moment of spiritual elevation and detachment from the body” (66). Works like *De Senectute* express the “value attached to being old; old age is a condition worth preserving, and by knowing how to prevent the body's decay, man is in position to fashion nature so as to slow down the whirligig of time and significantly delay its revenges on the body” (Taunton, “Time's Whirligig” 24).

Francis Bacon's *The Historie of Life and Death* (1638) explores the possibilities of prolongevity. The preface assures the reader that it is not unchristian to seek the prolongation of life and defer death (and, implicitly, defer one's salvation) because “For while we Christians aspire and labour to come to the Land of Promise; it will be a signe of Divine favour, if our shoos and the garments of our frail bodies, be here little worne in our journey in the worlds wilderness” (sig. A6v).¹⁰ Bacon asserts that aging can be prevented by repairing the radical moisture that decays with aging. Though the “*spirits*,

¹⁰ Quotes from Bacon have been modernized.

blood, flesh, and fatnesse” are “easily repaired,” “dry parts” such as “*membranes, tunicles, nerves, arteries, veines, gristles*, most of the bowels, and all the organically and instrumentally parts” are more difficult (sig. B2v and B3r). He also rejects the notion that astrological forces influence people’s aging; instead, people age at different rates depending on the era, or Age of the World, in which they are born, the location of their birth, “their stocke and Kindred,” and their personal physical constitution (sig. B6r). Ultimately, Bacon promotes the notion that one can exert an influence over one’s own aging, and his concern is “How Mans Life is lengthned and shortned, by sustenance, Dyet, government of Life, exercise, and the like, and by Ayre” (sig. B6r). Du Laurens also discusses the ideal diet for old people at length. The prescriptive literature is directed towards readers concerned with their own aging, offering defences of old age, or methods to preserve the more active, early stage of old age (as described earlier by Cuffe) for as long as possible. The fascination with prolongevity is also evident in the popularity of Thomas Parr’s life story, and with the pains taken in the accounts of his life to identify the potential variables that led to Parr’s superlongevity. However, the degree to which one can extrapolate the lived experience of early modern old age from prescriptive texts on aging is questionable. As Johnson writes, “The tropes of old age that appear with a certain monotony in texts on health and morals from the ancient world to the modern are rightly viewed as literary constructions, ripe for any number of equally valid readings of the way old age was socially and culturally formed in past times” (17).

1.5 Old Age on the Early Modern Stage

Since the majority of the texts discussed in this dissertation are dramatic, it is important to address what stage conventions existed for representing old age. As in the

prescriptive literature, depictions of old age in early modern drama are also built on convention, the familiar theatrical devices used to signal old age to an audience. These include specific types of “posture and gait, makeup, costume, and strongly symbolic props such as staffs. Changing of hair and beard were particularly effective means of showing aging in men” (Phelan 166n92). Nightcaps, the wearing of which was associated with old or ill men, could also convey a character’s age (Herford and Simpson 8n145). The performance techniques that signaled old age were celebrated when performed by accomplished players; Ben Jonson wrote an epitaph for a boy player who specialized in old man roles, the conceit of which blames his death on his superior performance of old age, which misled the fates into thinking he was old and taking his life prematurely (Gibbons, “Representation of Ageing” 48).

Theatrical portrayals of older people are also informed by the generic types inherited from early modern drama’s progenitors. The template for these characters derives from the Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence, such as the *senex iratus* of the New Comedy tradition, who serves as an obstacle to the younger generation:

What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will. . . . At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play’s society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the

plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero. (Frye 163)¹¹

As Maurice Charney writes, the *senex* is “generally wealthy and was strongly opposed to his son’s interests, which [are] focused on raising the cash needed to buy the freedom of a beautiful young girl enslaved to a pimp and then to marry her” (49). The *senex* characters “tend to be garrulous and long-winded” (62) and conspire against the younger generation. Nina Taunton notes that “Plautus makes his old men the authors of the misfortunes of the young. They are present and active, but do not leave the various stereotypical moulds of the *senex* figure” (*Fictions* 14). The conventionality of intergenerational antagonism in comic plots, and the normative ascendancy of the younger generation, can be read as a ritual banishment or disciplining of the experience of old age itself, a notion that will be taken up further in chapter four on *The Old Law*.

Frequently, the older male character threatens the younger male protagonist by competing with him for the sexual attention of younger female characters. This *senex amans*, or “the *pantalone* character of the *commedia dell’arte*,” is “the proverbial old man who marries a young wife and is thought to be impotent and sexually feeble” (Charney

¹¹ Karl Zender notes the transmission of the blocking older character in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies, such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *As You Like It* (10). Steven R. Smith argues that dramatic literature depicted older characters in a progressively more negative way: “While the dramatists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries depicted old age in a variety of conditions, by the late seventeenth century, drama focused almost exclusively on the negative features. Restoration comedies were full of old men and old women who were generally bewildered and victimized by younger characters. Seemingly, old people were associated with the discarded values of the past, and the glorification of youth reflected the Restoration era’s rebellion against the earlier constricting morality” (“Age of Transition” 197).

100). Older characters that display such behavior are mocked as the “foolish old man in love” (Ellis 3). In real life, the practice of intergenerational marriages was controversial but not uncommon, and Margaret Pelling has suggested that its stigma derives from its association with the practices of self-preservation used by the poor, who would contract second marriages with large age gaps in order to share resources:

It is usually assumed that disparate marriages of this kind were disliked by church and state and subject to popular disapproval. It is possible, however, that during the period in question, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, they were tolerated among the poor, both by the poor themselves and by authority; and that the association of such unions with the poorer classes and their circumstances might be one reason why they came to be so disliked at the end of the seventeenth century. (76)

Smith points to Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* to show how intergenerational marriage is stigmatized due to perceived humoral incompatibility. Because old age is associated with “impotency, a possible result of the coldness and dryness of old men’s bodies,” Burton argues against unequal marriage: “Because this was such a frequent problem for old men and because of the difficulties which it could cause, Burton warned old men not to marry young wives” (“Early Stuart England” 131). However, humoral incompatibility is also used as an argument in favour of marriage to younger women, which could also be imagined as a panacea against aging. As Ellis points out, the notion that “physical contact with young virgins could actually renew the vigor of old men” also circulated in advice manuals and has scriptural precedence in 1

Kings: 1–4, in which the dying King David is brought a young virgin to supplement his lack of heat (24).

As with the portrayal of old age in the prescriptive literature, the degree to which one can extrapolate reliable information about the early modern experience of old age from these stereotypes, tropes, and theatrical conventions has been questioned. The concern here is how to tell when the drama is relying on stage convention and when it may be reflective of real lived experience. Hallett Smith writes, “It is worth asking whether old age in Shakespeare depends more upon stage conventions than upon observations of real life or proverb lore or ballads or treatises of the learned” (240). For instance, Combe and Schmader warn against drawing conclusions regarding people’s lives from comedic elders in this period’s drama, arguing that “the genre of comedy is a metalanguage system that empties the signifier of the elder of its historical reality and meaning as a language object. In the place of that political reality, comedy supplies an ideological signification for the elder—a signification that more often than not has little to do with the facts of the aging process” (“Naturalizing Myths” 192). These scholars are pessimistic regarding the effect of comic tropes on an audience, suggesting that a “thin veneer of humor and sentimentality puts a happy and benevolent sheen over the ageist (and often sexist and classist) brutality extant at a deeper level of these dramas” (192). However, it is possible to read older characters for both the stereotypes they rehearse and also for the moments when the operation of the stereotype is interrupted or complicated. The theatre also offers the potential to interrupt received notions of aging, as some older characters flout the received conventions of old age. Early modern drama often nuances the generic function of older characters. For instance, though the characters of Lucre and

Hoard in Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* are fairly uncomplicated misers, intent upon their function as the blocking agents who prevent the young male protagonist from achieving his financial emancipation and sexual desire, Middleton offers something considerably more complex in his representation of the socially-imposed nature of old age in *The Old Law*, as will be discussed further in chapter four.

Though the influence of fairly one-dimensional comedic characters can certainly be found in the older characters of early modern drama, the early modern stage also offers a much more nuanced vision of the social role of old age. The works discussed in this dissertation show that the causes and effects of the aging process cannot be reduced to any one explanatory model, such as the various Ages of Man schemes, the theory of the humors, or the measurement of one's calendar age (which requires the reliable record-keeping of one's birth date). The works show how old age is constructed within a relationship: the relationships between family members and the relationships between older people and their state or community. These works reveal the influence of familial and intergenerational conflict on old age, the idealizing use of older characters as paragons of ethical and national stability, and they explore how old age (constructed as a state of wonder, decrepitude, inspiration, isolation, poverty, powerlessness, and wisdom or ignorance) is imposed upon the older characters by others. They also dramatize the consequences experienced by the older characters who resist socially normative aging.

1.6 Early Modern Literature and Age Studies

Scholarly treatments of old age in early modern literature often claim that the topic is understudied. For instance, Albrecht Classen has suggested that present-day ageism leads

to a lack of attention to old age in medieval and early modern research, despite the wealth of literary material that deals with old age in these periods:

Has the modern disregard of, or perhaps even discomfort with, old people in western societies led to a form of myopia in research as well? Has the current tendency to move old people into retirement communities or retirement homes, hence to make them disappear from our modern and post-modern life with its dominant focus on youth, also influenced research of cultural history and the history of mentality? (3)

In response to this lack of attention, a growing number of publications that take old age as their primary interpretive lens have begun to fill this gap in research and criticism.¹²

¹² Classen's edited collection *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (2007) is joined by Erin Campbell's edited collection *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations* (2006). This collection offers essays in literary criticism, art history, history, and the history of medicine, and emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary treatments of this subject. Nina Taunton's *Fictions of Old Age in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (2007) historicizes readings of early modern dramatic literature by "cross-pollinating texts which sometimes belong to different and seemingly unrelated discursive and historical fields" (2). Anthony Ellis's *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama* (2009) traces the influence of Italian drama on English theatrical depictions of older male characters. Maurice Charney's *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare* (2009) canvasses the large number of older characters who appear in the Shakespearean canon, and subdivides them into types such as "Politically Old Men," "Wise Old Men," "Old Warriors," and "Powerful Older Women." Christopher Martin's *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear* (2012) shows how the early modern concept of an individual's "constitution" complicates socially constructed narratives of decline that are so perniciously attached to attitudes towards aging. Karl Zender's *Shakespeare, Midlife, and Generativity* argues that "Shakespeare reoriented the representational traditions he inherited [i.e., the Ages of Man schemes] toward an interiorized understanding of midlife experience" (2), and that "Understanding that achievement as it relates to one important aspect of the middle years—the transfer of power and authority between the generations—is the ambition of [his] book" (3). Yvonne Oram's *Old Bold and Won't Be Told: Shakespeare's Amazing Ageing Ladies* (2013) takes Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* as

The growing interest in artistic depictions of early modern old age depends on the concurrent interest in the history of aging from historians. Johnson describes the reasons behind this increased attention: “This interest of historians in old age and ageing parallels a more general concern in modern industrial societies with the rapid ageing of the population now under way, and its consequent medical, social service and financial effects” (1; see also Botelho, “General Introduction” ix–x). This type of urgency is evident in the 2009 Special Senate Committee on Aging report *Canada’s Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity*, which argues that Canadians need to “become aware of our own stereotypes relating to aging, and of the barriers which these stereotypes have created in the life of seniors” (6). Scholarship on early modern aging frequently alludes to its importance in contributing to the public good, suggesting that understanding the evolution of our modern conception of old age will better equip present-day readers to treat old age in more sensitive and nuanced ways:

What can we learn from Shakespeare’s treatment of aging and disabilities that might pertain to our current social context and perceptions? Certainly, it has often been observed that we should learn from the past and Shakespeare’s treatment of aging and disability warrant contemporary review. Some of Shakespeare’s ideas, drawn from the western tradition, continue to surface in contemporary times, such

paradigmatic of Shakespeare’s ability to create agentic representations of women’s old age, because Paulina “maintains active, dynamic centrality until the very end of the play” (xi). She argues that in dramatic portrayals of aging women, generally “domesticity is a key to the successful containment of those mature women who are in danger of becoming too bold, outspoken and disobedient” (18).

as the perception that aging and decline (disability) are inevitable or that people with disabilities make good villains for dramas. (Covey, “Shakespeare” 182)

From this perspective, analysis of earlier historical attitudes toward old age enables a greater understanding of present-day attitudes to aging, and challenges received notions of both positive and negative stereotypes of the elderly, as if old age in the past “serves as a laboratory for future developments” (Classen 6). However, the urgency of studying old age in earlier periods is also tempered by a cautiousness around producing overly general or anachronistic readings of early modern aging, what Susannah Ottaway identifies as a common scholarly “insistence on the individuality of the experience of aging—its specificity not only in time and place, but also according to gender, social class, and even individual life experience . . .” (Ottaway, “Authority, Autonomy and Responsibility” 2). In this way, scholarship copes with the ways in which early modern aging can seem simultaneously familiar and historically distant and different.

The study of old age and aging from a humanities perspective is a growing field. The establishment of *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal* in 2014 is a recent example of fresh work on these topics, but this is only one of the most recent attempts to unite age studies with the humanities; for instance, the 1999 edited collection *Aging and Identity: A Humanities Perspective* proposes to study “the ways in which the humanities have contributed to the construction of stereotypic images of aging in our society and the ways in which the humanities can be employed to deconstruct these images” (Deats and Lenker 1). Yet interdisciplinary approaches to the study of old age have not been without criticism. Anne Wyatt-Brown suggests that attempts to apply frameworks from other disciplines, such as the social sciences, onto the literary analysis

of old age have not always produced nuanced readings. For instance, she criticizes some analyses that apply the psychoanalytic thought of Jung and Eriksonian models of psychological development to literary works about aging, arguing that “there are hazards in applying psychoanalytic theories to literature too programmatically,” and that these readings tend to “reduc[e] these organic theories to a systems analysis. The literary critic, however, must be especially careful not to impose any psychoanalytic theory on literary texts without regard for their particularity” (335, 336). Producing reductive readings of literary texts, or inaccurately imposing a methodology from a less-familiar discipline, are risks for the scholar who attempts to incorporate the interdisciplinary treatments of old age that many recognize as essential to the accurate reconstruction of how old age signified in the past.

Age studies scholarship interrogates the idiomatic, conventional language that stigmatizes old age, dehumanizes old people, and generalizes older people as an urgent demographic problem that threatens the economic stability of a country. Andrea Charise has described the imagined economic and social impact of a so-called aging population as a “crisis of capacity” or “a modern and interdisciplinary habit of conceiving agedness as a damaging and destructive excess: a tendency that afflicts literary criticism as much as economics, politics, or medicine” (2). She notes the frequency with which the elderly as a population group are associated with watery imagery that threatens to overwhelm a country’s welfare systems:

This ominous rhetoric of rising, swamping, tides, and disease—amplified by the authoritative tones of medical and health policy expertise—conceives of population aging as an imminent catastrophe. Conceived en masse, the elderly are

naturalized as a liquid cataclysm whose volume exceeds the nation's ability to contain, or even guard against, an abstracted human burden. (3)

Given Charise's description of the rote metaphors so frequently assigned to old age as a burdensome population, it should give readers pause that *King Lear* is often seen as the most representative and relevant example of Shakespearean insight into aging. For present-day audiences, the scenes in which Lear, mad, wanders in the storm may reproduce current ageist, unconscious fears about old age as a force that subsumes its descendants. The next chapter will argue that the reception of Lear's old age has indeed become increasingly pathologized.

A central critique of an age studies perspective is the interrogation of the persistent association of aging with decline.¹³ Representations of old age as a period of decline are just as widely available in early modern literature as they are now. However, analysis of these representations of decline can show how they undermine themselves.

¹³ Margaret Morganroth Gullette describes how decline ideology limits imaginative possibilities for narratives of aging:

Decline is a metaphor as hard to contain as dye. Once it has tinged our expectations of the future (sensations, rewards, status, power, voice) with peril, it tends to stain our experiences, our views of others, our explanatory systems, and then our retrospective judgments. Once I feel I am at risk, the collective future can shrink to the fantasized autobiography of the *Aging Me*. . . . One of decline's saddest ego-centripetal effects is to obscure anything suffered by those adjacent to us, in the polity and across the globe. The only history that matters is that of our times. Decline then squeezes the life span further, into an inflexible, biological, individual arc. (*Aged by Culture* 11)

The historian Pat Thane has argued that an inaccurate decline narrative has plagued assumptions about the changing treatment of old age over time. She argues against decline narrative of history, in which people assume that there existed a pre-modern and pre-industrial "golden age" of old age when old people were revered and that has since disappeared. See her introduction to *Old Age in English History* (1–16).

For instance, Michel de Montaigne construes old age as a period of decline in his essays of self-exploration. In the essay “To philosophize is to learn how to die,” he writes that Nature leads us downward into old age gradually so that we are not shocked by the transition:

If any of us were to be plunged into old age all of a sudden, I do not think that the change would be bearable. But, almost imperceptibly, Nature leads us by the hand down a gentle slope; little by little, step by step, she engulfs us in that pitiful state and breaks us in, so that we feel no jolt when youth dies in us, although in essence and in truth that is a harsher death than the total extinction of a languishing life as old age dies. For it is not so grievous a leap from a wretched existence to nonexistence as it is from a sweet existence in full bloom to one full of travail and pain. (29)

In his essay “On the Length of Life” he portrays aging as a process whereby vigour and accomplishment give way to decline. Montaigne takes issue with the notion that dying of old age is “natural,” refusing to see it as more natural than a man breaking his neck in fall, from shipwreck, or from plague. He claims that the label of natural death ought to be reserved for more generic, universal deaths. Dying of old age is yet too rare—“it is indeed the limit beyond which we shall not go and which has been prescribed by Nature’s law as never to be crossed,” and few last until then (121). Montaigne also objects to delaying young men’s assumption of social and political power; he believes that adulthood should begin at twenty, since by that age one’s soul exhibits one’s capabilities (121). In addition to suggesting that most great deeds are accomplished before the age of thirty, he returns to personal anecdote—he senses a decline in himself—to advocate for

the earlier adoption of social power by younger men, and earlier retirement for older men (122).

However, early modern literature also provides extensive examples of work that does not exclusively treat old age as a period of decline. Indeed, the literature of this period offers a wide variety of complex symbolic deployments of old age. One suggestive example is Edmund Waller's poem "Of the Last Verses in the Book" (1685). Waller's poem transforms the conventional portrayal of old age as decline, reorienting the reader's perspective by drawing attention to a new way of reading the metaphor of aging:

When we for age could neither read nor write,
 The subject made us able to indite;
 The soul with nobler resolutions decked,
 The body stooping, does herself erect.
 No mortal parts are requisite to raise
 Her, that unbodied can her Maker praise.

The seas are quiet when the winds give o'er;
 So, calm are we when passions are no more,
 For then we know how vain it was to boast
 Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.
 Clouds of affection from our younger eyes
 Conceal that emptiness which age describes.

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,

Lets in new light through chinks that time has made;
 Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become,
 As they draw near to their eternal home.
 Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,
 That stand upon the threshold of the new. (374–75)

The poem begins with a refusal to cease poetic production: if old age prevents one from reading or writing, the soul will erect herself within the stooping body. The mortal body is secondary to the soul, “Her, that unbodied can her Maker praise.” Just as the seas become quiet when the winds cease, so do one’s passions calm. This calming allows for a more profound engagement with that which is eternal, allowing one to realize the vanity of the distracting, fleeting things that reveal their limitations through their disappearance. In fact, it is the eyes of old age, not youth, which can discern the importance of devotion to one’s Maker. The first stanza feminizes and disembodies the soul, separating it from the body. The final stanza transforms the soul by rematerializing it, this time as a cottage, a home, a dark container that is slowly able to let in light over time by virtue of being in time, by virtue of aging. The experience of becoming battered and decayed is not a decline, instead it opens up the soul and “Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.” The battering of living and aging allows the soul to open up to the light and to see its eternal home. The poem embraces the paradox of becoming stronger by weakness, as the proximity to death allows for a bifurcated vision of the old, mortal world and the new, heavenly one soon to be inhabited. The poem ends on that threshold of enhanced perception, upon which stands not one speaker but many. There is no single speaker in this poem; when the poem begins the speaker is referred to in the first person plural, and

by the end of the poem, the subject has been extended to an unnumbered amount of female-souled men standing on a threshold, looking forward and backward simultaneously. The title of the poem “Of the Last Verses in the Book” emphasizes Waller’s sense that the last verses, and the last years, are the most creative, perceptive, and observant.

Waller’s poetic reorientation of the decline narrative resembles Stephen Katz’s refreshing definition of the process of aging for the *Encyclopedia of Aging*: “the elegant and continuous means by which the forces of nature, from the microscopic to the universal, create the conditions for regeneration” (45). Katz reorients, or rewrites, the conventional decline narrative of aging by focusing on how it can also be understood as a process of regeneration. His definition also restores the microcosm/macrocosm relationship so central to early modern views on the cosmic interconnectedness of the aging body. All of the works in this dissertation show the contradictory, complex, and productive ways that old age operates in early modern drama and literature. The next chapter, on *King Lear*, will show how the strong, yet often ambivalent, reactions to Lear’s old age have positioned the play as such a central text in the cultural imaginary.

2 Kill Thy Physician: The Afterlife of King Lear's Old Age

King Lear is, unsurprisingly, one of the most frequently analyzed texts in the growing body of criticism that takes up themes of early modern aging.¹⁴ The work of Christopher Martin, Anthony Ellis, and Nina Taunton, among others, historicizes the play, showing how its portrayal of old age is affected by the period's economic, theological, and political contexts, its discourses on gender and sexuality, and the play's source material and intertextual allusions.¹⁵ This work captures the contexts of early modern aging at the

¹⁴ Maurice Charney points out the second childhood theme, makes the association of Lear's condition with dementia and Alzheimer's and notes the play's emphasis on the age of three male characters (Lear, Gloucester and Kent) (11–21). Lyell Asher identifies the king's age as part of a general theme of lateness that pervades the play. Asher suggests that Shakespeare makes Lear older than his other tragic figures in order to create a character who can reflect on the past but for whom it is too late to change anything: "A man who is always already too late: this is the circumstance that marks Lear's distinction as a dramatic character" (214). Karl Zender, in contrast, in his study of Shakespeare's representation of the midlife period, proposes that "*King Lear* folds together the concerns of extreme age with those more characteristic of the middle years. At its center is the claim that underlying Lear's relationship with Cordelia is a midlife fantasy of literal rebirth, one in which Cordelia is assigned the role of a surrogate bride in an effort on Lear's part, never consciously acknowledged, at incestuous self-renewal" (11).

¹⁵ Nina Taunton reads dramatic literature alongside early modern prose, making connections between representations of aging and texts inherited from the classical tradition such as Cicero's *De Senectute*. Taunton contextualizes the play within early modern inheritance disputes as well as discussing the events of *Lear* as a breakdown of the Biblical command for children to honour and sustain their parents. Taunton reads the play within the context of the legal agreements, or "maintenance contracts," that some parents drew up in order to ensure their children would care for them, noting the existence of advice literature that recommended against premature transfer of property to children (*Fictions* 51–56). Anthony Ellis focuses on representations of old age and masculinity and the relationship between English and Italian drama, describing Lear as a melancholic *senex amans* and the play as a warning to a culture that denies "full emotional and sexual experience to the aged" (38). Philip Collington examines how *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *King Lear* (and early modern culture in general) displace the anxiety that old age is a time of

time of the play's composition around 1605. This chapter, however, focuses on certain moments in the play's stage and reception history to investigate how the play's treatment of age is taken up and transformed over time. Shakespeare is often credited with having created a representation of old age that is stable, universally true, and historically transcendent.¹⁶ The notion that Lear is, or ought to be, "relatable" is remarkably persistent.¹⁷ Yet the sense that the meaning of Lear's old age is fixed in the text is belied

"abandonment, powerlessness and isolation" onto misogynist attitudes towards women (188). Christopher Martin analyzes the way Lear's old age and body are made into a public spectacle, arguing that for both the king and Gloucester, "As embodiments of old age, they must contend with the literal obscenity of their 'unsightly' statures before a society that nonetheless fears the inevitable reality they represent and wishes to consolidate its power (while shoring up its self-image) by preserving them as controlled spectacles. The title character's struggle to marshal his own formidable constitution against the public and private roles that the ascending generation would constitute for him in particular emerges as one of the tragedy's most potent dramatic achievements" (140). Martin also reads the play as a reflection on the lately concluded reign of Elizabeth, a monarch whose own final years were characterized by intergenerational struggles between court factions (146).

¹⁶ See Richard Proudfoot on the tendency to attribute this kind of universalism to Lear's old age (139), and more generally for a discussion of "appropriations" of Lear.

¹⁷ In 2014, Ira Glass, the National Public Radio host, tweeted this response to a performance of *King Lear*: "No stakes, not relatable" (Glass n.p.). This drew a number of online responses including a blog post by Rebecca Mead on the *New Yorker* website that criticized the use of "relatability" as the measure by which to evaluate art. She argues that doing so forces "the work itself be somehow accommodating to, or reflective of, the experience of the reader or viewer" (Mead n.p.). Shakespearean scholar Holger Syme also posted a blog response that points out that relatability is not the aim of much Shakespearean dramaturgy, arguing that "More than most of his contemporaries, Shakespeare is at pains to signal to his audience that these figures are not like them—that their very removal from a life recognizable as the audience's everyday existence makes them suitable vehicles for the examination of grand themes and big questions, for negotiating conflicts and debates cut off from the actual day-to-day concerns of a subject in 1600 or a citizen in 2014" (Syme n.p.). Furthermore, Syme recuperates unrelatability as "a nice and even timely

by the fact that Shakespeare's early adapters and their audiences frequently resisted his characterization of old age, preferring instead the comic ending as rewritten by Nahum Tate. The representation of Lear's old age as it is transmitted through various adaptations and productions reflects Margaret Jane Kidnie's theorization of Shakespearean adaptation, that "a play, for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring sensibility, is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic *process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (2).

This chapter will focus on that idea of play as process and argues that doing so undermines the comfortable assumption that Lear is an unchanging paragon of old age. I draw together three examples of *King Lear*'s reception and adaptation/appropriation: the Tate adaptation and its offshoots, the nineteenth-century perspective that the play is unstageable, and the twentieth and twenty-first century gerontological appropriation of Lear via the literary critical tradition of character criticism. I have selected these examples because they are all episodes in an arc that concludes with the dominant "type" of Lear's old age that is currently performed, which is, I argue, interpreted through a clinical lens. By retracing how the meaning of King Lear's age has changed over time,¹⁸ I resist the essentialism that is still often attributed to old age and that can be extended to literary criticism of Lear's character. As asserted in the introduction, the meaning of old

corrective to the mushy universalism that so often dominates the popular discourse around Shakespeare: that he speaks to all of us, that he grasped the core of human existence, that he invented us" (Syme n.p.).

¹⁸ My methodology is influenced by that of R. A. Foakes in *Hamlet versus Lear*, who tracks changing critical responses to those two plays, taking the position that "critics consciously or unconsciously reflect the mood of their time" (*Hamlet Versus Lear* 1).

age is slippery and shifting. To historicize the unstable meanings of old age throughout *King Lear*'s production history is to undermine the argument that Shakespeare's play offers a universal model of aging, and by extension, to challenge the use of Lear, or other Shakespearean characters, as case studies that deal with modern old age. However, I conclude by preserving the insights that are possible in these types of interdisciplinary readings. Rather than categorizing Lear within present-day diagnostic paradigms, I suggest that it is more productive to return to Shakespeare's text to unpack the ways it depicts the physician-patient relationship. Doing so shifts the focus away from a critical mode that purports to reveal what is "wrong" with Lear towards a more self-reflexive mode that foregrounds the act of interpretation that is present in any physician/patient, audience/character, or critic/play relationship, and the ethical implication of the physician/audience-member/critic in the relationship with its object of analysis. Furthermore, returning to Shakespeare's representation of the physician-patient relationship allows us to grapple with the tragic ending that Shakespeare provided for Lear—an ending that had been evaded for so much of the play's reception history.

2.1 Shakespeare's Turn to Old Age as Tragedy

Shakespeare's depiction of Lear's old age diverges from his source material to such a degree that old age becomes a central problem for the play.¹⁹ In Shakespeare's source

¹⁹ For Helen Small, Shakespeare's intensification of the tragedy occurs because of "the moral damage taking place within Lear" (73). Ellis also points out that "*Lear* differs from its main source by increasing the king's chronological age and calling frequent attention to it" (34).

materials (Holinshed's account of King Leir in his *Chronicles* [first edition, 1577 and second edition, 1587] and the anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Goneril, Ragan, and Cordella*²⁰), the king's experience of old age and death is downplayed. Holinshed does not provide much detail on Leir's death, writing that after Leir and Cordeilla return together from Gallia and conquer their enemies, Leir is "restored to his kingdome, which he ruled after this by the space of two yeeres, and then died, fortie yeres after he first began to raigne" (quoted in the introduction to *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* 13). Leir's death is not mentioned at all in the play *The True Chronicle History*, where, at the conclusion, Leir and the French army defeat the British forces and Leir is restored to his kingdom. However, he resigns his position once again, this time to the King of Gallia, Cordella's husband:

KING Thanks be to God, your foes are overcome

And you again possesséd of your right.

LEIR First to the heavens; next, thanks to you, my son,

By whose good means I repossess the same,

Which, if it please you to accept yourself,

With all my heart I will resign to you;

For it is yours by right, and none of mine.

²⁰ The play was printed in 1605. See Richard Knowles, "How Shakespeare Knew *King Leir*" (2002), for a review of the evidence of how Shakespeare may have encountered the older play, and the suggestion that the 1605 edition influenced Shakespeare's composition.

First, have you raised at your own charge a power
 Of valiant soldiers—this comes all from you—
 Next, have you ventured your own person's scathe,
 And lastly, worthy Gallia never stained,
 My kingly title I by thee have gained. (5.8.2633–44)

His age is unmentioned in his reasons for stepping down. Instead, Leir abdicates and passes the succession to his son-in-law in recognition of the role the King of Gallia's army played in their military victory.

In contrast, Shakespeare introduces the quality of Lear's old age as key aspect of the play's dramatic power. Categorized as a history in quarto and as a tragedy in the Folio, *Lear's* vision of old age is tragic in its depiction of a person who is gradually stripped of his security and markers of identity in the final period of his life.

Shakespeare's play emphasizes loss and alienation and ends with its protagonist's enigmatic death, an event that directly follows his heartbreak over the death of Cordelia. The comparison of Lear's condition in the final scene with his status in the first, the psychological impact of the storm scenes, and the percussive impact of the series of tragic events that conclude the play complicate any attempt to determine an exact cause of death. To live to be old, in this play, is to experience a precarious existence in which one's needs are coldly calculated and then stripped away, lending Lear's "reason not the need" speech its poignancy. As Stephen Orgel notes, Shakespeare eschews the recuperative, comic twist that would be offered by the endings of his tragicomedies. Each possibility of reunion or reconciliation instead meets with disappointment:

This is a play in which Shakespeare goes out of his way to raise expectations only to—perhaps in order to—defeat them. Cordelia’s aborted survival is not the only one. The recognition of Edgar by the blind Gloucester, which is reported in a single line as an afterthought in *King Lear*, is where Shakespeare’s source story in Sidney’s *Arcadia* starts, the perspective from which the whole story of the Paphlagonian king is told by the reconciled father and son. In Shakespeare, on the contrary, it is precisely the revelation of Edgar’s identity that kills Gloucester. As with the scene of Gloucester’s blinding and the omission of the reconciliations of Gloucester with Edgar and of Lear with Kent, what happens at the conclusion of the play is something that happens to the audience. (“Johnson’s *Lear*” 194)

Part of the play’s tragic effect derives from its association of old age with disappointment, estrangement, and madness. There is a major disjunction between the fantasies that Lear holds for his old age and what actually occurs. His initial plan to depend on Cordelia fails, as does his makeshift arrangement to divide his time between Goneril and Regan. His fantasy to turn his prison into a refuge where he will live with Cordelia like “birds i’ th’ cage” (5.3.10) is followed by the brutal death of his daughter. Options narrow for Lear until the remaining sympathetic characters view his death as preferable to the prolongation of his life. Lear’s death is closely associated with his long life and is immediately eulogized as such by those who witness his demise, with Kent observing “The wonder is he hath endured so long / He but usurped his life” (5.3.384–85), and the play’s final lines (spoken by either Albany or Edgar, depending on the version) characterize his accumulation of experience, so often claimed as a benefit of old age, as a burden that could not be shared or apprehended by another: “The oldest hath

borne most; we that are young / Shall never see so much nor live so long” (5.3.394–95).²¹ Ironically, this final couplet undermines the idea that *Lear*, or *King Lear*, is relatable. In fact, these lines expressly tell the audience that there is a barrier between full sympathy or understanding of what the king has suffered. This perspective, delivered post-mortem by Lear’s sympathetic yet helpless witnesses, is jettisoned in much of the play’s subsequent stage and reception history, which attempts to reduce ambiguity in order to resolve the problem of knowing, and even curing, the king’s old age.

2.2 Nahum Tate’s Adaptation

Between 1681 and 1838 Nahum Tate’s adaptation of *King Lear* was preferred over Shakespeare’s text on the London stage. Audiences at Tate’s adaptation saw a play that omits the Fool, invents a romantic relationship between Cordelia and Edgar, and has Lear and Cordelia survive the ending. Tate’s changes remove Shakespeare’s narrative from the genre of tragedy, and, in this sense, he is “if anything, actually ‘restoring’ the ‘Lear’ story’s original shape and generic character after its ‘distortion’ by Shakespeare” (Holderness and Carter 4. Gibbons also makes this point in “Madness of George III” 5). However, by cutting Lear’s death, Tate is not so much restoring an earlier version of the

²¹ Naomi Liebler reads in these final lines that “in this play, the consequence of change, of ‘progress’ or progression, is that there’s nothing for the old to pass along to the young, and the young don’t last long enough to become old” (118). Liebler also notes the troubling implications of Lear’s statement “Age is unnecessary”: “The idea that necessity or utility or even action should be a requirement for civic/civilized life is unsettling. ‘We that are young’ can never be certain that *we* live useful or necessary lives; many of ‘we that are old’ have long since given up the luxury of self-deception in that regard” (115). Chapter four on *The Old Law* will take up the idea of what happens when necessity and utility in old age is made mandatory in society.

Lear story as he is interpolating a new ending specifically in response Shakespeare's representation of the *quality* of Lear's decline and death—his adaptation responds to Shakespeare's formulation of old age as tragedy, as described above.²² Tate retains Shakespeare's sustained interest in Lear's age but removes from the play's conclusion the quality of disappointment that Shakespeare invests in old age. Christopher Martin describes Tate's adaptation as driven by denial over Shakespeare's harshness:

The denial—in the sense of an unwillingness to acknowledge conspicuous realities in order to shelter oneself psychologically—that significantly informs a good deal of the play's overall dynamic also understandably comes to trouble audience response to the extremes of human experience that Shakespeare aims to depict. . . . Tate's radical revision of *King Lear*'s spectacular ending illustrates a prevailing reluctance to confront the physical and metaphysical horrors highlighted in Shakespeare's version of the story. (139)

Instead, Tate constructs for Lear a retirement that disavows the impact of Lear's suffering and removes death beyond the scope of the play.

²² In her article historicizing the changing understanding of intellectual property that preceded the Copyright Act of 1709, Laura Rosenthal argues that Tate's treatment of Shakespeare acts as "an 'enclosure' of the text" (325). By the final decades of the seventeenth century, *King Lear* becomes established as Shakespeare's original property due to how his adapters represented their own source material:

Tate represents himself as the refiner and the organizer, and Shakespeare as the spontaneous creator of raw material. Shakespeare, then, not only becomes an origin, but he becomes Tate's *single* origin for this play. And while Shakespeare cannot become the legal owner of *King Lear*, Tate nevertheless represents the play as Shakespeare's property. (328)

Tate's *King Lear* therefore presents itself as participating in a Shakespearean tradition, despite its turn (or return) to a happy ending.

Tate's ending is triumphant: Lear rescues Cordelia from being murdered and visits an "old man's vengeance" upon the captain before he can kill his daughter (5.6.33).

Albany's arrival follows shortly thereafter, bringing word that he has conquered Edmund's troops and that Lear is restored to his kingdom (except for the portion already promised to Albany). Lear reacts to this turn of events in his address to Kent:

Why I have news that will recall thy youth.

Ha! didst thou hear't, or did th'inspiring gods

Whisper to me alone? Old Lear shall be

A king again. (Tate 5.6.102–105)

Lear represents his restoration as something that will recall Kent's youth. Tate's interpolations allow Lear to retain his role and position and integrate them into a "good" old age, one that recalls youth while still allowing him to be old. However, he does not retain the position of head of state for long, choosing to relinquish that role to Cordelia and Edgar. His old age is empowered by performatively making the choice to retire in a way that preserves his dignity, rather than the degradations suffered by Shakespeare's Lear. Later, Gloster (who is blinded in Tate's version as he is in Shakespeare's) appeals to the gods to speed his own death, only to have his attempt to invoke the tragic mode firmly rejected by Lear in another exhortation to "recall" himself through Lear's own recovery. This time, Lear suggests that they spend their time in retirement, recalling their pasts:

GLOSTER Now, gentle gods, give Gloster his discharge.

LEAR No, Gloster, thou hast business yet for life.

Thou, Kent and I, retired to some cool cell,

Will gently pass our short reserves of time
 In calm reflections on our fortunes past,
 Cheered with relation of the prosperous reign
 Of this celestial pair [Edgar and Cordelia]. Thus our remains
 Shall in an even course of thought be passed;
 Enjoy the present hour, nor fear the last. (5.6.145–53)

Unlike in Shakespeare, where accumulated life experience is perceived as a burden by the other characters, here the past is simply material for reflection that can be held at a safe remove and contemplated. Lear moves swiftly from his restored and restorative kingship to designs on a vision of retirement in which a community of older men calmly and evenly reflect upon the past and beneficently observe the new rulers. He emphasizes that this period of retirement will not be marked by suffering or dread; instead, the men will “enjoy the present hour” without fear of the “last” hours that were so unbearable in Shakespeare’s *Lear*.²³ Lear’s body is not marked by decline; rather, he is almost super-

²³ In fact, this speech in Tate could be contrasted to Shakespeare’s Lear’s description of his vision of an idealized prison sentence with Cordelia in act five (a speech that Tate does also include, with changes). The similarities between the speeches suggest that there is an element of constraint in this idealized vision of retirement that is made more obvious in Shakespeare:

Come, let’s away to prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage.
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down
 And ask of thee forgiveness. So we’ll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news, and we’ll talk with them too—
 Who loses and who wins; who’s in, who’s out—

human, having triumphed over his enemies and the time he spent suffering in the storm. Tate idealizes old age as a time of serene reflection, renewal, and sociable conversation and shows that the characters' physical and psychological duress carries no lasting effect.

The popularity of the Tate adaptation has been explained in various ways, with scholarship demonstrating the influence that the Exclusion Crisis had on Tate's alterations.²⁴ However, once the immediate relevance of that political crisis passes, another reading is required to explain Tate's continued popularity into the following centuries. Samuel Johnson's admits to preferring Tate because he removes the injustice suffered by Cordelia, and reveals the relief that Tate's changes apparently provided to audiences:

In the present case the public has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate, I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor. (In Kermode 28)

And take upon 's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies. And we'll wear out,
In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by th' moon. (Shakespeare 5.3.9–20)

²⁴ C. B. Hardman and Nancy Klein Maguire, respectively, argue that Tate's adaptation is influenced by the Exclusion Crisis (1678–83), with Edmund coming to represent the illegitimate son of Charles II who was put forth as successor by those who wished to exclude Charles's brother, the Catholic Duke of York, from succession (Hardman 914).

The indignity of Shakespeare's representation of old age and Lear's death was not the only element of the play that was perceived as in need of alteration. Peter Womack argues that Tate's changes remain attractive to audiences more generally because they make the characters' actions more accessible and motivated; in essence, "Tate has made the play newly *purposeful*" because his changes "recover the dramatis personae as active subjects within a syntax of intelligible cause and effect" (98, 99). In Tate, Cordelia's refusal to participate in Lear's "love test" is explicitly motivated by her objection to an arranged marriage, and Gloucester/Gloster becomes an agent capable of assessing how the sight of his injured body will be able to sway popular opinion to his and Lear's side (100–101). Leigh Woods remarks that Tate's Lear, played by Betterton in the 1681 production, is a saner character:

Through this choice to strip away some of Shakespeare's verbiage, which seemed like rhetorical excess, Tate rendered up for Betterton to play a Lear who was more logical; more controlled, and more dignified in his command of his faculties—but also a Lear who was less crazed. (22)

The pleasure in Tate's text is in its conceptual neatness and its promise that human behavior is explicable, as the characters become new types of people who are possessed with increased powers of self-determination. Lear is able to move from an unwise old age, to a crazed, mad old age, to a recovered, sane and retired old age. By the end of Tate's play, Lear has returned to where he began in Shakespeare's, directing plans for his retirement once again. Indeed, part of what confirms Tate's Lear as being returned to a "good" old age is his ability to rationally restore himself to the throne and then immediately relinquish it to the next generation. In Shakespeare, Lear does not recover

that power, and the meaning of Lear's old age and suffering is unresolved by Edgar/Albany's concluding statement of alienated sympathy. In Shakespeare's text, Lear's fantasies of first depending on Cordelia's "kind nursery" and then his qualified hope to live with her in the birdcage of prison are shown to be fruitless. By the end of Tate's play, however, the audience has no reason to doubt that Lear's plans for himself, Gloster, and Kent will come to pass. Tate's alterations allow the audience to evade Shakespeare's depiction of a particularly vulnerable old age in favour of a far more organized experience.

Tate's text and its later adaptations highlight a recovery narrative for the play. Woods argues that the continued reworking of Tate's text in performance is linked to an eighteenth-century fascination with madness and its potential cure, suggesting that Garrick's 1756 production restores enough "mad" elements from Shakespeare's text to make Lear's recovery and survival (which he retains from Tate) all the more heroic (31).²⁵ For Woods, Garrick's performance of Lear becomes newly suggestive of an empirically observable disease, as "the clinical and actorly ways of describing madness converge in a *Zeitgeist* which observed aberrant behaviors in detail and offered for them the possibility of cure, whether accomplished in Battie's asylum or in Garrick's Drury

²⁵ Garrick made "life-studies" of people in asylums to render a performance of madness that satisfied "the tastes of an audience grown more interested in madness in its clinical details" (Woods 24). Kenneth Muir, in "Samuel Harsnett and *King Lear*," accounts for the way in which Shakespeare's portrayal of Edgar's madness is borrowed from Harnsett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popishe Imposters* (1603), an account of false exorcisms performed by Jesuit priests.

Lane” (28).²⁶ Woods’s description of Garrick’s textual alterations and performance allows the audience to participate in a kind of collective diagnosis, where Lear’s madness is constituted and cured through performance. Here, the affliction that Lear is cured of is madness but later, I will argue, critics become more interested in the idea that Lear can be cured of an unsuccessful type of old age. I will return to this collective diagnosis and recovery later in the chapter. At the moment I will take up the interruption to *King Lear*’s performance history that was caused by the political crisis posed by George III’s old age and illness.

2.3 Unstageable Lear: George III

Even Tate’s reassuring *Lear* becomes impossible by the early years of the nineteenth century. The play is not performed at all in London between the years of 1810 and 1820 because, as R. A. Foakes points out, George III’s illness and apparent madness had made even Tate’s version too provocative due to “the analogy that might be drawn between Lear and the mad old king on the throne” (*Hamlet versus Lear* 45).²⁷ The image of a once-powerful king reduced to inefficacy has increasingly uncomfortable resonances for early nineteenth-century audiences as George’s health problems become a growing

²⁶ Stuart Sillars traces how the character comes to be associated with madness in pictorial representations of Lear and how “disordered hair” comes to represent the king’s “mental disarray” (“*King Lear: Toward a Visual History*” 278).

²⁷ In terms of the effect of the hiatus on visual artists who depicted Shakespearean scenes, Sillars writes that “The absence of Shakespeare’s play from the London stage, indeed, becomes a positive advantage, since it forces painters to work from traditions other than those of theatrical representation, and thus offer readings of greater, and freer, imaginative richness” (“*King Lear: Toward a Visual History*” 287).

public and political concern. Tate's adaptation allows Lear to experience an almost superhuman recovery from his madness. Relapse would be inexcusable. However, the relapse of a chronic, little-understood illness is precisely what afflicted George for years, beginning in 1788. At this point, the government began making arrangements to introduce a Regency, only to put it off when the king appears to recover in 1789 (Hibbert 271–272, 291–293). He relapses again in 1801, 1804 and, after the final relapse in 1810, the Prince of Wales does become regent in February of 1811 (315, 339, 398–98). If Lear was removed from sight, so was George—as Linda Colley notes, “The king had been insane and removed from the public eye since 1810” (94). George read *King Lear* during 1789 and commented that he “was thankful that he was ‘better off’, since he had neither a Regan nor a Goneril but three Cordelias” (Hibbert 287). The king dies in 1820 at age eighty-one and the play's staging resumes not long after, with performances that year at the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres produced by Junius Brutus Booth and Edmond Kean, respectively (Halio 38).

During this period, the dysfunctional familial story of *King Lear* begins to obtain more currency since the association of the Lear story with the Royal family was easy to make. Brian Gibbons notes that the skewering of contemporary monarchs with Shakespeare's representation of historical royals “was in fact a very popular journalist's and satirist's sport in Georgian England” (“Madness of George III” 3).²⁸ The connection

²⁸ Brian Gibbons analyses how Alan Bennett's twentieth-century play *The Madness of King George* rewrites the ending of George's life, and notes how the “superficially jubilant” ending of the play is tempered by “by a time-shift in which a modern doctor reminds us that George III's illness returned, the relapse ended only in death, and the disease may in fact be hereditary—so it may still run in the family” (4). Gibbons also examines the connections that Bennett makes between George and Lear and remarks that

was not solely made because of the madness angle: Colley describes the representation of George in post-1810 prints as “a wise, Lear-like patriarch and the celestial guardian of his nation” (102). Colley also identifies an increasing focus on familial themes in portrayals of the Hanoverian monarchy, which depicted “a steady background of domestic responsibility and, preferably, domestic bliss. The royal *family* and not just the monarch had acquired increased currency and popularity in this period” (124–25). In addition to the play’s problematic reminder of George’s madness, Lear’s transfer of power to his daughters may have raised uncomfortable implications during the Regency, as George III hands over his role to the Prince of Wales in the decade before his death. The dysfunctional family dynamics on display in *King Lear* would not have harmonized well with the political theatre of domestic bliss that Colley describes. The interest in the domestic life of the royal family coincides with a trend towards the same in drama. As Jean Marsden writes, during the latter half of the eighteenth century plays that focus on politics and monarchy decrease in popularity in favour of plays that deal with domestic themes (34). The staging of *King Lear* adjusts accordingly, and the play’s dramatic effect is “attributed not to his position as fallen king but almost universally to his position as wronged father” (35).

Bennett treats the end of George’s life like Tate treats Shakespeare: “Notice that Bennett does to the historical record of George III the opposite of what Shakespeare did to the historical record of Lear, but in so doing Bennett fits eighteenth century history to eighteenth century theatrical taste, creating in effect a Nahum Tate version of King George III” (4–5).

2.4 Unstageable Lear: The Critics

The decision not to stage *Lear* during George's illness resulted in the censoring of a mad, unruly type of old age from the public space of the theatre. The discomfort with staging *King Lear* also extended to the period's literary and dramatic criticism of the play, which was informed, I will argue, by the nineteenth-century trend of conceiving of the elderly as an increasingly vulnerable, dependent, and institutionalized population that was in need of external control and management. The discomfort caused by *Lear*'s unruly type of old age is not solely caused by the impact of George's suffering. It is also caused by a growing and general social concern over the aged poor as a population group. Stephen Katz suggests that during this period the aged body is increasingly defined and regulated by the "institutional matrix" of the hospital and the almshouse, where people over sixty were overrepresented (*Disciplining Old Age* 60):

The almshouse became one of the strongest institutional bases for the subjective homogeneity attributed to the elderly in general. By the late nineteenth century, they constituted the majority of its residents and justified its continued existence. In return, the institutions made visible the social presence of the elderly as a poor, dependent, infirm, incapacitated, unproductive, unreformable, and differentiated population. The public got to know the elderly through a custodial gaze that uncharitably framed them as a subjected population who had been means-tested and classified as deserving of the state's welfare. (58)

I will show how it was precisely this kind of poor, dependent, infirm figure that so displeased critics such as Charles Lamb in their critiques of the staging of *King Lear*. It is not a coincidence that this period marks a trend in popular critical opinion that *Lear* is

fundamentally unsuited to performance and better experienced through private reading. Lamb goes so far as to say that “the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted” in 1811 (36). Similarly, in an 1820 review of Kean’s performance, the theatre reviewer Leigh Hunt writes that: “An actor who performs *Lear* truly, should so terrify and shake the town, as to be requested never to perform the part again. If he does this, he does it well. If not, he does not do it at all” (298n14). And yet, according to Hunt, a fully expressive performance of *Lear* would be an unbearable sight, as “There is no medium, in a scene which we are to witness with our *eyes*, between an unbearable *Lear*, and no *Lear*” (298n14).²⁹ In the early twentieth century, A. C. Bradley writes that “*King Lear* is too huge for the stage,” adding the sense that the play contains an excessiveness that overwhelms the ability of the theatre to contain it (203).

These nineteenth-century critics describe *King Lear* in performance as altogether overwhelming and disorienting, either due to the destabilizing intensity and vagueness of the play as posited by Bradley or due to the terror described by Hunt, for whom the ideal characterization of *Lear* is self-consuming and unrepeatable. Lamb establishes a hierarchy in which reading Shakespeare offers a more fully satisfying artistic experience than staging him:³⁰

²⁹ Richard Meek points out the connection between Lamb and Bradley’s resistance to seeing the play and the “emphasis upon ‘seeing’” in the play itself, suggesting that “If *King Lear* is obsessed with the difference between seeing and not seeing, then it is perhaps unsurprising that this concern is repeated and played out by the play’s critics” (117, 119).

³⁰ This is not to suggest that the theatre was unpopular during the period. Younglim Han suggests that the theatres’ expansion in the late eighteenth century may have contributed to the critical dissatisfaction with the staging of Shakespeare, as both the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres increased the size of their

When the novelty [of seeing Shakespeare's tragedies in performance] is past, we find to our cost that instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance. (27)

The elevation of the reading of Shakespeare over performance is not limited to *King Lear*; however, this play recurs in criticism as a case deemed particularly problematic onstage. The gap that nineteenth-century critics establish between the text of *King Lear* and the play in performance draws a sharp line between the intellectual and physical abilities. Lamb argues in favour of reading *King Lear* by associating the display of Lear's body with weakness and vulnerability:

The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason,

stages and the seating areas, resulting in “a corresponding inability to present the psychological space of Shakespearean characters” (33). Though Lamb's position seems anti-theatrical, he attempted playwriting himself and was an avid audience member (Han 28; Coldwell 185). Lamb's critical writing on tragedies “knowingly poses paradoxical questions to the reader, not least because of the way it seems at odds with his own fondness for theatre-going and actors” (James 17), as Lamb participates in London's theatre culture while claiming that the best of Shakespeare is reserved for a print culture and reading public.

we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. (36–37)³¹

Lamb describes how the act of reading allows him to do more than just empathize with Lear—by reading Shakespeare he actually becomes Lear and enters his mind. For Lamb, staging the play reveals flesh and blood, insignificance, corporal infirmities, weakness, and impotent rage, whereas reading it transforms this experience of weakness into an intellectual triumph. The reading experience temporarily diminishes the tragic ending and allows Lear and the reader to triumph in strength, whereas the sight of the body becomes associated with failure and death.

The critical perspective that *King Lear* is unstageable is not solely attributable to a Romantic preference for a reading experience of Shakespeare.³² It also reveals an anxiety surrounding the staging of Lear’s physical vulnerability, something that Gary Taylor identifies as the contradiction at the heart of the Romantic attraction to the play:

³¹ Luisa Calè describes the experience of reading in this passage as “a spiritual communion, a partaking of the workings of the mind and of the motives of action” as opposed to the embodiment of the actor, who “offers a sensual incarnation of action” (56).

³² Joan Coldwell writes, “Shakespeare’s characters, in the Romantic view, are products of the poet’s imagination, . . . and therefore they are to be most nearly approached through the imagination of a reader” (193). Unlike a spectator in an audience, the reader of Shakespeare may access that which is most sublime about the poetry through the “imaginative sympathy between writer and reader” (James 51), since “An identification operates through reading that does not—as in the deluded response of the theatergoer—join the actor to the character or author” (Arac 217).

King Lear excites the Romantics by acting out a total rebellion against the authority of the past. . . . But that sense of awesome and admirable power is located, paradoxically, in a feeble old man. That is why the Romantics' *King Lear* could not be acted: performance reminded them, jarringly, of the character's physical frailty. (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 160)

The objections Hunt and Lamb levy against a staged Lear refer to a particularly vulnerable type of old age. Hunt writes, “now that the real man is before us, with his white beard, and the storm howling about him, we ought not to be able to endure the sight, any more than that of a mad old father in the public street. And indeed we are little able to do so, as it is” (298n14). By comparing Lear in the storm to “a mad old father in the public street,” Hunt makes the street and the play's setting for the storm interchangeable. Instead of wandering in the desolate space where “For many miles about / There's scarce a bush” (2.4.345–46), Lear becomes someone Hunt might well have encountered in the city, and the king's distress becomes local and potentially recognizable. Lamb describes Lear's frail body in a tone that is no longer directed by aesthetic concerns, but moral ones: “to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him” (36). This response contrasts with Lamb's formulation of the reading experience of the play, where “we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind.” While reading the play allows Lamb to be enfolded by Lear's mind, seeing it staged sparks a desire to shelter the character. In response to the sight of a Lear who is vulnerable, exposed to the elements and left defenseless in a hostile public space, Lamb wants to relieve him by removing

him from the stage and sheltering him in his own mind, which is where he believes the greatness of Lear lies.

Lamb and Hunt's remarks regarding the sight of Lear in the storm are ethical responses: they suggest that they experience his state of distress as something socially shocking, something they should not be able to bear or even see, and yet something towards which they do have a responsibility. Christy Desmet observes that Lamb's attitude to a staged *King Lear* is marked by the sense that seeing the play crosses a boundary: "Lamb returns repeatedly to a sense that when seeing rather than reading a play, privacy—both that of the King and of the audience—has been violated" ("*Some Lears*" 329). Staging Lear's suffering makes public something that was previously held to be private or perhaps deliberately unseen. Lamb's impulse to "take [Lear] into shelter and relieve him" raises the prospect of the public responsibility to provide support for the aged poor. There is evidence that stage productions played up the potential for social commentary. Helen Borowitz notes that "[Charles] Macready recorded in his diary his 'pointing' the speech beginning 'Poor naked wretches' at Queen Victoria's box" (333) in act 3 scene 4, where Lear empathizes with the impoverished and homeless who have up until then been too little in the thought of their king.

Though Lamb and Hunt emphasize Lear's physical frailty, the text offers numerous points at which a different kind of physicality is available to Lear, such as the return from the hunt, the storm scenes, and the ending when he carries Cordelia onstage

just after killing her executioner.³³ Christopher Martin argues that Lear's strength is one of the most apparent elements of his old age, and that

If matters of aged self-image and the larger societal witnessing that helps to shape it have seemed less critically urgent than they obviously should in a tragedy that has chosen senescence so profoundly and distinctively as its central topic, this has much to do with the play's peculiar refusal to enact explicitly the physical curtailments commonly associated with old age. (138)

As Helen Small points out, "We are told Lear's age (he is in his eighties) so late in the play (4.6.55) that our unfolding impression of it is, in practice, highly plastic. Here, Lear speaks and acts as a man whose physical powers remain vigorous (he still rides to the hunt, as we shortly learn), and whose political powers are transferable, or not, at his sovereign will" (71). In contrast, the nineteenth-century trend, epitomized by the comments of Lamb, Hunt, and Bradley, of emphasizing Lear's frailty reflects these critics' historically-specific preoccupation with the elderly as a group perceived as a dependent and vulnerable population in need of new policies of public support.

³³ Lear was not necessarily presented as weak in pictorial representations. Stuart Sillars analyses a plate from Frank Howard's *Spirit of Shakespeare* (1827–1833) that illustrates the offstage action alluded to by Lear's line "I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee" (5.3.330). As Sillars writes,

The image is not only shocking through the way the hanging is depicted, but also because of the youthful energy it unleashes within Lear. His posture implies a single movement from the abandoned scabbard at the left to the sword thrust into the hangman, balanced by his rough grasp on his daughter to ease the noose around her neck. Implicit in this movement is its failure: as he is stabbed, the hangman falls backwards and pulls the rope tighter. This translates the inevitability of the play's tragic pattern into a powerful, and wholly graphic, statement of catastrophe: in this it is a remarkable, and possibly unique act of visualisation. (*Illustrated Shakespeare* 177–78)

The depiction of Lear's vulnerability and dependency compels audiences to grapple with public responsibility towards a marginalized population. Both Shakespeare and Tate make this ethical responsibility explicit when Lear recognizes that he has previously ignored or denied his responsibility towards those in need:

O, I have ta'en

Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp.

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

That thou may'st shake the superflux to them

And show the heavens more just. (3.4.36–41)³⁴

David Stymeist glosses Lear's speech as follows:

Termed by critics as a prayer for the homeless, Lear's speech is more a meditation on social inequity than a supplication to providence. In fact, he characterizes itinerant poverty not as a result of the criminal tendencies and wastrel capacities of the lower classes but as a direct result of the ignorance and greed of the wealthy and powerful in society. (39)³⁵

Lear's speech brings previously marginalized experiences of poverty into awareness and identifies poverty as something that he, as head of state, is responsible for reducing.³⁶ At

³⁴ Tate retains the lines quoted here at 3.3.28–31, but changes "shake" to "cast."

³⁵ Stymeist discusses what this passage might mean for wealth redistribution in Shakespeare's period, and how *King Lear* may be read as in conversation with the Elizabethan poor laws.

³⁶ Helen Small criticizes this kind of reading (of what she points out is Lear's only soliloquy) as a "morally compensatory reading" that imposes on the old a moral virtuousness, and argues that instead the play

this moment, Lear experiences what it is like to be one of the aged poor, though it is unclear whether this moment of recognition is actually a harbinger of change, considering Lear's own loss of power. Instead, this moment suggests uncertainty regarding the potential for the state to materially improve the lives of the poor, an uncertainty that would have resonated in the nineteenth century, when the existing state provisions for the aged poor were increasingly perceived as insufficient.

These audience responses are occurring in a period immediately preceding what would become a major overhaul of public policy towards poverty in old age in England. Identifying alternative responses to poverty in old age was an ongoing project at the end of the nineteenth century:

The concern to find a home for the aged, to provide material succor and moral dignity during the declining time of life, to take responsibility not only for one elderly relative at a time but for the great conspicuous mass unable to tend to themselves—these preoccupations became a national as well as narrative concern at the end of the nineteenth century. (Chase 240–41)

By the end of the century, the desire to legislate a more protected end-of-life experience on a mass scale would be formally expressed in the report of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor (1895), which

crystallized the widespread awareness and concern at the end of the nineteenth century about the aged poor as a distinct social group, and a growing sense that

“provokes, or should provoke, moments of scepticism about loss of capability leading to an increase in virtue” (85).

they deserved, and that the country could afford, a new, more secure, and less degrading form of public support than in preceding centuries. (Thane 193)

This is the context underpinning the reviewers' perspectives on Lear's old age. The elderly, perceived as a frail and dependent population, are in need of new policies of public support. Yet this vulnerable visibility, captured by performances of *Lear*, inspires a kind of benevolently-intended banishment in the play's critics.

These critics express their sympathy to Lear by paradoxically telegraphing a desire to remove the aged body at the very point it comes into sight and provokes a painful response in the viewer. In 1904, A. C. Bradley defends earlier audiences' preferences for Tate's play, referring to a collective desire to see an end-of-life experience for Lear that is consolatory, supported by love and care, but removed from the public. Bradley writes that spectators wish to "be allowed to imagine the poor old King passing quietly in the home of his beloved child to the end which cannot be far off" (207). The inability to bear the performance of Shakespeare's play becomes an ethical response towards Lear's care. Shortly after, Bradley includes himself in that collective wish, stating that "what we desire for [Lear] during the brief remainder of his days is . . . not what Tate gives him, but what Shakespeare himself might have given him—peace and happiness by Cordelia's fireside" (209). Tate is no longer the ideal author, nor does the rational male sociality he offers as Lear's ideal retirement seem desirable; instead, Shakespeare returns as the playwright who could have written Lear's ideal ending—but withheld it. Bradley's idealized ending is not the hospital or the almshouse, it is a private, domestic accommodation provided by a female family member, with Cordelia enlisted

into the role of the ideal Victorian daughter.³⁷ Bradley affirms Cordelia as Lear's ideal caregiver and, in doing so, circumscribes the sphere of old age to the private home.³⁸

Bradley's focus on Cordelia narrows the range of potential caregivers offered in Shakespeare's text, and identifies the intimate relationships of the play within the nuclear family model.³⁹ This disregards the wider networks of affective relationship models in the play and the early modern period. David Schalkwyk has demonstrated how the nature of early modern service is intertwined with the affect of unconditional love (215). The similarity between Cordelia and Kent's relationships with Lear "reduces the political and personal differences—which we tend now to cast in terms of public and private relationships—between aristocratic courtier and family member" (216). However, the importance of Kent's service to Lear falls out of focus in Bradley's discussion of who

³⁷ John Harvey describes the cult of Cordelia in the nineteenth century as a celebration of "the nobly self-effacing woman" (32).

³⁸ This attitude is in keeping with what Foakes has identified as the nineteenth-century tendency, in both performance and in criticism, to render the character as "privatized and sentimentalized" ("King Lear: Monarch or Senior Citizen?" 272).

³⁹ The importance of Kent's relationship to Lear reflects early modern models of service and, as Jonas Barish and Marshall Waingrow point out, loyal service in *King Lear* is best expressed by Kent, who is "the quintessence of the good servant and the touchstone for service throughout the play" (349, and their work is also used by Schalkwyk in his argument). Zender turns to the nineteenth-century cult of Cordelia as embodiment of filial piety in order to show how earlier female readers dealt with the feminist impasse he reads in Shakespeare's text, where identification with Lear's suffering seems to require the negation of the agency and desires of Lear's daughters, especially Cordelia (23–24). Building off of Coppélia Kahn's description of Lear's infantile need to be mothered by Cordelia, Ellis connects this need to Goneril's reference to his second childhood, pointing out that though "Contemporary gerontologists have been busy discrediting this phrase" it still captures an early modern humoral stereotype about the nature of old age (31–32).

should attend to Lear in his final days, as Bradley expresses a historically-specific desire for old age to exist within an intimate family setting and to be cared for by a female relative. The most supportive relationships in *King Lear* are no longer defined by the mutuality of service but rather a model of intimate familial caregiving.

2.5 Gerontological Lear

I move now from the sphere of the private home to the quasi-private, quasi-public space of the clinic, because, I argue, it is there that *King Lear* has ended up. Lear has had a parallel career outside the realm of literary scholarship as a case study of the aged subject, and *King Lear*'s relevance in clinical discourse has in turn influenced literary and performance analysis of the character. The character has been "appropriated" by gerontology and geriatrics specialists⁴⁰ in journal articles from *The Gerontologist*, *The British Journal of Medical Psychology*, and *The History of Medicine* in order to illustrate the aging process for a readership not primarily comprising literary critics. In general, gerontologists have become more amenable to the use of literary sources to inform the

⁴⁰ Brita Larenz defines the two fields as follows:

In medical science, old age and ageing are the subjects of two special fields of research: 1. Gerontology: the study of old age [and] 2. Geriatrics: concerned with therapy, including care for the dying. . . . Gerontology developed the theories of ageing. One can distinguish the biological theory of ageing, to which the organic-somatic and the evolutionary theory of ageing belong, and the sociological theory of ageing, with the subgroup 'successful ageing.'" (11)

Stephen Katz notes that "The terms *geriatrics* and *gerontology* did not come into existence until the early twentieth century; both referred to medical specializations. Gerontology then branched off after the 1940s to incorporate studies in psychology, sociology, and demography, thus distinguishing itself from geriatrics" (*Disciplining Old Age* 29). See also Amelia DeFalco (2).

study of aging, suggesting that it “should not be treated as a topic by itself, neither should gerontologists confine themselves to purely ‘scientific’ fields of research” (Zeilig 39). As such, “‘literature’ in general may be regarded as being of ‘use’ to other fields of inquiry” such as the study of old age (42). For instance, in an article published in *The Gerontologist*, Rachel Ricciardelli reads *Lear* as aging according to disengagement theory, which posits that aging individuals accept aging and death by renegotiating their relationships with society, turning inward, and withdrawing from former social roles. Ricciardelli’s purpose is to “discuss the theory of disengagement, explain some of its corollaries, and finally examine to what extent the theory relates to the aging character of *Lear*” (148).⁴¹ She concludes that “from a gerontological standpoint, Shakespeare has created a ‘genuine old man’ whose life cycle traces a modal pattern: from activity to differential disengagement and finally to total disengagement and death” (152).

To literary critics, the “gerontological” readings of *King Lear* can appear reductive and overdetermined, and they seem to resolve the complexity of the play through the application of schematic diagnostic models to *Lear*’s character. I suggest, however, that these readings recast the play’s tragic turn as *Lear*’s individual failure to accept the course of his life events, and that this critical approach has been embraced by literary critics as well. *Lear*’s perceived “tragic error” is his failure to age successfully

⁴¹ Hannah Zeilig also analyzes *Lear* according to disengagement theory, and brings up some of the pitfalls of using literary figures to explicate gerontology theory (43–44). In her 1992 survey of the state of “literary gerontology,” Anne Wyatt-Brown describes Ricciardelli’s article as an example of humanistic gerontology and critiques it for producing “a distorted reading of the text” (334). Ellis also critiques it (36).

(successful aging is a term of art within gerontology).⁴² The notion of successful or failed aging therefore recurs in these types of analyses, with Combe and Schmader classing Lear “as an example of unsuccessful aging” (34) and Brita Larenz likewise viewing Lear as an example of a “complete failure to age successfully” (12). The notion that Lear’s tragic aging is caused by a personal failure to accomplish an important developmental stage becomes a variation on Aristotelian *hamartia*. Marvin Bennet Krims, in the *Journal of Aging, Humanities and the Arts*, argues that “King Lear’s inability to grieve the losses inflicted by aging causes his tragic decline and eventual psychosis” (71) and diagnoses him with borderline personality disorder (74). For Ken Robinson, in “His Majesty the Ego: The Tragic Narcissism of King Lear’s ‘crawl towards death,’” Shakespeare is interesting insofar as he “portrays heroes who are faced with their roles at different developmental stages, from the adolescent prince faced with the role of avenger to the old man who retires from his role as king and has to reinterpret his role as father” (187). *King Lear*, in turn, is about “the painful tragedy of retirement when the ego is narcissistically fragile” (187). These approaches deemphasize the politics in the play itself, since readings that identify Lear as having narcissistic rage or Borderline

⁴² Larenz defines successful ageing as follows:

1. Theory of disengagement (accept loss of power)
2. Theory of activity (take over new roles, new commitments)
3. Theory of continuity (keep the accustomed pattern of life)
4. Looking back at one’s life (freeing oneself from obligations, achieving humaneness and wisdom)
5. Lifelong development (accepting handicaps due to old age)
6. Lifelong development of personality (accepting experience of life and death). (11)

Personality Disorder, a condition that appears in the *Diagnostic or Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, place Lear's problems within the disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. The notion that Lear is an unsuccessful ager is also evident in Kirk Combe and Kenneth Schmader's rendering of Lear as a case study of a man who, unlike Prospero who "ages well," "has lost control of the course of his later life" and who has made the mistake of "disastrous retirement planning" ("Shakespeare Teaching Geriatrics" 34, 40, 39). The character is paired with the case study of an eighty-three year old man with physical ailments, dementia and unreliable family care.⁴³

Treating Lear as a case study can lead the authors into troubling allegiances. For instance, John Howells and M. Livia Osborn claim Lear "displays the composite of two clinical conditions—firstly, dementia resulting from old age, and secondly, emotional illness resulting from the anguish of filial ingratitude" (30). They provide textual support for the symptoms of the conditions, such as "loss of judgment," "rash decisions," disorientation, and memory loss/failure (30). The authors conclude that "old age has brought such indiscretion that he cannot understand it himself and thus needs assistance, he needs to be 'ruled and led'. The choice of words here convey the firmness required to handle old people, and the kindly persuasion that will make them more amenable" (31). After matching Lear to a checklist of symptoms, the study ends up in agreement with Regan's claim that Lear needs to be "ruled and led" (2.4.167) and the authors implicate

⁴³ Using Lear's story as a case study has been approached as a way to help medical practitioners benefit from the practices of literary analysis. Combe and Schmader suggest that medical students should read older Shakespearean characters such as Lear and Prospero as "poignant, centuries-old case studies of human aging" ("Shakespeare Teaching Geriatrics" 44).

themselves in Goneril and Regan's cruelty more generally.⁴⁴ These approaches to the play prioritize an interest in character over other features of literature such as its figurative language or historical context. In this case, the forces of domination represented by Regan and Goneril are de-politicized, naturalized, and retroactively styled as an appropriate approach to containing unruly old age.

More recent attempts to incorporate the study of literature into medical training and practice have focused on broader aspects of narrative, rather than just character. The "narrative medicine" movement aims to incorporate narrative studies, traditionally the purview of the arts and humanities, into medicine in order to train clinicians to develop different ways of engaging with their patients: "The study of the humanities—literature, creative writing, history, philosophy, visual arts, and anthropology—has emerged in medical training as a means of conveying skill in the interpretive, relational, and reflective areas otherwise hard to teach" (Arntfield et al 280). This approach recognizes what humanities scholars have long argued: that studying the humanities makes people more humane. Rita Charon and Sayantani DasGupta describe the purpose of narrative medicine as follows:

We now find ourselves seeking to strengthen clinicians' and patients' *sense of story*, that dimension of human experience that sustains the meaning-making efforts of our lives. We try to offer the meaning-making face of medicine to

⁴⁴ The authors' sympathy with Goneril and Regan rather than Lear mirrors a phenomenon that Margaret Gullette has noted about twentieth-century productions of the play, which, she argues, display a "new ageism" by portraying Lear as unreasonable and unsympathetic, and therefore justifying Goneril and Regan's exasperation with him ("Losing *Lear*" 62, 63).

patients and clinicians as an alternative to the relentless, fact-using face of medicine. As we turn toward meaning—not eclipsing the facts but using them and then, with the help of emplotment and metaphor and voice, seeing beyond them—we find the power to shift illness and suffering from their potential to savage and strip meaning from events and experience to the possibility of exposing meaning in ordinary and extraordinary life. (viii)

The reading techniques described here suggest that narrative medicine could shift Lear’s value to medicine and gerontology away from that of a diagnostic tool and towards a focus on narrative that show how works of literature are useful not simply for their ability to produce characters with diagnosable conditions. As Allan Peterkin writes, “Physician-readers need to be reminded that the goal is not to master a text but rather to tolerate its ambiguity” (401). The literary text offers the reader the opportunity to meditate on the difficulties of the act of interpretation itself.

2.6 Clinical Performances and Readings

The clinical Lear is relevant to literary critics and Shakespeare scholars because Lear’s application as a clinical case study is not limited to gerontology—it is found in recent approaches to performance and literary criticism as well. Actors who perform older Shakespearean characters draw on medical expertise to inform their portrayals of the character. Simon Russell Beale researched Lewy Body dementia to create his performance in the 2014 National Theatre production of *King Lear* (Furness n.p.). In an interview with *The Guardian*, Timothy West describes his preparation for his first performance of the role in 1971:

The first time I played Lear, I consulted a surgeon about senile dementia. He said: ‘No, you don’t want to talk about senile dementia. What he’s got is arteriosclerosis.’ He’d read the play and said it fitted all the known symptoms. He was jolly nearly right. (Barnett n.p.)

The 2014 production of *King Lear* at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival was accompanied by a panel event titled “Lear’s Shadow: Contemporary Reflections on Diagnoses, Abuses and Testamentary Capacity.” This event, featuring lectures from and discussions with doctors specializing in geriatric psychiatry, placed Shakespeare’s play in the context of present-day medical knowledge and practices and reconfirmed Shakespeare’s relevance for the consumption of twenty-first century audiences, making Lear’s old age more recognizable, or relatable. The underlying assumption that Shakespeare precociously recorded physiological facts about dementia or old age legitimates Shakespeare’s continued performance.

Literary critics have also adopted a clinical perspective in order to recuperate the play’s tragic ending. It has been suggested that by creating Lear and Prospero, Shakespeare “anticipates many of the tenets of contemporary gerontology” such as the Eriksonian stages of aging, in which the different stages of life offer a person the opportunity to either successfully or unsuccessfully confront age-specific conflicts (Deats 23, 24–25). Lear’s desire to retire has also been read as “a perfectly acceptable, ordinary wish for an octogenarian” (Porter 60).⁴⁵ David Bevington connects Shakespeare’s play

⁴⁵ Wyatt-Brown critiques Porter’s article as an example of humanistic gerontology that shows how “too intense a focus on gerontological issues sometimes overshadows literary questions” (334).

to the romances by virtue of their shared “focus on aging and preparation for death” and relates the play’s treatment of death to the Elizabeth Kübler-Ross model of accepting loss, reading the text as a meditation on how to die (407). Sara Munson Deats, in her reading of how “Lear’s progress into madness is accompanied by a journey into self-awareness” (27), sees the final act of the play as providing a transformative and recuperative image of old age in which change and growth is always possible, though Lear dies soon after his transformation:

And then, in the last act of the play, something wonderful happens. Reunited with his beloved daughter Cordelia and encircled and succored by her love, Lear reclaims his powers (even as Gutmann [1987], so many years later, asserts that the elderly tend to do). But the power he displays is very different from the authority he so valorized at the beginning of the play. The man who ever but slenderly knew himself receives a dazzling self-awareness: The wrathful bully learns patience; the dictatorial tyrant learns responsibility; and the authoritarian patriarch learns to accept, even cherish, the feminine within himself. (28)

Deats also writes that “Ultimately, Lear’s growth and expansion is not a success story, since he learns too late to accept—even embrace—aging” (29).

These kinds of readings return to the gerontological question of whether Lear has aged successfully or not. Susan Snyder follows this line of inquiry as well: “Can it be that what we recognize in *Lear* is the process of dying? Each of us in that sense is a king who must eventually give up his kingdom. . . . We may hope to win through before the end to peace with ourselves, to make friends at last with the necessity of dying” (450–51). Here, the emphasis is on discovering transformative potential in the individual’s ability to

change and die well. Lear's tragic death is not written out of the play anymore, as it was in Tate. However, a type of recovery is still made available: one in which the king's apparent acceptance of himself as an old man who faces an imminent death provides a type of catharsis.⁴⁶ In this framework of aging, the crisis of madness is something that Lear works through—a positive developmental stage that leads to an acceptance of one's need to detach from life. The focus on Lear succeeding in this developmental stage is a renewal of the style of literary criticism that Foakes identifies as predominant up until the mid-twentieth century, in which critics are “concerned with Lear's pilgrimage to redemption, as he finds himself and is ‘saved’ at the end” (*Hamlet versus Lear* 3). Though those critics often took a Christian perspective on redemption, they could also offer “A secular version [that] might offer renewal or restoration” (50). Tracing how Lear engages with models of aging, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, returns criticism of the play to the questions of redemption that concerned earlier critics.

2.7 Character Criticism and Lear's Old Age

Lear has become legible as an ideal clinical subject because of the play's passage through the trend in literary criticism that is broadly called character criticism. The gerontological criticism of Lear is another version of Shakespearean character criticism, which treats characters as psychologically unified subjects. This gerontological style of

⁴⁶ These kinds of redemptive readings stand in contrast to the position taken by some critics of Lear's old age who find an “absence of anagnorisis” in the play's ending (Zender 11). Zender writes, “It is puzzling why so many commentators are eager to see a breakthrough in understanding in Lear's self-characterizations in the reunion scene” and that “There is an implicit ageism in the assumption that Lear's breakthrough in understanding need consist of nothing more than an acknowledgment of his frailty” (28).

Shakespearean character criticism foregrounds Lear as a psychologically coherent subject and isolates analysis of the character from the other events of the play. Here, I draw on Lynn Bradley's argument that the twentieth-century adaptations that export Shakespeare's characters from the play proper in order to unfold a new story about them (like Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) are the inheritors of the practices of eighteenth-century character critics. These critics, she argues, have bequeathed a general tendency of approaching Shakespearean characters "as if they were real people, real enough to exist *outside* of Shakespeare's text" (78). Furthermore, she suggests that "By the twentieth century, the critical habit of treating Shakespeare's characters as real people had so permeated the collective imagination that it began to appear in adaptations" (78).

Lear's growing legibility as a clinical subject is the result of that same process. Eighteenth-century neoclassical character criticism produced, as Brian Vickers writes, "essays and whole books [that] are devoted to individual characters, and those alone" (11). This critical mode decentralizes plot and poetry analysis in favour of analysis of "the people of Shakespeare's creation" (11).⁴⁷ The Romantic critics, Lynn Bradley writes, "began to imagine personalities, histories, hidden memories and even more hidden desires all in the service of explaining who Shakespeare's characters really were and why they acted the way they did" (91). Character criticism treats Shakespeare's characters as

⁴⁷ Bradley proposes an alternative origin for character criticism by pointing to David Garrick's pageant of Shakespearean characters in the Shakespeare Commemoration Festival in 1769. During this pageant, various characters from different plays were presented together in ways that suggested "psychology, motivation and personality independent of Shakespeare and the stage" (80).

unique subjects who can also serve as representatives of common psychological traits. As a result, Shakespeare's characters become "individuals worthy of close scrutiny and strong feelings of identification" (Desmet, "Character Criticism" 351). Discussions of character address issues of motivation, morality, consistency, and suggest that characters possess a biography that precedes or exists apart from the play itself.

Despite its persistence as a methodology, character criticism has been critiqued for its tendency to construe characters as subjects with psychological realities beyond the textual evidence of the plays themselves. Alan Sinfield has criticized character criticism for its problematic political implications:

Does not character criticism attend to individuals, and thereby sustain a generous openness to the diversity of human experience? I think not, for the counterpart of the individual is the universal; so while characters are supposed to be essentially themselves, they end up reduced to an essential human nature—to *man*. Further, when the individual and the universal come into focus, the social, the historical, and the political become blurred or fade from view. And they are the frameworks within which we might observe the operations of power and envisage alternative scope for human lives. (78)

Sinfield suggests that this mode of criticism elides the understanding of systemic operations of power in favour of an appeal to so-called human nature.

Yet the foregrounding of character, individuality and subjectivity must be in place in order for a character like Lear to become legible as the representative of a psychological or physical condition like a medicalized old age. An early example of this is William Richardson's *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters* (1784), which

“exemplifies the quasi-scientific approach to character analysis” present in character criticism (Desmet “Character Criticism” 353). Richardson’s text is an explication of the man of sensibility, and he uses Lear to argue that “Those who are guided in their conduct by impetuous impulse, arising from sensibility, and undirected by reflection, are liable to extravagant or outrageous excess” (Richardson 60).⁴⁸ A person like Lear lacks a strong boundary between self and other and is agitated by the sympathy aroused by others’ emotions. A man of sensibility reacts to such stimuli instead of responding with reflection:

mere sensibility, undirected by reflection, leads men to an extravagant expression both of social or unsocial feelings; renders them capriciously inconstant in their affections; variable, and of course irresolute, in their conduct. These things, together with the miseries entailed by such deportment, seem to me well illustrated by Shakespeare, in his dramatic character of King Lear. (83)

For Richardson, Lear becomes a prototype in a piece devoted more to the explication of a psychological temperament than to a discussion of the play itself, as Richardson attends to the ways in which the bond of sympathy between two people can actually fail to produce meaningful communication.⁴⁹ By treating Lear is as if the character is a real

⁴⁸ Quotes from Richardson have been modernized.

⁴⁹ Bradley argues that the development of psychoanalysis as a discipline emerges from the same interests that led to character criticism:

In many ways, psychoanalysis was an institutionalized manifestation of the same impulse that motivated character criticism. It gave the world a pseudoscientific discourse with which to discuss the impulses—desire, fear, anxiety, resentment—that motivated human beings and which character critics had used to analyze dramatic characters. Psychoanalysis does not signal the end

person, Lear becomes someone “whose actions and reactions were motivated like those of any other person, so much so that Lear could be used as an example of human nature” (L. Bradley 87). Richardson’s focus on the psychology of the individual and the vagaries of communication anticipates how Lear would come to be perceived as a fitting subject for the case study.

The continued prevalence of character-based approaches to the plays allows for Lear to become intelligible as the case study of an individual man navigating old age. However, the hazard in the clinical appropriation of *King Lear* is in the reduction of Lear to the specifications of whatever theory is being applied, as both Lear and the patient are assimilated to a generic model of aging.⁵⁰ Though Lear may offer a useful way to illustrate a particular theory of aging, the application of a diagnosis to Lear can serve as a too pat resolution to Shakespeare’s apparent refusal to deliver an explicit cause for Lear’s decline. Instead, Shakespeare’s representation of a tragic and uncertain old age is rehabilitated by being brought into the purview of the clinical and diagnostic gaze. However, clinical approaches to Lear’s old age remain attractive to audiences because this kind of character criticism is the mode that most clearly allows Lear to serve as an example of the ways that old age is problematized right now, whether it be as a so-called aging population and its supposed pressure on the health care system, the factors involved

of character criticism . . . but rather a more complicated transformation of the methodology from literary criticism into pseudoscientific practice. (98)

⁵⁰ Stephen Katz has argued that the establishment of geriatrics and gerontology as disciplines have resulted in the medicalization and pathologization of old age and the creation of the “elderly” as a demographic (*Disciplining Old Age* 80–88). The lens of gerontology will “create the elderly population in the process of studying it” (51).

in the hastening or delaying of the onset of dementia, the removal of mandatory retirement, or issues of elder abuse.

2.8 Kill Thy Physician

Shakespeare's explicit references to the physician-patient relationship go unremarked upon in the texts that adopt Lear as a clinical subject, even though their interest in diagnosing Lear implicitly positions the critic as his physician. Rather than positing that Lear's old age can be "known" via some kind of diagnosis (such as dementia, which is a progressive illness and therefore does not fit well with Lear's case anyway), it would be more productive to examine the types of doctor-patient relationships that are available in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare offers two examples of the doctor-patient encounter. The second reference to a physician occurs in act 4 scene 7 during Cordelia and Lear's reunion scene. Cordelia, Kent, and a doctor gather while Lear sleeps:

CORDELIA O, you kind gods,
 Cure this great breach in his abused nature!
 Th' unturned and jarring senses, O, wind up,
 Of this child-changed father! (4.7.16–19)

Like Goneril, Cordelia invokes the second childhood metaphor, reiterating the association of the loss of reason with the second childhood of old age laid out in the introduction.

The doctor asks her permission to wake him and Cordelia responds by appealing to his own expertise:

Be governed by your knowledge, and proceed
 I' th' sway of your own will. (4.7.22–23)

The doctor wakes Lear by drawing Cordelia near and having music played. He encourages Cordelia to speak with him and then advises she leave her father to wake more fully:

Be comforted, good madam. The great rage,
 You see, is killed in him, <and yet it is danger
 To make him even o'er the time he has lost.> (4.7.91–93)

The doctor, in his detached authority, recommends against knowing, or reiterating, what Lear has suffered. In fact, he recommends precisely the types of evasions practiced by Lear's readers and adapters when confronted with the depth of the king's suffering. Further, by claiming that it is dangerous to have Lear recall his suffering and by advocating distance from it, he seems to align himself with the alienation in the play's final couplet. Yet this is not the sole model of doctoring available in the play. Once again, Kent provides the superior alternative when he assigns himself the role of Lear's physician in the first scene of the play.

In the first scene, after Cordelia fails to meet her father's expectations in the infamous love test and Lear, appalled and hurt, dispossesses her from any inheritance, Kent's sense of honour and duty to the king compels him to step in and contest Lear's "hideous rashness" (1.1.169). Kent's words only spur Lear to even greater anger, but still Kent's response is to tell Lear what he does not want to hear:

Kill thy physician, and thy fee bestow
 Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift,
 Or whilst I can vent clamor from my throat,
 I'll tell thee thou dost evil. (1.1.187–190)

Perhaps these lines have been ignored by the clinical readings because they characterize the physician as being equally as vulnerable as Lear. Here the physician-patient relationship is interdependent.⁵¹ Unlike the doctor's in act 4 scene 7, Kent's duty as self-appointed physician to Lear does not remove him to an objective, separate interpretative space. Instead, he understands that he may need to sacrifice himself in order to cure Lear. Here, the physician joins the patient on his journey to a tragic conclusion, something Kent articulates in his final lines after Lear's death when he rejects Albany's offer to jointly rule the realm with Edgar:

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;

My master calls me. I must not say no. (5.3.390–91)

Kent's role, throughout the play, is to stay with Lear as he suffers, to remain loyal to him even when Lear abuses him, and to not to abandon him even when Lear appears (to Goneril and Regan) to deserve it. This model of devotion implies that the physician's role is to stay with the patient until the end, even when the end is a terrible tragedy.

⁵¹ Noel Hess takes up Kent's implication in Lear's suffering in his case study on the treatment of narcissistic tyranny in psychodynamic psychotherapy. Hess's position is that Lear is too often reduced in criticism to "aggrieved victim," and Hess provides a reading of three case studies in which elderly subjects "felt driven to use their loved objects as narcissistic extensions of themselves, as Lear uses his daughters, in a campaign to hold themselves together while under siege from within" (215). What is unusual about Hess's approach is his willingness to include his own experience as therapist with a client who, after an initial session during which Hess "dared to question the set-up and challenge his narcissism," canceled any follow-up sessions (213). At the conclusion of this case, Hess identifies with the banishment of Cordelia and Kent. Hess's self-reflexive inclusion in the cast of characters in Shakespeare's play allows him to communicate the possibility that the doctor (and, by extension any interpreter or critic) is as much at the mercy of the dramatic text as the object under clinical consideration.

The reception of *King Lear* is informed by the pressing issues that attend the concept of old age in a given period, whether it is the transformation of the poor laws, the paradoxically public absence of King George in the final years of his life, or the incorporation of old age into the professional specialization of gerontology. The reception history of Lear's old age shows how attempts to resolve the tragic uncertainty left by Lear's death paradoxically suppress the ambiguity that makes Shakespeare's play compelling in the first place. Ultimately, the play proves resistant to adaptations that avoid this troubling uncertainty by compensating with either the superhuman Lear of Tate, the removal of Lear's body entirely by the Romantic critics, or the reduction of Lear to a case study.

Critics such as Lamb and Bradley respond to the vulnerability of Lear's tragic old age by wishing someone would care for him. King Lear's tragic experience of old age evokes anxieties of being abandoned at the point one returns to a so-called "second childhood." Though Goneril invokes the second childhood trope as an insult, the trope does register the fundamental fear of returning to the vulnerability of infancy and early childhood in one's old age, and the even greater fear that one will be abandoned in that time of need instead of provided with a caregiver. The next chapter addresses Jaques's representation of the final stage of life in his Ages of Man speech in *As You Like It*. The chapter tracks the reception history of Jaques's description of "second childishness," and shows how visual artists supplement Jaques's nihilistic and lonely final stage with a

compensatory female caregiver that the satirical speaker withholds from his own cynical schema of the lifecourse.⁵²

⁵² Thank you to Chad Allen Thomas from the 2013 “Wrong Shakespeare” SAA seminar for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

3 Sans Everything? Old Age, Gender, and Visual Representation in *As You Like It*

In act two of *As You Like It*, Jaques delivers one of the most well-known and oft-quoted speeches in the Shakespeare canon, one that chronicles the entirety of the lifespan in twenty-eight lines:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;

And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into lean and slippered pantaloon,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank, and his big, manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange, eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (2.7.138–165)

Jaques addresses his speech to the exiled Duke Senior and the rest of his courtiers in the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden, anatomizing the lifespan in response to Duke Senior's observation that many other people must share the exiles' misfortune. By dividing the progress of life into seven distinct stages, Shakespeare invokes the Ages of Life or Ages of Man models that represent the life-cycle schematically, sometimes as a wheel or circle, sometimes as an ascending and descending staircase, sometimes by pairing each stage of life with a different type of animal, and frequently by representing the transformation of the human body as it grows older.⁵³ Ages of Man schemes were

⁵³ Much discussion of this speech has focused on the particular sources Shakespeare may have used to come up with his seven-stage division of life. Alan Taylor Bradford argues that Jaques follows the seven-stage Ptolemaic scheme of aging, in which each stage is ruled by a planetary influence, only to "tendentiously distort" it by removing the influence of the sun and by overemphasizing the influence of Saturn by splitting it across the final two stages (174). William Jeffrey Phelan argues that this type of

expressed in text and image, in manuscript and print, and were integrated into the architecture present in early modern Europe, such as the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral and the pavement of the Siena Cathedral.⁵⁴

Shakespeare adapts this visual and emblematic tradition of representing the progress of life into dramatic form. In this chapter, I will argue that Jaques's nihilistic description of old age as "mere oblivion" is contested by the emblematic entrance of Orlando and Adam that directly follows the speech. Though it has been widely observed that the appearance of Orlando supporting Adam undermines Jaques's totalizing representation of the lifecourse, I argue that Shakespeare's subversion of Jaques's cynical conclusion is gendered as a specifically masculine emblem of intergenerational care. I then argue that the gendering of intergenerational care changes during the speech's long afterlife in *As You Like It's* reception history. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century illustrations of the speech marginalize Shakespeare's model of male intergenerational interdependency. Instead, pictorial depictions of the final stage reveal their contemporary gender politics by inserting female caregiver figures into the final stage, thus establishing the care of infancy and old age as belonging to the private sphere of female domesticity and labour. The illustrations recognize the nihilism inherent in Jaques's perspective on aging, and

reading overstates the role of the Ptolemaic scheme's influence and that there is not necessarily an astrological meaning to be found motivating each of Jaques's characterizations (98).

⁵⁴ Samuel Chew argues that early modern audiences would have been familiar with the Ages of Man from "stained glass windows or in murals or in engravings," morality plays, or the treatises that circulated in the period and addressed how to divide and define each stage of life according various physical, natural, or astrological influences (146).

attempt to repair that pessimism by offering the consolations of female filial piety. However, as the chapter's final turn will demonstrate, the visual representations of the final stage retain the refusal of empathy enshrined in the text of Jaques's speech. Jaques's refusal to allow for old age the opportunity to represent itself, to enter into signification, does not just pose a practical problem to the artists, who must figure out strategies to visually represent the state of "mere oblivion" and of being "sans everything." They also tend to bolster Jaques's vision of old age as being evacuated of subjectivity, an inaccessible psychological state that is fundamentally "othered" from intellectual and sympathetic exchange. Ultimately, these cultural engagements with Shakespeare's final stage reveal more about the anxious observer who fails to empathize with the aged subject, and who instead is locked into a fear of the state of "witlessness" or "mere oblivion" that is perceived to define the final stage. That so many of these illustrations end up maintaining Jaques's lack of empathy for the loss of subjectivity that he envisions for extreme old age overlooks the larger point of *As You Like It*, which is far more generous and never denies Adam's subjectivity in the way that Jaques suggests is inevitable. Like the reception history of *King Lear*, so much of which is occupied by a refusal to confront a vulnerable type of old age, here the vulnerable state of so-called second childishness is raised by the cynical Jaques, but never given its own voice.

3.1 Jaques's Predecessors: The Ages of Man in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods

The production and transmission of the Ages of Man schemes created in the medieval and early modern periods served moral, religious, and meditative functions.

These illustrations offer schematic compositional conventions for the representation of each stage of life, and take the form of wheels, trees, staircases, and bridges.⁵⁵ The human body is depicted sequentially at progressive stages within these conceptual structures and the stages are distinguished from each other through physiological differences and other physical cues. As Elizabeth Sears writes, the artists

drew distinctions between the different ages of man through physical characteristics—size, posture, the length and colour of hair, the presence or absence of beard—and through costume and attribute: whip tops and other toys, bows and arrows, writing tablets, mirrors, falcons, flowering branches, scepters, swords and shields, axes, money bags, spindles and distaffs, rosaries, books, crutches, and other items were given to appropriate figures. Certain stock characters were created—the swaddled baby, the frolicsome child, the youthful falconer, the military man in his prime, the prosperous older man, and the very elderly man bent over a stick among them—and these were used time and time again, painters and sculptors combining them to form shorter and longer cycles as context demanded. (5)

The division of the lifecycle within a visual schema allows the artists to show how one person is connected to larger macrocosmic forces. A four-stage division shows how life stages may be associated with the four seasons, and a seven-stage division allows for an astrological correlation between one's age and the planets. These connections between body, stage of life, and natural phenomenon act, as Chris Gilleard puts it, as “enduring

⁵⁵ See Chew and Sears for detailed treatments of each type of scheme.

reference points ranging from the ages of the world, the number of the planets, the cardinal virtues to the hours of the day, the months and the seasons of the year” and establish “the existence of a moral order within the world, of which aging and old age form an integral part” (“Aging and Old Age” 29). Human aging makes legible God’s theological order and reveals the presence of the divine in nature. The production and transmission of the Ages of Man schemes place the individual in relationship to the cosmos, the natural world, and in spiritual time.

The wheel structure emphasizes, to quote Sears, “that a man should look beyond the worldly life, so transitory, so deceitful, to a spiritual existence which is not bound by time, the vagaries of chance, and the rhythms of growth and decay” (145). The Wheel of the Ten Ages of Man found in the fourteenth-century de Lisle psalter is one well-known example (plate 1). While four images of the broader stages of life appear in each of the design’s four corners, ten smaller medallions appear at the end of each spoke of the wheel, each portraying a unique stage. The infancy stage in the lower left medallion depicts a female figure holding an infant next to a fire. As the wheel rotates clockwise other figures appear: a young man, a figure with a pair of scales, a figure seated on a horse with a falcon in his hand, and a figure with a crown and scepter at the apex of the wheel. At this point wheel begins to descend, as a hooded figure holding a staff looks back at the figure that preceded him. Next appears a figure bent on a staff, which a child also appears to hold.⁵⁶ The following stage portrays a figure lying supine as a physician

⁵⁶ The child’s behavior is ambiguous and has been read as malevolent. See John Winter Jones for this view and textual support (11).

stands at his side. The penultimate medallion contains a religious figure reading rites over a coffin and the final medallion, at the bottom of the wheel, simply portrays a crypt. It is the only medallion to contain no human figure whatsoever. At the center of the wheel is the head of Christ. As J. A. Burrow writes, the positioning of God at the center has an equalizing and transcendent effect: “The eternal God sees the whole of time as eternally present, including the times of man’s life, which are all equidistant from him” (*Ages* 45). The spatial relationships afforded by the wheel’s structure allow for two concepts to be held in tension: though the rise and fall of the wheel invariably tie the lifespan to trajectories of ascent and descent, the positioning of Christ’s head at the hub of the wheel’s spokes, at equal distance from each stage, emphasizes the pervasive and timeless connection between human and God.⁵⁷ It is simply not possible to be “sans everything” in a scheme in which spiritual transcendence is available at every stage of life.

⁵⁷ Burrow translates the text surrounding the head of God as follows: “I see everything at once and govern by reason” (*Ages* 45).

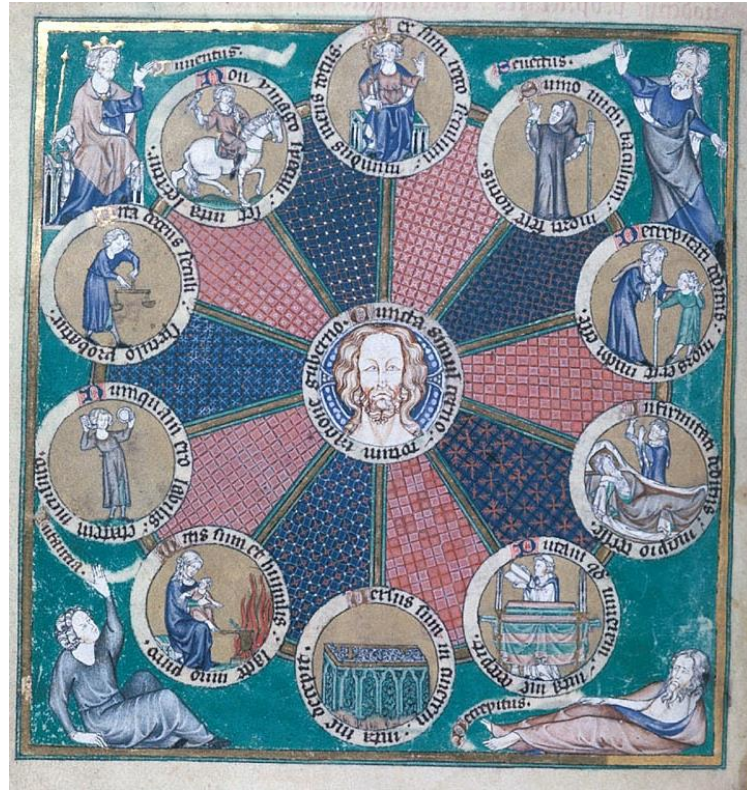


Plate 1: Detail from the Wheel of the Ten Ages of Man from the De Lisle Psalter (c. 1310). Image Courtesy of British Library. Public Domain. <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IID=7108>.

As representations of the Ages of Man continued to be produced into the sixteenth century formal aspects of the schemata began to diversify. The image of the stairway first comes into use in this period, the earliest example of which is a 1540 print by Jorg Breu the Younger (Chew 148). In this image, a representative of each age group sits on its own step above an animal that is paired with each age. Like the wheel, the staircase also associates aging with ascent and descent; however, the stairway model loses the transcendent circularity implied in the de Lisle psalter, while also allowing for more explicit parallelisms between the ages to arise. The 1540 print suggests the conceptual pairing of childhood and old age, as Chew indicates: “At the knees of the older man is another infant, perhaps suggestive of ‘second childishness’ but perhaps also

representative of the next generation” (148). A later, undated print, titled *As in a Map Here Man May Well Perceiue, How Tyme Creeps on Til Death His Life Bereaue*, operates in a similar fashion, with each step occupied by a figure one decade older than its predecessor (plate 2).⁵⁸ The stairway peaks at age fifty and descends once again to age one hundred. As in the 1540 print, each age is paired with an animal that represents the characteristics of that stage of life, and the later print also includes couplets that describe the relationship between the animal and each age:

[Year 1:] Untill the first 10 yeares be spent / A Child is Lamb like innocent.

[Year 10:] But then Hee Goatlike skips, & joyes / In idle sports and foolish toys.

[Year 20:] Now Lustfull blood doeth fill his veynes / And Heifer like untam'd remains.

[Year 30:] Full ripe in strength Hee doeth inure / His Limbs to marre, & toyle t'endure.

[Year 40:] No daunger can his courage quaile / But Lyonlike Hee will prevaile.

[Year 50:] Force now ginns faile therefore with wit / Foxlike Hee helps to manage it.

[Year 60:] By rapine might or any wayes / He seekes wolfelike His state to raise.

[Year 70:] News he affects to hear, and tell / But Dogglike loves at home to dwell.

[Year 80:] The Cat keeps house & likes the fire / Men aged have the same desire.

[Year 90:] Weake Asses backes are made to beare / And Age must suffer every

⁵⁸ This particular print dates to mid- to late-seventeenth century, according to its entry in the Folger Shakespeare Library catalogue.

where.

[Year 100:] Grown twice a Child Gooselike he spauls⁵⁹ / And gives hope of his
funeralls.

Both infancy and extreme old age are placed at the base of the staircase and are the only two figures posed in recumbent positions. By the time Shakespeare writes Jaques's speech in which old age is equated with childhood, the connection had already been well-established in these visual schemes and their iconic conventions. However, that these traditions are schematic and repetitive does not necessarily suggest that they enforce static interpretations of the life cycle, something that becomes apparent when Shakespeare takes up Ages of Man imagery within *As You Like It*.

⁵⁹ The couplets have been modernized. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "spaul" as an obscure word dating from 1430: "Of the shoulders: To move up and down during walking" (*OED* 2). The association of "extreme" old age with the goose has precedence in the images accompanying a 1520 Dutch print "Der Dierē Palleys" ("The Palace of Animals"):

At a hundred years he becomes the prey of death;
He resembles a goose which is plucked and eaten[.]
So is he plucked of the riches he prized,
And his body is eaten by the worms. (In Jones 18)

Francis Bacon, in a section of *Historie of Life and Death* that addresses the length of life in animals, also notes that "The Goose, though his food be grasse, is long-liv'd, especially the wild-goose; so that in *Germany* this Proverb is common, *Magis senex quam anser nivalis*, Older than a white Goose" (sig. D3v, D4r. The quote has been modernized).



Plate 2: As in a Map Here Man May Well Perceiue, How Tyme Creeps on Til Death His Life Bereaue. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Jaques's speech turns away from the type of meditative, transcendent effects offered by the de Lisle psalter. By doing so, Shakespeare is in keeping with the shift Gilleard identifies in early modern versions of the Ages; the speech is less moral and spiritual and more interested in material experience (29). As is frequently noted, the speech combines the *theatrum mundi* topos, the notion that all the world's a stage, with the structure of the Ages of Man. By doing so, Jaques demotes the spiritual and natural world in favour of the delineation of the stages as performed, genre-bound identities. As Gregory M. Colón Semenza writes, Shakespeare “transforms ages such as adolescence from archetypal phases into behavioural roles that can be performed—voluntarily or

involuntarily —throughout one’s lifetime” (228). Semenza notes that upon closer examination the speech does not sustain itself as a rigorously schematic exercise, since Jaques “oscillates between describing stages of life and roles that men play (infancy and adolescence versus schoolboy and lover)” (227). The organizing intelligence behind this particular scheme is Jaques’s cynical, melancholy perspective, instead of an all-seeing deity. There is no sense of an afterlife waiting for those who occupy the final stage, no sense of a macrocosmic order that can reintegrate the body after death. With the loss of a religious afterlife, death loses its role as a necessary step in resurrection. Instead, Jaques insists upon stripping the final stage of any subjectivity and any possibility of empathetic connection with the aged subject.

Jaques does so by insisting on the final stage’s total inaccessibility, an inaccessibility that extends to visual representation. Were the speech to be translated back into visual form, Jaques offers clear instructions for the visual content of the first six stages. The first should, like the de Lisle psalter, include a nurse or caregiver figure. The schoolboy’s accessories and demeanor in the next stage are accounted for, as are the lover’s attitude and activity, the soldier’s bearded appearance and suggestion of a cannon, the Justice’s meal and round belly, and the pantaloone’s clothing. A particularized set of iconic conventions emerges for each stage—up to a point. Though Jaques declares a clear subject for each age and assigns each subject a detailed identity, the final stage is paradoxically given definition through its formlessness: being sans everything. Jaques also excludes extreme old age from the possibility of self-articulation, as the central character in all of the stages *except* the final one is vocal and expressive. The character first mewls, then whines, then sighs, then curses, then utters wise saws, and then whistles,

yet the final stage lacks any evidence of vocal expression. Jaques's description of the last stage as a return of "childishness" and then as "mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything" forecloses any avenue for old age's representation on its own terms. However, this is "childishness" with a difference: in its first iteration the infant expresses its anger and displeasure ("mewling and puking") in the presence of another whose role is to nurse it. The second iteration of childishness is isolated and characterized by want. To isolate extreme old age from the arena of signification renders the final age as Jaques's most cynical indictment of all the stages.⁶⁰

The nihilistic and overly deterministic gesture with which Jaques concludes his speech is undercut, however, by the re-entrance of Orlando bearing Adam. Orlando, the young man who has fled to the Forest of Arden to avoid his older brother's persecution and who, as Rosalind's lover, occupies stage three of Jaques's schema, has been wandering with his family's older servant, Adam. They are both starved and desperate and the Duke has offered to share his company's meal with them. Orlando re-enters with Adam at the conclusion of Jaques's speech, with the text suggesting that the younger man is carrying the older one, as Duke Senior says to Orlando, "Welcome. Set down your venerable burden / And let him feed" (2.7.166–67). Jaques's speech, gesturing as it does to the visual specificities of the Ages of Man tradition, also primes the audience for a

⁶⁰ Many scholars have pointed out that the speech is delivered from the perspective of Jaques and is therefore best read as a product of his particular personality rather than as a universalized commentary on aging (Chew 144–45, Scolnicov 76), and that Adam serves as "instructive juxtaposition" to Jaques (Ellis 7, and see the commentary collected by Richard Knowles on these lines in the *New Variorum Edition* of the play, 137–38).

theatrical visualization of an emblematic idea: youth carrying age.⁶¹

The re-entry of these characters fills the void Jaques leaves open for old age with an image familiar from Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586): "Pietas filiorum in parentes" (plate 3).

⁶¹ Variations on this observation are commonplace in Shakespeare scholarship. See, for example, Janice Rossen (210) and Gregory Semenza (229). It is also noted in the work of historians of aging; see Pat Thane on how Adam's entrance serves as an example "of human difference in the process of ageing over which individuals have some control" (50).

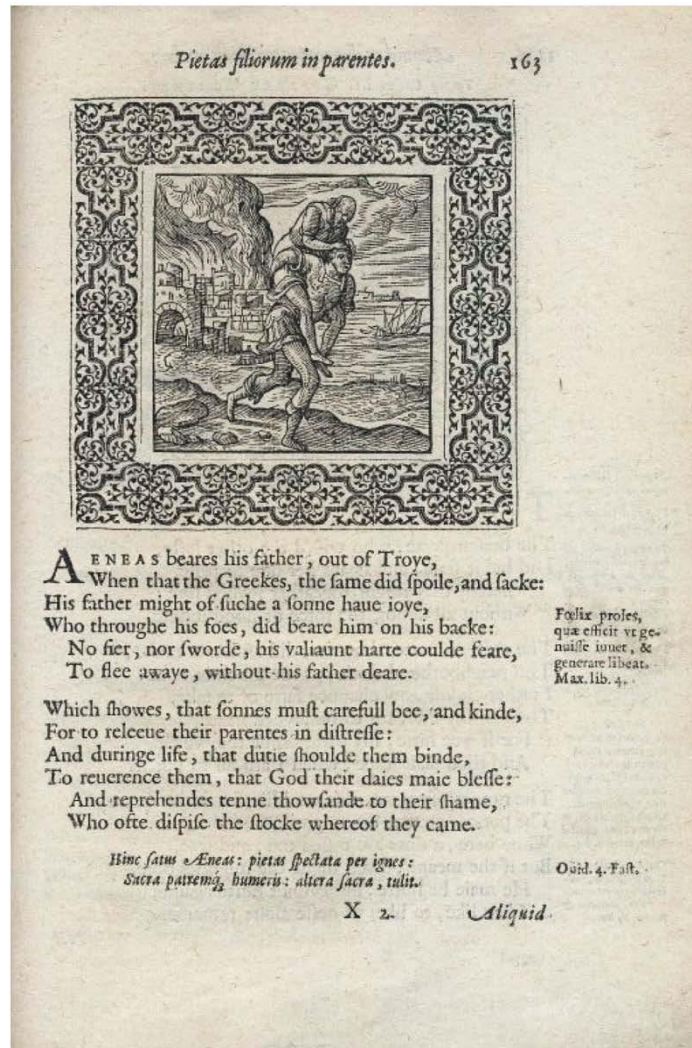


Plate 3: “Pietas filiorum in parentes” from Geoffrey Whitney’s *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586). Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

In this emblem, which teaches the importance of filial duty, Aeneas carries his father out of a burning Troy. Whitney's verse underneath the image exhorts sons to honour their parents. It reads "sonnes must carefull bee, and kinde, / For to releevē their parents in distresse: / And during life, that dutie shoulde them binde, / To reverence them, that God their daies maie blesse" (163).⁶² As John Doeblér writes, "The emblem of Aeneas carrying his father Anchises out of a captured and burning Troy . . . is based on one of the most insistent images of loyalty in the Renaissance" (321). Samuel Johnson, in his 1765 edition of Shakespeare, notes the possible allusion here to the story of father and son fleeing Troy in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where the older man is also described, like Adam, as a "venerable burthen" (Knowles, *As You Like It* 138. Note to TLN 1147–48). Moreover, Orlando and Adam have fled a conflagration of their own. As we learn in act two scene three, Oliver plans to burn Orlando's lodgings, and it is only Adam's intervention that saves Orlando's life. Crucially, the two characters who enter in act two scene seven, one younger, one older, are interdependent. Anthony Ellis puts their relationship in the context of intergenerational relations, noting "The cooperation and selflessness that mark Orlando and Adam's relationship demonstrate that productive harmony can exist between youth and age," and that "their loyalty is mutual" (7). They have each rescued the other. Though Orlando no doubt occupies the lover stage, he is not limited to it: the play shows that the characters need not be solely determined by their supposed places in the lifecourse. In fact, Orlando's capacity to express filial piety towards a character who is not his father is part of what confirms him as a worthy lover to

⁶² Whitney's text has been modernized.

Rosalind. In return, Adam has demonstrated his generosity and commitment to sustaining Orlando by bestowing him with his retirement savings:

I have five hundred crowns,
 The thrifty hire I saved under your father,
 Which I did store to be my foster-nurse
 When service should in my old limbs lie lame,
 And unregarded age in corners thrown.
 Take that, and he that doth the ravens feed,
 Yea providently caters for the sparrow,
 Be comfort to my age. Here is the gold.

All this I give you. Let me be your servant. (2.3.39–47)

Adam invokes a pervasive early modern anecdote about the dangers of premature transfer of property, one that also reveals a fear of being abandoned in old age and neglected by one's children. Steven R. Smith summarizes the general narrative of the story:

The story of the old man of Monmouth, which dates from the Middle Ages, was still popular in the seventeenth century. This unfortunate old man transferred his property to his married son with the understanding that his son would take care of him in his old age. At first the old man was accorded due honor and respect. He was first seated at the head of the table, but gradually was moved down and eventually reduced to remaining on a couch behind the door where he was covered with an old sackcloth. When he died and was buried, his grandson asked

for the sackcloth telling his father that ‘it shall serve to cover you as it did my old grandfather.’ (“Age of Transition” 202)

Set against this background, Adam’s willingness to give up the money he has saved to ensure his own security in old age is even more selfless. Though the story of the old man of Monmouth warns against precisely this type of generosity, Adam still risks potential penury in order to support Orlando in his period of need.

By introducing Orlando and Adam to unfix Jaques’s conclusion to the Ages of Man, the play offers an emblematic image to counter the potentially reductive effects of Jaques’s interpretation of the lifecourse. Hanna Scolnicov reflects on the de-universalizing effect Shakespeare’s incorporation of the Ages of Man has in the play:

Shakespeare dissociates himself from the belief in the universal validity of the traditional Seven Ages of Man motif. He acknowledges it and employs it for his own ends, but rejects the totality of its claim, showing its weakness and partiality. He makes use of it as a convenient cultural matrix and social convention, on the basis of which he can develop his own more sophisticated characterizations.

(76)⁶³

⁶³ Ellis also argues that “neither of the opposed types, the pantaloone nor Adam, embodies the whole truth of old age. The sheer diversity of Shakespeare’s older characters argues against his reduction of the aging process to conform with traditional ‘ages of man’ models” (8). However, Ellis does not agree that Adam’s entrance fully resolves the nihilism of Jaques’s speech, suggesting instead that “the discomfiture given rise to by old age persists beyond this moment. This happens because Adam’s rejuvenation occurs in the otherworldly, seemingly timeless Arden, a place its visitors inhabit only as a temporary escape from normal lived experience” (8). He goes on to argue that Adam, having been dismissed from service, operates as a reminder of the social problem of the poverty in old age, and that on this topic the play offers no solution (8–9).

If no one scheme is monolithic, then no character can be totally determined by the outcomes that Jaques offers for each stage of life.⁶⁴

3.2 The Afterlife of the Seven Ages of Man: Shakespearean Illustration

So far I have focused on three points: first, how Shakespeare's speech originates in, and then departs from, a long-standing visual tradition of representing the lifecycle, a tradition that frequently connects each stage of human life to a larger, macrocosmic order. Second, that by having Jaques deliver the Ages of Man, Shakespeare temporarily offers a scheme of the lifecourse where the final stage is more akin to a void than a stage or role. Third, that through the staging practices strongly suggested by the playscript, the entrance of Orlando and Adam counters Jaques's nihilistic scheme with a model of male intergenerational interdependency. Once God is out of the picture, as it were, Jaques's model does not consider that there may be an afterlife. However, the speech itself has a long afterlife in Shakespeare's reception history. Jaques's Ages of Man becomes a Shakespearean commonplace that, once extracted from its original textual context, circulates Jaques's essentialized and pessimistic reading of old age instead of the broader and more generous perspective on aging that exists in the larger context of *As You Like It*. These illustrations do also carry forward the notion of the importance of intergenerational care; however, they lose the reciprocal nature that is inherent to Adam and Orlando's

⁶⁴ As Karl Zender writes, Jaques "does not, and cannot, truly characterize the ages themselves, for to do so would require that he abandon his schema and instead depict the ages from inside, in all their intricacy and variety" (3).

relationship, while also changing the play's vision of masculine intergenerational care to one of female filial piety.

Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man* becomes a popular topic for artistic representation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This interest is not unique to this speech—these illustrations are but part of a growing interest in the pictorial representation of all of Shakespeare's works, evident in the rise of the illustrated Shakespeare edition and the growing popularity of painting moments from the plays. And it is not surprising that artists return Shakespeare's *Seven Ages* speech to the visual dimension, restoring the speech to the artistic tradition from which it sprang. The rest of the chapter will take up how the state of being “sans everything” is depicted in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings, engravings, in advertisements for soap and food products, and in collectable art books.

The illustrations of Jaques's *Seven Ages* that emerge in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries form part of a growing interest in the pictorial representation of Shakespeare's works.⁶⁵ Accounts of this history show how closely linked Shakespearean illustration is to the history of the Shakespeare edition. For instance, Charles Knight's pictorial edition, writes Stephen Orgel, was directed to “a middle-class audience with a growing, carefully educated, taste for paintings in their homes, and an enthusiasm for theatre as a thoroughly proper entertainment” (“*Shakespeare Illustrated*” 81). Shakespearean illustration was also firmly character-oriented. Peter Holland argues that the illustrators of nineteenth-century

⁶⁵ See also John Harvey, “Shakespeare and the Ends of Time” (1996) and Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (2013).

editions, such as John Gilbert and Joseph Kenny Meadows, “foregroun[d] character” and produce their own “dramatic narrative of performance” (71), in Meadows’s case by “peopl[ing] the play with characters whose life and dynamic vitality move from simply supporting or surrounding the page of dry text into a theatrical engagement with the text’s energies” (65). Jonathan Bate points out how the illustrators would extract characters such as Falstaff from the play “and transform him into an iconic figure” (41), linking this visual practice with the contemporary trend in the period’s character criticism. By emphasizing character, these illustrations carry forward the work of the character criticism described in chapter two.⁶⁶

The increase in affordable editions and the proliferation of Shakespearean illustration are components of the nineteenth century’s “bardolatry,” a term that implies that there is a visual, idolatrous, element to the period’s adulation of Shakespeare.⁶⁷ The widespread familiarity with Shakespeare’s works makes the plays a productive source of material for

⁶⁶ Stuart Sillars notes the same foregrounding of character in Shakespearean painting:

That these paintings show individual figures rather than presenting more fully individual moments of the play, or bringing together their larger concerns, is part of a movement seen not only in painting but in other branches of visual art, and the reading of the plays in general, as the century moves on. In this the characters are increasingly seen as figures with lives extending beyond the confines of theatre or text, their individual natures and human relationships exposed to the age’s growing interest in emotional and psychological identities and usually shown through techniques borrowed from contemporary portraiture. (“Shakespeare and the Visual Arts” 276).

⁶⁷ Sillars summarizes some of the developments that motivated the spread of bardolatry: “Technical advances made the illustrated edition far easier, cheaper and quicker to produce; the demand for such volumes was driven by educational reforms and the idea of Shakespeare as a marker of national identity and cultural maturity in the owner” (“Shakespeare and the Visual Arts” 269).

artists and advertisers seeking to reach a wide audience. The Ages of Man speech is particularly well-represented in illustration since, as Adrian Poole writes, “Few speeches from Shakespeare are as easily extracted from their dramatic context as Jaques’s” (71). Separated from the play and transformed into new media, Shakespeare’s Seven Ages are portrayed in paintings, engravings, as part of advertisements for soap and food products, on fan covers, and in illustrated art books that represent each stage individually on sequential pages. In 1849, there is *Man: From the Cradle to the Grave, Being Shakspeare’s Seven Ages of Life*. Another contemporary publication is *Shakespeare’s Seven Ages of Man Comically Illustrated In Jest and Earnest By a Funny Fellow*. In 1885, there is *The Seven Ages of Man from Shakespeare’s “As You Like It” Illustrated*. Eventually the subject matter diverges from Shakespeare completely with *The Seven Ages of Golf* in 1899. A frequently reprinted version of these modern Ages of Man, titled *Shakspeare’s Seven Ages of Man: Illustrated by Original Designs Drawn on Wood* (1840), was illustrated by members of the Royal Academy and was edited by John Martin, a bibliographer and librarian at Woburn Abbey who was “a keen promoter of the use of original wood-engraving in book illustration” (Goodwin n.p.). In the volume’s introduction, Martin attempts to trace the origins and context of Jaques’s speech, reprinting a letter from Maria Callcott, notable for her own writing on travel, history, and art (Mitchell n.p.). Callcott places Jaques’s speech within a wider intellectual, cultural, and artistic tradition and offers the example of the 1475 pavement at the Siena Cathedral by Antonio Federighi (which she visited with her husband Augustus Callcott, one of the artists who contributed to the project) as a precursor to Shakespeare’s seven-stage

scheme.⁶⁸ I will address this edition, and the Callcotts' trip to the Siena pavement, later in this chapter. My examination of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century illustrations of Shakespeare's Ages of Man has shown that the depictions tend to reproduce consistent traits, which I will now address in order to unearth how Shakespeare's visual interpreters transform and adapt the seventh stage of Jaques's speech.

3.3 Filial Piety, Take Two: Domesticity and Female Labour

The majority of Shakespearean painting and illustration took as its subject the characters of Shakespeare's plays, and I discussed above how critics have identified the periods' trends in painting Shakespeare as commensurate with character criticism. The illustrations of the Jaques's Ages of Man are different insofar as the visual artists are, in this case, illustrating a descriptive speech, instead of a dramatic role or character. Furthermore, it is a speech that seems to invite the difficulty of visually depicting the

⁶⁸ John Winter Jones, the Principal Librarian of the British Museum, published *Observations on the Division of Man's Life into Stages prior to the "Seven Ages" of Shakspeare* in 1853. Like Martin and Callcott, Jones is interested in the historical contextualization the speech. His paper begins, "The name of Shakspeare appears to be so inseparably connected with the Seven Ages of Man in the minds of most persons, that few have thought of inquiring how much of this charming creation is really his own" (3). His curiosity is piqued by the British Museum's acquisition of "an extremely curious wood-engraving of the Seven Ages of Man, executed about the middle of the fifteenth century" (3). Jones therefore embarks upon research into the Ages of Man and the convention of dividing life into stages. He notes that visual representation of the stages of life was already occurring by the twelfth century and points to examples found in cathedrals (10). He translates poetry and reproduces prints but still concludes with a reassertion of bardolatry: "Every one who reads the extracts I have given will feel how immeasurably they all fall short of the poetic conception of our own Shakspeare" (25).

final stage, described as the condition of “mere oblivion” and being “sans everything.” Jaques is far more cryptic when describing the seventh stage than he is when providing the concrete details that describe the previous stages: the infant in the nurse’s arms, the schoolboy carrying a satchel, the lover composing a ballad, the bearded soldier facing a cannon, the justice with his well-described physicality, and especially the pantaloon. This sixth stage, also a version of old age, actually receives the most attention from Jaques; the pantaloon receives approximately seven lines of description that draw attention to the figure in the process of his shrinking, with the hose too large for the shrunk shank and the voice turning to a whistle and becoming childlike, prefiguring the approach of second childhood in the next stage.

Despite Jaques’s lack of concrete details for the final stage, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artistic representations of the speech portray the final stage in consistent ways (see plates 4–8).⁶⁹ The central figure often sits in a chair or lies in a bed,

⁶⁹ Peter Whitfield describes how “The Shakespearean artistic tradition . . . created a recognized iconography of Shakespeare, a series of classic scenes to which artists returned again and again, and to which any future illustrator was more or less compelled to acknowledge and respond” (12). Though this chapter mainly discusses the first and final stages, the other five stages possess their own iconic conventions and reflect the consistency that Whitfield describes. The schoolboy may appear dejected but occasionally happy, and he is frequently portrayed with a hanging slate in a pastoral setting. The third scene tends to reference the conventions of the courtly lover who is accompanied by his lute, his poetry, and a framed miniature of a woman. The soldier is frequently represented in the midst of battle, sometimes on horse and sometimes on foot. Occasionally his dead or wounded victim appears nearby. Unsurprisingly, he is bearded and is often posed triumphantly, with sword hand raised. Other times he is depicted mid-attack, sneaking up on the enemy. The Justice often sits in a well-appointed room at a food and drink-laden table. He may have a dog lying at his feet, or be attended by a clerk and supplicants seeking his judgment. The illustrations may suggest that the Justice has abdicated his duty towards the unfortunate in favour of creature comforts. Some of the images smooth out any conflict suggested by the speech, whereas others

sometimes covered with blankets, sometimes wearing a cap and robe. A female caregiver may prepare food, attend to a fire, or engage with a child. The setting is further marked as a domestic one through items such as furniture, ornaments on a mantle, and framed paintings. Images of the final stage consistently include this female caregiving figure in a domestic space, in contrast to the events in Shakespeare's play, where Orlando tends to Adam in the pastoral setting of the forest of Arden.

emphasize it. The pantaloon occasionally appears in profile, with a walking stick or cane, brimmed hat and cape, and usually with legs visible to display the hose. Often a dog appears in the image with him as well. He may gaze at himself in a full length mirror. In one case an additional female figure (who more commonly appears in the final stage) sits on a stool beside him reading, presumably out loud. Often, a separate page is devoted to each stage in the illustrated book or pamphlet. In contrast, William Mulready's painting *Seven Ages of Man* (1838) depicts representatives of all the stages together in an outdoor scene. Sillars points out the disjunction between the playtext and the painting: the painting "suggests human life as governed by nurture—a reading against the text that accords well with contemporary views of family and care" ("Shakespeare and the Visual Arts" 271). The image is reproduced in Martin's edition.



Plate 4: *Shakspear's Seven Ages of Man* (c. 19th century). The seventh stage appears in the bottom center of the image. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



Plate 6: Detail from above.



Plate 7: A print captioned as “Second Childishness” from a collection titled *Miscellaneous engravings and woodcuts, many unidentified* in the Folger Shakespeare Library. The date can be estimated by the date of the volume owner’s death: Robert Balmanno (d. 1861). The series is titled *The Seven Ages* in pencil, and illustrates each of Jaques’s stages. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

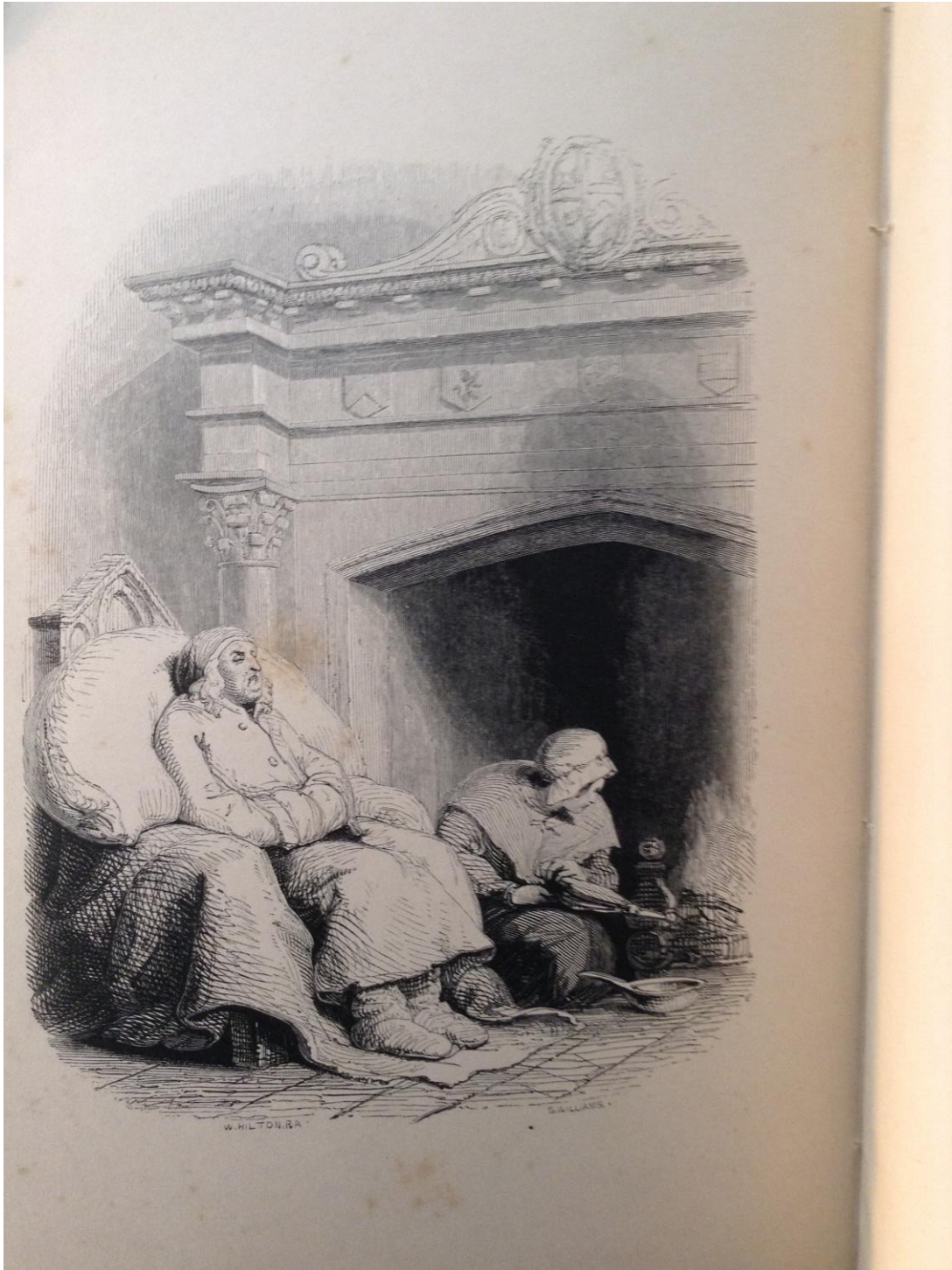


Plate 8: “The Last Scene” from John Martin’s 1848 edition of *Shakspeare’s Seven Ages of Man*. Designed by William Hilton. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Almost universally, the pictorial renderings of the final stage are interested in recuperating a domestic scene. One outlier is the painting of the final stage by Thomas Stothard. Stothard's painting (from the mid- to late-eighteenth century) produces an interpretation of Jaques's final stage that restores the promise of Christian resurrection and religious afterlife that is more reminiscent of the religious transcendence available in the medieval Ages of Man schemes (plate 9).



Plate 9: Untitled painting by Thomas Stothard. Titled *A set of seven paintings depicting the seven ages of man from As you like it, act two, scene 7* in the Folger Shakespeare Library catalogue. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

The body of the central figure is absent, represented instead by a coffin over which a woman works, folding and preparing a white shroud. Though the (presumably dead) body that may occupy this shroud is unseen, the viewer's eye is drawn to the top right of the image by the coffin lid, where a framed painting of Christ's crucifixion hangs. In Stothard's painting, Christ's crucifixion serves as a rejoinder to Jaques's claim that one could ever be "sans everything." The body of the crucified Christ stands in for the absent aged subject and prefigures its resurrection. In this way, Stothard's painting recalls the essential message of the de Lisle psalter.

However, when Stothard's paintings are published as engravings in 1799, the image of the final stage is replaced by one that dispenses with the coffin and the painting of Christ (plate 10).

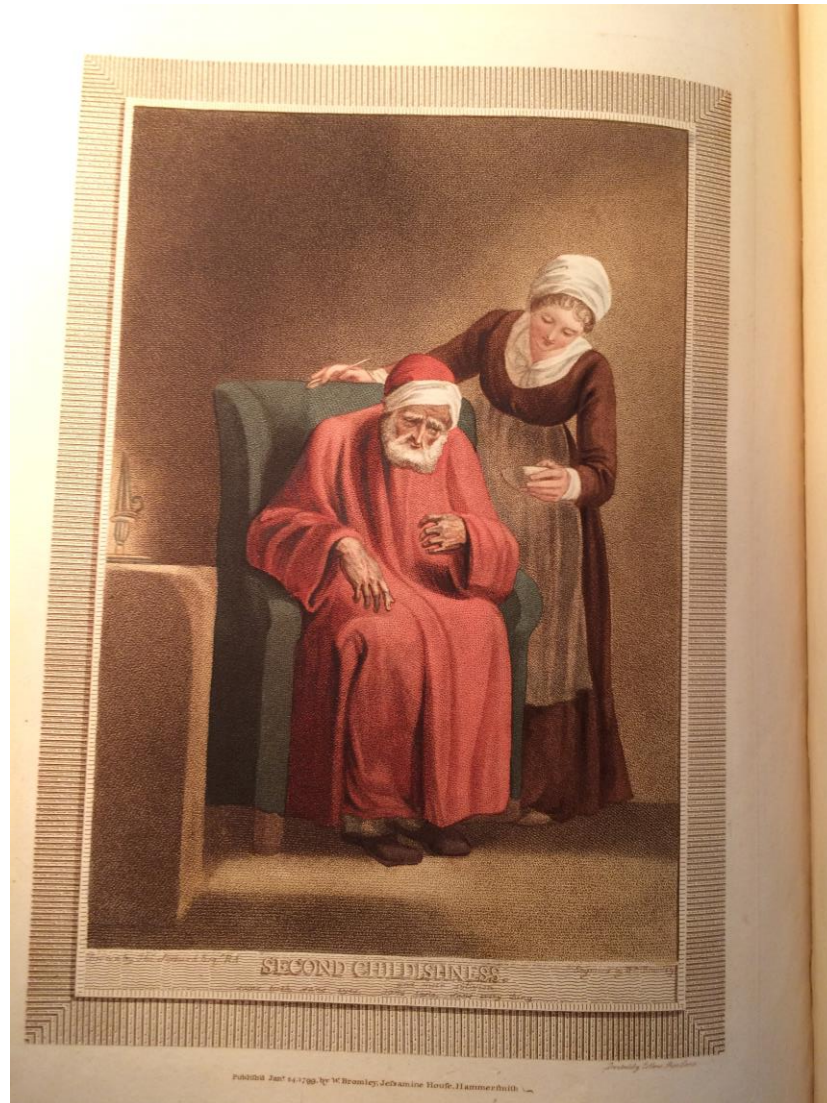


Plate 10. Image by William Bromley that reimagines Thomas Stothard's painting of the final stage (1799). Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Instead, the body of the old man returns to sight, alive and sitting in a chair. The female figure is still bent in the same position from the original painting, yet she now offers the man a bowl. Her former activity, of shrouding and preparing the dead body, is transformed into one that extends the man's life. Like Jaques, this revised illustration removes the promise of the afterlife. Now, the focus is on the ways in which female filial piety sustains the aged subject and prolongs his life. The anonymous commentary

published alongside the illustrations identifies the woman as his daughter and elaborates on her virtues:

The youthful figure of the young woman attentive to the wants of her aged sire, and presenting him with that food which his dim eyes can no longer behold, nor his pithless arms convey to his lips, forms a fine contrast to the decrepit old man. It is impossible that a feeling heart should contemplate this picture without an intermixture of the pleasing and painful emotions of the mind. While the latter are awakened by reflecting on the infirmities and miseries ever attendant upon the state of second childishness, from which the highest faculties are not always exempted: the former are excited by the filial piety, and affectionate tenderness displayed in the countenance and attitude of the girl who is conveying to the old man that food which is necessary for the prolongation of his existence. (Bromley 13–14)

The commentary evokes Jaques by describing the privations of the losses of eyesight and physical strength. However, the sentimental addition of the daughter's devotion creates "an intermixture of pleasure and painful emotions of the mind" that adds to the artwork's power. The transformation of the final image also restores the final stage to the domestic setting that would prove so popular over the next century.

Other appreciations of filial piety in the seventh stage of life make it clear that this quality is a specifically female occupation. John Evans, in *The Progress of Human Life: Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man* (first published in 1818 and reprinted multiple times over the course of the century), emphasizes that the pious daughter is performing a role suited to her nature:

By the sacred writers, who delineate the infirmities of OLD AGE in a very affecting manner, the greatest tenderness is inculcated upon young people towards their parents. And the imbecilities of advanced years are softened by the assiduities of filial affection. . . . In the discharge of this important duty towards the aged, *the fair sex* have more especially distinguished themselves. The particular tenderness of their nature, and the endearing softness of their manners, fit them for these situations. Nor is there a more interesting spectacle than a *daughter* leading about AN INFIRM PARENT, bending over his couch with a tremulous anxiety, and smoothing his passage to the tomb! Such conduct will be crowned by a distinguished reward. (228)

Neither the anonymous commentary nor the observations of Evans seem to recall that Orlando fulfills this role in *As You Like It*. Instead, the presence of the daughter compensates for the losses assumed to be inherent in the state of old age.

The expectation that women care for older men also appears in advertisements that exploit the domestic potential of the Seven Ages in order to sell their products. Dobbins' Electric Soap, a company based in Philadelphia, produced a series of advertising cards depicting the Seven Ages of Man in 1881 (plate 11).



Plate 11: Dobbins' Electric Soap Advertising cards (1881). Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Each stage incorporates the product: the nurse bathes the infant with Dobbins' Electric soap, the schoolboy totes a cake of Dobbins' in his satchel, the lover shaves with it, the soldier washes his hands with the soap in a green wooden tub, the Justice receives a bar as a bribe, and the Pantaloon slips on a wet floor freshly washed with Dobbins' soap. The final stage is unusual in that the corporeal presence of the central figure is not clearly illustrated. The artist has taken the concept of "mere oblivion" and interpreted it as a pile of soap suds in a washing basin. The suds take the vague form of a disconsolate figure that sits with its arms crossed, threatening to dissolve into froth. The figure is not

gendered, in keeping with Jaques's description, which actually refrains from gendering this stage, unlike the six others. Once again, a female figure appears—an aproned body only visible from the neck down, she holds the bar of soap and shapes the suds into perhaps the most formless version of Jaques's "mere oblivion" that I have seen. Here, the physical body of old age is totally removed and old age is represented as a byproduct of female household labour. Unlike Evans's sentimental elevation of female filial loyalty, the Dobbins' ad positions the care for older family members as another aspect of women's housework, which the soap company promises to make more efficient with their consumer product. Evans's sentimental idealizing of the woman's role in the household is replaced by a sardonic advertisement presumably targeted to the women doing the cleaning and who may well not have enjoyed it. It is also the illustration that perhaps most clearly conveys Jaques's lack of empathy expressed towards the aged subject. Evans and the anonymous commentator may insist on the daughter figure's empathy for "her aged sire," but in the Dobbins' advertisement caring for the elderly is portrayed as a chore.

3.4 Infancy versus "Second Childhood"

The Dobbins' advertisement conveys the concept of "second childishness" by making the pile of suds child-sized, visually linking it with the first stage and the first image. Yet, as I will now argue, the conventional yoking of infancy and old age produces ideological dissonance in a period that increasingly elevates infancy. To understand how visual adaptations of Jaques's speech take up "second childishness" it is necessary to examine how these artists and writers imagine the infancy stage as well. Plates 12 and 13, from

1760, make that parallelism plain. The nurse spoonfeeds both the infant and the old man, who are lying in similar positions.



Plates 12 and 13: Untitled prints depicting the first and final stages (c. 1760). Given the title *As you like it, act II, scene 7, Seven ages of man* in the Folger Shakespeare Library Catalogue. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Adrian Poole argues that Jaques's speech could at best hold a paradoxical appeal for the Victorians in his analysis of another set of Shakespearean Ages of Man illustrations titled *Man from Cradle to Grave* (1849). Despite the fact that the speech appears to offer a moral framework according to which one may map one's life, the speech ultimately thwarts the cherished nineteenth-century narrative of progress since "The Shakespearean source does not speak a Victorian idiom. There is an alarming rift between the bleak trajectory of Jaques's speech and the sense of progress on which most Victorian models of narrative depend" (71). Poole adds, "there is a blatant contradiction between the decay and death of the individual represented by Jaques's consolation-less story and the continued progress of civilization" (72). The artist of *Man from Cradle to Grave* solves

this problem of the final stage, Poole suggests, by adding child figures that herald future generations, resulting in a final scene where the old man is

tended by the daughter into whom the child [depicted assisting the Pantaloon figure in the previous stage] has presumably grown up, while in the corner her own daughter, his granddaughter, plays on the floor. So the story does continue, unlike Jaques's, . . . modestly on to the next generation. (72)

As Poole suggests, the artist brings in daughter and grandchild figures to promise that the narrative will begin once again. However, including child figures in the image of the final stage emphasizes the contrast between so-called first and second childhoods. Jaques's portrayal of old age as second childishness cannot be fully recuperated by the insertion of the child figure due to the changing ideological status that infancy comes to hold in this period. Instead, the contrast between first and second childhoods results in an increasingly pejorative understanding of old age, which is not allowed to share in the positive, future-oriented ideological status that is increasingly attributed to the child, and to which I will now turn.

When discussing aging, the nineteenth-century commentaries on the Seven Ages portray the child as the seed from which good citizens will grow. John Evans, in *The Progress of Human Life: Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man*, describes the Infancy stage as "MAN in embryo—it is the germ from which springs, under a proper education, the intelligent, the respectable, and the useful member of the community" (48). Evans's claim elevates the infant and its needs, suggesting that educational and moralizing efforts should be directed toward that stage of life. The preference for childhood over old age is also apparent in John Martin's prefatory material to the illustrations in *Shakespeare's*

Seven Ages of Man (1840, 1848). In his introduction, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, he reprints a letter from Maria Callcott who describes the fifteenth-century pavement at the Siena cathedral that depicts the pre-Shakespearean Ages of Man. The original pavement in Siena depicts a central diamond surrounded by six octagons, with old age positioned in the diamond at the center, as is apparent in Elizabeth Sears's description below:

Figures representing the first six phases of life, in octagons, surround a man representing the last age in a central diamond. . . . The figures survive as silhouettes, white against a black marble ground, set within evocative landscapes of rocks, grass, and flowers. *Infantia* is represented as a child running; *pueritia* is a boy holding a ring in his right hand . . . ; *adolescencia*, a youth in a cape . . . ; and *iuventus*, a graceful young man holding a bird with outstretched wings. *Virilitas*, the best preserved of the figures, stands with a book in his hand, and *senectus*, a bearded man, holds a stick and a ring. The central panel, representing *decrepitas*, is, as ironically befits its subject, in particularly ruinous condition. An old man in a stark setting totters toward his open tomb on two sticks. The cycle of life, set out in a circle, has as its centerpiece death. (137)

Martin's introduction to his edition of woodcut illustrations reproduces a sketch that Maria and Augustus Callcott made of this pavement on their trip to Siena (page 9 in Martin, shown here at plate 16). However, there is a mistake in the Callcotts' sketch. Though the sketch correctly shows that the pavement consists of a central diamond surrounded by eight octagons, and that each octagon is occupied by a figure at a different stage of life, it incorrectly places the infant in the central diamond and demotes the stage

of extreme old age to the bottom of the design.



Plate 14: The Callcotts' sketch of the Siena pavement in Martin (1848). Note the placement of *Infantia* in the center, instead of *Decrepitas* as in the original by Federighi. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Maria Callcott remarks in her letter to Martin that they were rushed in their attempt to make a memorandum copy of the pavement.⁷⁰ However, the reversal of the positions of

⁷⁰ "Our time was so very short, that it was only possible to make a slight sketch by way of memorandum of the subjects; that sketch accompanies this letter, in order that you may compare it with Shakespeare's poetry, and the Hebrew parable" (Martin 9).

childhood and old age significantly re-conceptualizes the meaning of the pavement. In the cathedral, the order of the tiles, the placement of the “Decrepitas” stage in the central diamond, and the tiles’ sacred location inspire a meditation on mortality in the viewer.⁷¹ In contrast, the Callcotts’ unconscious substitution of Infancy for Old Age redistributes the weight that traditional Ages of Man schemes so often placed on the final stage, where one’s presumed proximity to death offered one the opportunity to meditate on mortality and the immortal life of the soul. The Callcotts’ reversal privileges infancy and is consistent with ideas in the period that emphasize infancy as a potential-filled, future-oriented stage of life. By removing the connection that the pavement makes between old age and that meditative function, the Callcotts can only interpret the final stages as a

⁷¹ A book titled *The Seven Ages of Man*, published in 1886 and dedicated to Sir John Savile Lumley, the British Ambassador to Italy, reproduces each of Federighi’s stages on separate pages as lithographs. The author, credited only as “E.E.,” describes the stages slightly differently. E.E. also notes elsewhere that Decreptas occupies the central diamond:

Infancy.—Infantia. A child riding his toy.

Boyhood.—Puertia. A boy with a quoit in his right hand, and a bird in his left.

Those who have lived in Italy have doubtless seen live birds commonly used as playthings, and even given as toys with a string round one leg to very young children. See also Raphael’s beautiful picture of the Cardellino in the Uffizi, Florence.

Adolescence.—Adolescentia. The young collegian with satchel and gloves.

Youth.—Juventus. With falcon and leash.

Manhood.—Virilitas. Dressed in the “Berretta alla Civile” and toga.

Old age.—Senectus. Telling his beads as he passes along life’s road.

Decrepitude.—Decrepitas. The old man walking heavily on crutches to the tomb. [xii]

period of decline.⁷² The replacement of *Decrepitas* with *Infantia* in *Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man* privileges infancy and the Callcotts' error, or parapraxia, elevates the child and unconsciously brushes old age and death to the side.

Many of the illustrations of the infancy stage that I have examined tend to ignore Jaques's description of the infant's mewling and puking, choosing instead to render the stage as an idealized communion between mother and child. Childhood, here, is an embryonic expression of futurity. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley describe the origin of the emerging conception of the child as laden with future potential:

Most readers are probably familiar with John Locke's idea of the child as blank slate. In his 1690 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he wrested the figure of the child from original sin and posited it as *tabula rasa*, which represented for Locke's developing bourgeois culture the almost infinite possibilities of the individual. (xv)

This Lockean conceptualization of childhood and its relationship to one's potential and one's future quality of life is quite different from medieval and early modern understandings of how the earlier stages are understood to affect the quality of one's old age.⁷³ Early modern prescriptive literature exhorts the younger generation to behave

⁷² Callcott writes, "From fifty to sixty, he declines; he has a staff, but he has also a purse, whose weight he not unwillingly bears. From sixty to seventy, supported on crutches, he is creeping towards the grave, which is open to receive him, when he shall have accomplished his threescore and ten years" (Martin 10).

⁷³ Brian Gibbons points out the different attitude to childhood held by the early moderns:

In Elizabethan portraits children, as soon as they cease to be toddlers, are dressed as miniature adults, and this is fully in accord with the custom of the age, with its general cultural assumption that childhood be perceived as merely a preparatory phase for adulthood rather than a cherished state in itself. In early modern England children would be set to work as soon as they were

virtuously in order to secure for themselves a good old age. However, the focus is not on infancy (perhaps due to the high rate of infant mortality), but on the need to discipline one's behaviour over the course of one's life. Positioning infancy as the crucial period that will determine the course and quality of one's life is a later historical development. By retaining the trope of second childishness, the modern illustrations reveal a dissonance in the final scene, where second childishness is portrayed as a degraded repetition of the idealized first childishness. All the potential imagined in the figure of the child is stripped from the figure of the old man, who is left with the shared experience of the infant's dependency. Further, in keeping with Jaques's elimination of the sacred aspect of the ages of life, the modern illustrations do not introduce religious salvation as some kind of spiritual futurity for old age. In the one case where they do (Stothard's painting), this salvation is revised out of the picture upon publication.

3.5 Robert Smirke and the Seven Ages

I have argued that the visual adaptations of Jaques's seventh stage consistently import a female caregiver into a domestic space, producing a reading of Shakespeare's play that revises the events in *As You Like It* where a young man cares for an older man in a pastoral setting. I have also argued that the conflation of infancy and old age inherent in the second childishness trope accrues new meaning in these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century images as estimation of the first stage rises and the status of the final stage degrades. These images tend either to idealize the presence of a female caregiver

physically capable; the male children of the higher ranks might be sent away to other great houses; some to serve as Pages. ("The Representation of Ageing" 39)

occupied in a state of filial piety, as in the engraving of the Stothard painting discussed earlier, or they mount a critique when this care is perceived as absent or inadequate. The latter critique occurs in the series of images produced by Robert Smirke for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. I will now analyze the first and final images Smirke created, to show how a perceived inadequacy of maternal devotion in the first stage is implicitly connected to a lack of female piety in the final one.

The Boydell Shakespeare project was conceived in 1786 and became a significant event in the history of Shakespearean illustration, bringing Shakespeare into the world of art criticism. The Gallery, intended to establish a British school of history painting, was first exhibited in a building on Pall Mall in 1789. The paintings were subsequently turned into engravings destined for publication (1805) and purchase.⁷⁴ Smirke produced a number of paintings for the project, including a series of seven paintings that illustrated Jaques's speech. Smirke's rendering of the Ages reveals the degree to which artists would adapt the framework of Shakespeare's text to address extra-textual concerns in pictorial form. Smirke's representation of the first and final stages interrogates the role of women in the increasingly conflated duties of childcare and the care of older people.

⁷⁴ Sillars writes that the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery's

aim to found a national school of English painting was never remotely achieved, since the images produced were diverse in conception, style and address to the texts on which they rested—mercifully, one might think, since the imposition of deadly uniformity would have had gloomily reductive consequences over the succeeding years. Instead, the nineteenth century remains a period of great diversity in the transmediation of the plays into visual media. (“Shakespeare and the Visual Arts” 269).

Despite this diversity, this chapter posits that the representations of Jaques's Ages of Man tend to rehearse the same concerns over and over again.



Plate 15: Smirke’s depiction of “The First Age” (in Boydell). Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Smirke critiques the maternal body in his painting of the first stage (plate 17). An aristocratic mother visits a cottage belonging to her child’s nurse. The mother stands with her skirts gathered about her body as if unwilling to allow them to touch the cottage floor, and is placed at a distance from the central triad of the nurse, infant, and a third female figure (possibly the infant’s older sister). That the cut of her gown prominently displays her breasts is probably not accidental, as this painting is read by contemporaries as a critique of the practice of wet-nursing. Shearjasub Spooner (editor of the 1852 American edition of the Boydell Shakespeare) makes this plain in his commentary on the image:

The fashionable lady of the town, having, on the birth of her infant, put it out

nurse, has called to see how the child fares. She possesses so little maternal love, as not to desire to take her babe in her arms to kiss it, for fear of soiling her magnificent dress. The child repays the tender sensibilities of its mother without a look of recognition, but is amused with the caresses of its elder sister. The good nurse is answering, with flattering speech and gesture, some necessary questions propounded by the mother. . . . The little whiffet dog barks obstreperously at the lady's black footman, (a *rara avis* in England in those days,) standing at the door, liveried in Oriental costume. The artist has, in a very skillful manner, thrown much force and animation into his subject, which not only finely illustrates the poet, but is a happy hit against an unnatural and wicked custom among the fashionable world—more prevalent in former years than at present, and much oftener practised in Europe than in America. (39)

The mother's participation in the custom of wet-nursing is read as evidence of an unmaternal reservation to merge with her child, one that allows the maternal identity to split between her and the nurse. Spooner portrays wet-nursing not only as the "unnatural" custom of an earlier period, but as a practice that is chiefly foreign to America.⁷⁵ The

⁷⁵ Evans also uses his discussion of the infancy stage to critique mothers who hire out the labour of nursing:

That INFANTS, so very tender in their make and constitution, should have every possible attention paid them, is a position which none will deny. And who so proper to take this care of them as THE MOTHER to whom they owe their birth? Among the poor this becomes a necessary duty—not having the means of transferring the important charge to the care of another. The rich, indeed, often betray a criminal inattention to the earliest years of their offspring. Consigning them over to some *hireling nurse*; diseases and obliquities of the body are superinduced, which remain with them throughout life. An Infant ought on no account, except in cases of imperious necessity,

illustration conveys anxiety over the status of the boundaries between the bodies of the nurse, the mother, and the infant by drawing the viewer's attention to the threshold of the image (which coincides with the threshold of the cottage) where an orientalized and racialized figure, identified by Spooner as "the lady's black footman," stands just outside the door, gazing at a barking dog inside the cottage.

That the footman and the dog gaze at each other, instead of at their mistress, disrupts a racial trope that had become common in aristocratic portraiture. David Dabydeen describes how animal, servants, and slave figures, are depicted in positions of admiration towards the portrait's sitter in order to shore up hierarchies of race and rank:

Such a configuration of white master/mistress, dog, and black servant, is frequent in English painting. In John Riley's *Charles Seymour, 6th Duke of Somerset . . .*, black servant boy and black dog adopt the same attitude of admiration for their Master. The black and the dog are mirror images of each other. Similarly, in David Morier's *Henry, 10th Earl of Pembroke*, the Earl is being admired simultaneously by black groom and dog; the black groom, standing beside the Earl, admires him from one angle, whilst the dog, sitting at his feet, admires him from another. A hierarchy of power relationships is being revealed: the superior white (superior in social and human terms) is surrounded by inferior creatures, the black and the dog, who share more or less the same status. (26)

Unlike the dynamic established in the portraits described by Dabydeen, where the

to be withdrawn from a MOTHER'S breast. The little stranger is deprived of what nature has kindly provided for her offspring. In many cases an injury is sustained which proves to be irreparable. (39–40)

servants and animals direct admiring gazes at the central aristocratic subject, in Smirke's painting the servant and the dog stare at each other, withholding the deferential attitude that was understood to legitimate the mistress's colonial power and place in a racial hierarchy. Smirke thus uses the racial conventions in his period's artistic practice to critique the mother's gender performance.

Concerns over the presence or absence of the maternal body return in Smirke's representation of the final stage (plate 18). Already marked in Shakespeare's text as a recapitulation of the first age, Smirke's portrayal of "second childishness" offers a coda to the story begun in the image of the first stage. Once again, the scene is set in a domestic space, as an old man sits in a chair next to a fireplace. At his feet a child constructs a house of cards that is about to collapse and a nurse sits asleep in her chair on the opposite side of the frame. The picture includes markers of financially comfortable domesticity, and the furniture is covered with cooking and dining utensils. In contrast to the infancy stage, there are no open doors or windows. Instead, the windows to the outside world are replaced by framed and mounted artworks. The paintings, as well as the figurines displayed on the mantelpiece above the fireplace, offer a contrast of action to the relatively sedentary nature of the rest of the illustration. A repetition of the critique of wet-nursing is evident in the representation of the nurse, whose inattentiveness to her surroundings seems to indict her.



Plate 17. Smirke’s depiction of the final stage (in Boydell). Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Readers of the image are conditioned to perceive this as a scene in which “everything” is still missing. Each figure is isolated from the other, absorbed in his or herself. Spooner’s gloss on the final stage imparts a profound sense of failure: “[The old man] is reduced to utter helplessness, incapable of enjoyment, or of any participation in what passes around him. Nothing is wanting but the merciful stroke of death to remove him from the stage where he has played his part” (45). The collapse of the child’s house of cards reflects the general pessimism of Jaques’s description of this stage as “mere oblivion.” The image demonstrates that this man’s external needs are met, he is fiscally secure, and a nurse is present. The notion of old age as a second childhood is reinforced

by the possibility that the nurse could be present for either the child or the man. Spooner's commentary suggests that he perceives the experience of being "sans everything" as a profoundly internalized phenomenon. Jaques's description of the final stage as an undesirable state of witless childishness is replicated in the responses to the seventh age that fail to empathize with the aged subjects represented in these works.

3.6 Sans Everything: Visual Representation and Empathy

The illustrations follow Jaques's speech in suggesting that there is a gulf between the experience of old age and the viewer's ability to comprehend it. This sense of alienation from the experience of "second childishness" is apparent in the poetic and parodic adaptations of the speech that appeared in the nineteenth century. In 1851 the illustrations from Martin's *Shakespeare's Seven Ages of Man* appeared in newsprint in Philadelphia's *Pictorial For the Million, A Supplement to the Commercial Intelligencer*. Each image is accompanied by verse extracts, with the final scene paired with poetry by R. H. Stoddard:

I am not apt to grieve at anything,
 But when I see old age in infancy,
 The body wasted, and the mind decayed,
 I must perforce be sad, a little sad!—
 I follow up the current of my life,
 And trace myself thereto; and when I think
 I may be witless in my childishness,
 I cannot help but feel a bitter sorrow. ("Shakespeare's Seven Ages" n.p.)

In this poem, the portrayal of old age as a period of witless childishness emerges from the

subject position of the speaker-observer. The old person, whose experience of existence is witnessed yet not empathized with, activates the speaker's fears of an unknown, incommunicable experience.

A similar distancing effect occurs in an adaptation of the speech written by George Soane (whose dates are 1789–1860) titled “Musical Illustrations of Shakspeare’s Seven Ages.”⁷⁶ Soane completely ignores Shakespeare’s text but retains the seven-stage framework and the identity of each age. The first stage is written from the perspective of a mother gazing on her sleeping child, as she says “I marvel much / Of what thy dreams are made” (15). In addition to the not uncommon replacement of the nurse with a mother figure, Soane’s rewriting of the speech is fascinated with the infant’s interiority as he sketches a maternal desire to understand the infant’s still inaccessible psychological experience. The three stanzas devoted to the infant conclude with the mother urging the child, “My dearest one, sleep on” (15). The pre-linguistic infant’s inner experience, inaccessible to the reader, is mediated through the mother’s reaction to the baby. Once the subject of the poem enters language, the narrative perspective changes, and the second through sixth ages are all delivered through first-person narration. However, for the final stage Soane returns to the perspective of the third-person observer. I quote the final stanzas here at length to convey the degree to which the experience of the “old, old man” is made alien to the speaker:

He sits in his nook,

With a vacant look,

⁷⁶ The piece is set to music by Charles E. Horn and likely was performed at a Christmas concert.

The old, old man.
On his lip is a smile;
But no spirit the while
From his dim eye beams,
That waking yet dreams—
The old, old man.

He sits in the air,
For the morning is fair,
The old, old man.
Does he joy in the light
That flows on him so bright?
We look on that face,
But no mind can trace—
The old, old man.

Night-winds come by fits,
By the fire now he sits,
The old, old man.
And he hangs o'er the blaze,
That flickering plays;
But yet cannot warm,
That cold, bloodless form,—

The old, old man.

The bird's on the bough,

But where is he now,

The old, old man?

Hark, the funeral bell!

I know its sound well,

And the black feathers wave,

As they bear to the grave,

The old, old man! (18–19)

The speaker perceives the old, old man as living in a waking dream, a variation on the mother's perception of the infant. However, where the infant's inner experience is presumed to be remote but still abundant, the old man's mien is interpreted as "vacant." He possesses a "dim eye" in which the speaker can read no "spirit." Over the course of the four stanzas the speaker insists on the inscrutability of his subject: "no mind can trace— / The old, old man." The poem ends with the disappearance of the old man's body altogether and the speaker is alerted to his fate only by the sound of the funeral bell. Old age remains an object of observation or a signifier of absence rather than an inhabited experience, and it does not seem to share in the psychological heft and complexity that is so often attributed to other cultural products of the time period, such as the Victorian novel. This adaptation of Jaques's final scene renders old age as an object of observation rather than an inhabited experience as the speaker excludes the aged subject from the psychological complexity ascribed to the infant.

In her analysis of the portrayal of dementia in twentieth-century fiction, Amelia DeFalco observes that focalized narrative perspective often changes once the disease enters its later stages in the story. The narration transfers from the perspective of the person with dementia to another character, usually an adult child who acts as a caregiver (61). DeFalco thus suggests that since narrative is used to produce selfhood, subjects who possess what she calls “non-narrativized lives” are in danger of being seen by others as evacuated of interiority:

The inescapable emphasis placed on narrative in the production of meaning and identity presents serious difficulties for the victim of dementia or amnesia, whose selfhood is often seen as jeopardized by his or her reduced ability to employ memory in the service of personal narratives. (13)

The nineteenth-century responses to Jaques’s second childishness reflect Jenny Hockey and Alison James’s observation that the second childishness trope shores up middle adulthood at the expense of old age, which becomes a degraded state of inexpressiveness. To counter the objectified representation of old age and dementia, Stephen G. Post calls for the “enlargement of our sense of human worth to counter an exclusionary emphasis on rationality, efficient use of time and energy, ability to control distracting impulses, thrift, economic success, self-reliance . . . and the like” (para. 12). Post suggests that “we might concentrate on the hints at continuing self identity deep into progressive dementia, and celebrate these rather than draw on negative metaphors like ‘empty,’ ‘gone,’ ‘absent,’ ‘shell,’ and the like” (para. 13). My analysis of Edmund Waller’s “Of the Last Verses in the Book” in the introduction shows how Waller reorients the perspective that old age constitutes the loss of ability or loss of capacity to be poetically generative. Instead,

Waller insists that poetic communication is refined and elevated in old age, though it may not be expressed in conventional ways like reading or writing.

This chapter has traced the trope of second childishness as it moves outwards from Shakespeare's play and into the cultural imaginary. I have shown the movement, via Shakespeare's play, of the Ages of Man from the medieval and early modern visual tradition to a verbal performed narrative, and then back to pictorial representation once again. The transmission and adaptation of Shakespeare's Ages of Man, in both word and image, demonstrate how old age becomes marginalized, held at a remove, and even erased within a conventional narrative structure. Cultural engagements with Jaques's so-called "second childishness" reveal an anxious observer unable to access the state of "mere oblivion" that is perceived in the aged subject. This portrayal of an alienating second childhood is the product of narrative insecurity. The claim that the old person is sans everything always comes from the outside observer: first Jaques, then the artist, then the poet who is rewriting the speech. What ends up being communicated is the subject position of the speaker, who attempts to imagine him or herself in a future state of second childishness and fails. The narrator-observer is temporarily shored up as the one who possesses narrative coherence and stability. The female caregiver figures that are inserted into the illustrations of the final scene act as a consolation, but do not facilitate any kind of expression for the aged subjects, whose experience is never actually articulated. The silence of the final stage objectifies the old person, and these responses to Jaques's old age compound that objectification by portraying old age as an alienated state of being. Still, early modern drama does provide instances of older characters who express dramatic subjectivity and agency. The subject of the next chapter on *The Old Law* will

feature older characters who speak back to coercive and tyrannical conditions.

4 “His defect makes him fourscore”: Ablebodiedness, Old Age, and Retirement in *The Old Law*

In *The Old Law* (1618/19), written by Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and possibly Thomas Heywood,⁷⁷ Duke Evander, the ruler of a country named Epire, introduces legislation declaring that all eighty-year-old men and sixty-year-old women are to be killed or, as it is put in the play, “cut off as fruitless to the republic” (1.1.110). Initially, the Duke’s scheme seems to be a kind of public reform⁷⁸ that benefits the younger generation, allowing them access to social and economic power they do not yet possess.⁷⁹ Most of the younger members of the Duke’s court indulge in this opportunity to access their inheritances early and to usurp authority from the older characters who previously acted as judges and heads of households. However, in a surprise ending, the authority of the older generation is reinstated when the Duke reveals that the law was never carried

⁷⁷ For the question of what the title should be see Gary Taylor, “‘The Old Law’ or ‘An Old Law’?” (256–58). For authorship, see Taylor (“Middleton and Rowley—and Heywood: The Old Law and New Attribution Technologies” 165–217).

⁷⁸ As Sara Schotland points out, the play’s interest in reform marks it as part of the utopian or dystopian genres; she traces the relationship the play’s themes have with Thomas More *Utopia*, as well as dystopian works beyond the early modern period (Schotland 2013).

⁷⁹ The fantasy of the younger generation’s appropriation of power is rooted in early modern historical reality. Keith Thomas writes that “the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are conspicuous for a sustained drive to subordinate persons in their teens and early twenties and to delay their equal participation in the adult world. This drive is reflected in the wider dissemination of apprenticeship; in the involvement of many more children in formal education; and in a variety of measures to prolong the period of legal and social infancy” (“Age and Authority” 214). Nina Taunton suggests an audience response would have occurred along these lines: “for an early modern audience the youthful takeover of positions of high authority in *King Lear* and *The Old Law* is shocking and execrable from the point of view of institutionalised codes of practice, interesting and exciting from the point of view of repressed youth” (*Fictions* 132).

out and that his actions were actually intended to test the filial conduct of his courtiers. The older characters, led offstage to their apparent deaths, have been alive the entire time. The law, it turns out, was a test of the character of the court, a test that also implicates the audience, which finds out about the reversal at the same time as the rest of the characters. George Rowe Jr. has described the play as a kind of limit case for comedy—an exploration of the ageism underpinning generic comic endings in which the younger generation conventionally triumphs over the older blocking figures, as Middleton and his collaborators dramatize the patricidal wish inherent in the comic ending of youth overcoming over old age (181).⁸⁰

The intended reform in this play is, overtly, the restoration of proper obedience from the young to their elders, the ultimate goal to celebrate the few characters who remain loyal to their parents and to instill so-called age-appropriate behaviour in both generations.⁸¹ This is the action of the main plot, as the characters who maintain respect for their elders, such as Cleanthes, are vindicated and those who exult in their early

⁸⁰ As Rowe writes,

The Old Law opens with a legislated New Comedy triumph of youth over age and the enforced renewal of an apparently dying society. The play begins where most comedies conclude and paradoxically develops toward something like the normal opening of Roman comedy. . . . [T]he meaning of comedy is based upon an analogy between comic structure and both the seasonal renewal of nature and man's ability to recreate himself through procreation. The genre therefore portrays the triumph of the young as a necessary and positive source of continuity in human society. With a horrifying practicality, the citizens of Epire have simply taken these ideas one step further. . . . Their law is a logical extension of the central tenets of comedy. Their world has room only for the young and the fertile. But the effect of their actions is anything but festive. Comedy is transformed into nightmare. . . . (181)

⁸¹ Taunton (2007) and Bromham (1996) read the characters' behaviour as expressing Stoic values.

inheritances and their parents' apparent executions, such as Simonides, are punished. The subplot, which involves lower-ranking characters and provides the one instance of an older woman subjected to the euthanasia law, has received less critical attention.⁸² In this plot, Gnothoes bribes a clerk to corrupt and antedate his wife Agatha's birthdate in the parish churchbook, in the hopes that he will then wed a younger woman.⁸³ The portrayal of Agatha's ensuing social exclusion demonstrates how Epire's experience of old age is changing. An examination of the intersection of old age, gender, and rank in this play suggests that the Duke's reform solidifies a notion of numerical old age based on record-keeping and leads to the delineation of a "good" old age that is constructed within a discourse of ablebodiedness and utility. Throughout the play Middleton and his collaborators depict the installation of what Robert McRuer, the disability studies theorist, calls "compulsory ablebodiedness." While, on the one hand, the play concludes with an enforced ablebodiedness that limits any kind of old age that is not shown to be productive or positive, the play still makes room to imagine not simply how Epire's citizens can be useful to their country, but how the country is responsible to its aging citizens. The chapter concludes by examining the way the play shifts from valorizing filial piety as the solution to the care of older people toward the assertion of community responsibility for the care of a country's older citizens. By imagining and idealizing

⁸² Antigona, wife to Creon and mother to Leonides, protests the law but is not immediately subject to execution.

⁸³ *The Old Law* draws on cultural anxieties around "premature transference of inheritance to the young," and Gnothoes's plot against his wife and his attempt to marry a second one while the first is still living is "Yet another example of premature behaviour" (Taunton, *Fictions* 46, 48).

retirement, *The Old Law* appears to provisionally anticipate more modern schemes of age-related mass retirement.

4.1 Legal Matters: Legislating the Onset of Old Age

Initially, Epire's new law defines old age chronologically, though it will gradually be defined more and more by capability. Early in the play the text of the law is read out loud by two lawyers. This proclamation of the law provides useful exposition; it introduces the audience to the polity of Epire, which evokes classical antiquity in its use of a Senate but is also early modern in the style of power wielded by Duke Evander, who acts like a king. This exposition also reveals how the law will determine the citizens' identities by evaluating their usefulness to Epire as a state:

SECOND LAWYER [*reads*] 'That all men living in our dominions of Epire in their decayed nature to the age of fourscore, or women to the age of threescore, shall on the same day be instantly put to death, by those means and instruments that a former proclamation had (to this purpose) through our said territories dispersed.'

CLEANTHES There was no woman in this senate, certain. (1.1.132–38)

The law then sets out how "fruitlessness" will be defined for both men and women. Men will be put to death at eighty because they are perceived to be

past their bearing arms, to aid and defend their country, past their manhood and livelihood, to propagate any further issue to their posterity, and as well past their counsels (which overgrown gravity is now run into dotage), to assist their country.

(1.1.139–44)

Women, on the other hand, will be executed at sixty because

they never were defence to their country, never by counsel admitted to the assist of government of their country, only necessary to the propagation of posterity, and now at the age of threescore to be past that good, and all their goodness.

(1.1.151–55)

If the primary means Epire will use to subdivide its population is age, the next criterion of difference is gender. Old age is defined further by whether one is able to fulfill gender-based roles. Men are deemed useful in three capacities: as soldiers, as fathers, and as counselors. Per the law, women are valued only for their ability to bear children and are subject to execution twenty years earlier than men. The law initially establishes old age as an identity wherein one's physical ability is assumed to be determined by one's chronological age. Indeed, though women are subject to the law once they are no longer fertile, there is no mention of the variability possible in the onset of menopause.⁸⁴ The law thus reduces the heterogeneity of old age to a gendered binary and binds it to a fixed number. This initial focus on numerical age, and its implication that there is a perfect fit between chronological age and ability, will be complicated later in the play. Cleanthes's

⁸⁴ The notion that women aged earlier than men is a commonplace in the period (see Du Laurens, sig.BB1r, Taunton, *Fictions* 84, and Covey, "Definitions of the Beginning of Old Age in History" 330). However, Epire's rejection of post-menopausal women does not straightforwardly replicate early modern attitudes to older women. Margaret Pelling shows that "For women of the early modern period, age 50, the end of the reproductive years, signalled not simply a loss of function, but also to some extent a gain in qualification for certain social purposes. It should not be assumed that the end of reproductive life was perceived as purely negative in its effects, either by society or by the individual" (65). For instance, in the 1570 Norwich census, Pelling finds that "Women in their seventies who were blind, weak or lamehanded continued to knit, card, and spin" and provide other services to the community (69). Epire's enshrinement of reproduction as the only type of service available to women would most likely have appeared reductive to audiences.

interruption, noting that women do not have a voice in Epire's senate, is confirmed by the rest of the lawyer's recital and reinforces the play's awareness that the all-male senate produces laws that are inherently biased against women. As a result, the decision to set the ages of sixty and eighty as both the onset of old age and the endpoints of these characters' lives appears arbitrary and tyrannical.

Though the authority of the older generation is reinstated at the end of the play, the brief rule of this law establishes another social transformation in the country. That is, the resolution of Epire's crisis does not return the culture to its previous status quo. Throughout the play, Middleton depicts the installation of what McRuer calls "compulsory ablebodiedness," the idea that the performance of ablebodiedness is animated by the same types of repetitive failures that constitute the performance of heterosexuality. Something similar occurs in *The Old Law*, as the characters are shown to perform or re-state ablebodiedness over and over again in front of other judging characters. Though the law is ostensibly only temporary, the end result of Epire's period of reform is to delineate a normative, ablebodied old age. The older characters are required to orient themselves towards the state and to articulate why they deserve continued inclusion in the community.⁸⁵ Anthony Ellis sees the play as "early modern comedy's most original defense of old age, a searing indictment of the mistreatment and undervaluation of the aged that can occur within materialistically inclined societies, where the elderly are only seen as unproductive impediments to the next generation's

⁸⁵ Taunton writes that the play "enacts . . . reservations about the value of the old in office at the same time as it gives currency to the gerontocratic ideals of Cicero and Plutarch which confirm their enduring usefulness to the state" (*Fictions* 135).

prosperity” (164). Part of the play’s power is how it exposes how the idealization of the notion of being a productive citizen requires the rejection of anyone who is not able-bodied.

The characters who protest the application of the law point out the lack of fit between the type of so-called “fruitless” subject constructed by the legislation and their own lived experience. Antigona advocates on the behalf of her eighty-year old husband, Creon, by describing his role as head of a household, asserting that her husband “is not lost in judgement” and that “His very household laws prescribed at home by him / Are able to conform seven Christian kingdoms / They are so wise and virtuous” (2.1.98, 101–103). She emphasizes Creon’s able-bodiedness:

I know your laws extend not to desert, sir,
 But to unnecessary years, and, my lord,
 His are not such: though they show white, they’re worthy,
 Judicious, able, and religious. (2.1.104–107)

People are divided into two types: the unnecessary and the able.⁸⁶ In order to defend themselves against a tyrannical law, the resistant characters offer up counter-readings of their bodies. Lisander undergoes “feats of youth” in “drinking, fencing, dancing” and demonstrates greater proficiency than the younger courtiers with whom he is in

⁸⁶ As Masten points out in his introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, “The euthanasia of *Old Law*, in fact, more closely resembles fascist social engineering—the extermination of what Nazi ideology called ‘lives unworthy of life’—than these other meanings [i.e., the notion of euthanasia in ancient Greek thought, the notion as discussed by Montaigne and More, and the present-day notion of medically-assisted suicide]” (1332).

competition (3.2.108, 109). However, Lisander is chastised by Cleanthes for these performances:

for what is age
 But the holy place of life, chapel of ease
 For all men's wearied miseries? And to rob
 That of her ornament, it is accursed,
 As from a priest to steal a holy vestment,
 Ay, and convert it to a sinful covering. (3.2.248–53)

Cleanthes, as the paragon of fidelity to the Christian law of honouring one's parents, describes Lisander's displays as sacrilegious and suggests that he defiles old age. He indicts Lisander for not behaving decorously,⁸⁷ but Cleanthes's real resistance is to claim for old age the veneration due to the essential components of religious experience. Cleanthes's critique is not only directed to Lisander, but is also more broadly directed to the Duke, who, by extension, behaves irreligiously by forcing his aging subjects to submit to a wholly instrumentalized understanding of their bodies. The tragic aspect of this tragicomedy is the mechanism by which the older characters are coerced into first accepting the notion of the "unnecessary" subject, and then complying by demonstrating the ways in which their bodies are still necessary to Epire.⁸⁸ Over the course of the play,

⁸⁷ See Taunton (*Fictions* 74–86) for a discussion on how characters like Lisander flout age-related norms of decorum, such as those set by Castiglione in *The Courtier*.

⁸⁸ David Glimp argues that in *The Old Law* "Middleton explores how concerns with personal and national safety impact governance, how security organizes community. He does so by examining communities and characters in moments of dire emergency, in ways that both provoke critical reflection on the contemporary

the characters are forced to petition for inclusion in the law's compulsory able-bodiedness in order to defend themselves against a culture that devalues old age and only permits a very narrow and productive type of old age to its citizens.

4.2 Defect and Disability under the Law

Though the plot of the play is concerned with the maintenance of filial obedience between the generations, to sort out "The flowers and weeds that [grow] about [the Duke's] court" (5.1.613), a secondary project is at work. That is, the Duke's test hastens a social transformation in Epire, a city-state that is learning how to categorize bodies into the ablebodied and the disabled. The Duke himself describes how even those who have not quite come of age may be subject to execution:

Our law is fourscore years, because we judge
 Dotage complete then, as unfruitfulness
 In women at threescore. Marry, if the son
 Can within compass bring good solid proofs
 Of his own father's weakness and unfitness
 To live or sway the living, though he want five
 Or ten years of his number, that's not it,
 His defect makes him fourscore, and 'tis fit
 He dies when he deserves, for every act

moment and enable a commodifiably absorbing experience of the affectively intense, phenomenologically dense spectacle of other people living through a disastrous reality" (362).

Is in effect then, when the cause is ripe. (2.1.14–23)

This passage establishes the new relationship between old age and disability.⁸⁹ The Duke asserts that “good solid proofs” of weakness will make those younger than eighty eligible for the law’s action. The term *defect* signals that Evander is drawing on the period’s terminology of disability; as Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum write, “in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a ‘defect’ was both a cultural trope and a material condition that indelibly affected people’s lives. ‘Defects’ included having one of the senses impaired—blindness, deafness, or the inability to speak—as well as physical anomalies such as being lame or possessing a humpback” (1–2). Old age may now be achieved through “defect”; it is the lack of an able body that makes one old. The Duke restates the law in order to emphasize that having a non-normative body will meet the law’s threshold for the onset of old age and make one subject to execution.

The notion that one’s “defect” accelerates one’s age is new information, not captured in the language of the first reading of the law. During the first scene, Simonides asks the lawyer “Is the law firm, sir?” to which the lawyer responds, “The law—what more firm, sir, / More powerful, forcible, or more permanent?” (1.1.1–2). Yet as the play progresses, this assertion of the law’s powerful, forcible permanence is not only undermined by the Duke’s addendum, but also by the characters who attempt to find self-serving loopholes in the execution of the law, to be discussed further below. Furthermore, the Duke’s

⁸⁹ Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood advocate for increased attention to artistic depictions of disability in the early modern period, suggesting that doing so provides insight into how disability was lived in the period and helps to reconstruct “a historically remote cultural imagination of disability” that has been understudied (7).

addition to the official legislation confuses the issue of where the law's power lies and who proposes to adjudicate the "defect."⁹⁰ It turns out that the characters do not need the Duke or the Senate to do so, as they quickly internalize the law and are capable of policing each other's performances of age. The play maintains the ambiguity regarding the source of the law's legitimacy: is it a personal, justifiable project of the Duke's, or does he just think that it is?⁹¹ For the law has unpredictable effects once it is separated from the Duke's own person and courtly sphere.

4.3 The Subplot: Leaving Court

The law quickly spirals out of control once it expands throughout the country, something that was not part of the Duke's plan. The episodes involving the courtier sons and their fathers occur in and around the court and privilege a proximity to the Duke and his center of law and power. When the execution of the law coincides with his physical presence to oversee it, the Duke can reasonably expect to maintain control over the

⁹⁰ The Senate does not appear to have been privy to the Duke's plot and it appears that the only other official with knowledge of his test was the executioner, Cratilus (the Duke reveals at the end that "Only this gentleman we did abuse / With our own bosom; we seemed a tyrant, / And he our instrument" [5.1.616–18]). See the Oxford edition for commentary on the possible significance of the executioner's name.

⁹¹ A. A. Bromham writes on the play's relationship to the conflict between James I's royal prerogative and English Common Law ("Contemporary Significance" 327–39). Ellis agrees that "At one level, *The Old Law* invites speculation as to whether one owes greater allegiance to familial or governmental authority" and that "The conflict in *The Old Law* evokes also the seventeenth-century English dispute over the legitimacy of the monarch's capacity to override parliamentary legislation" (166). See also Taunton on how the "play pits the 'old law' of God and nature against the 'new' law which placed the king above the workings of the law, gave him the right to preside in the Star Chamber, and to interfere in trials" (*Fictions* 136). In another article, Bromham addresses a late-twentieth century adaptation of the play and potential early modern topical references to the Howard/Carr/Overbury scandal ("Is the Law Firm?" 117–27).

effects of his test. However, the playwrights also show what happens when the law goes into effect throughout the country—when it is administered by local powers—by showing how the law affects characters who are distanced from the court in the subplot. Upon coming into his inheritance, the courtier Simonides immediately dismisses most of the servingmen of his father Creon’s well-run household: the tailor, butler, cook, and bailiff. Now masterless men without any means of livelihood, they become determined to seek out aged widows close to sixty with whom they can profitably marry and promptly outlive.

The dissolution of Creon’s household identifies Simonides as a destructive, anti-social force, for his actions threaten to transform the men into the kind of mobile, unattached poor that the Vagrancy Laws and Poor Laws were meant to regulate, re-settle and set to work.⁹² The newfound vagrancy of the servingmen acts as a kind of unmooring of the play. Once they are evicted from the courtier world, they trace a path from the primary plot to the subplot, from the world of the court to the lower-ranking world of Gnothoes and Agatha, who may initially seem unconnected to the main plot. Indeed, Mark Hutchings and A. A. Bromham point out that the subplot “is not linked directly with the others” and that “This is surprising, and might be seen as a flaw in the play’s structure,” providing examples in performance where attempts are made to link the subplot’s characters more closely to the courtiers (80). However, for my purposes, the failure to link the subplot to the others is dramaturgically significant. It is the servingmen

⁹² See Paul Slack on the statutes that increasingly regulate the movement and behaviour of “vagrants” as part of the establishment of the relief system and that also establish vagrancy as a concern and responsibility of the parish (17–19, 59–64).

who carry the law with them across this gap and expand it to the rest of Epire, allowing the law to produce consequences unimagined by the Duke.

The subplot introduces a bureaucratic source of power that stands in for the will of the Duke. The former servingmen converge with Gnothoes and Agatha at the site of the parish churchbook, where Gnothoes has arrived to bribe the clerk to antedate his wife's birthdate and the servingmen have arrived to research the fifty-nine year old widows that they wish to wed for profit. The characters' dialogue reveals a new social order, as the cook complains to the clown that "this is the end of serving-men" (3.1.115) and that they are all "out of request" (3.1.134). Gnothoes's response reveals himself to be a character attuned to the times:

Nay, say not so, for you were never in more request than now, for requesting is but a kind of begging, for when you say, 'I beseech your worship's charity', 'tis all one if you say, 'I request it', and in that kind of requesting, I am sure serving-men were never in more request. (3.1.135–40)

The Duke's actions have set in motion a transformation in social relationships and produced a new way for these men to think about dependency: whereas earlier their masters were in need of their services, now the servingmen are the needy ones and must perform a new "kind of requesting" that is, in essence, begging. It seems likely that Epire will soon confront a rapid increase in beggars, should all the young men act as Simonides does.

4.4 The Parish Churchbook: Authority and Bureaucracy in Old Age

The transition, implicit in the play's title and carried out throughout the action of the play, from a society organized by the "old law" of Christianity to one organized by the new, secular "old law" that measures and categorizes its citizens according to age, has its basis in historical fact.⁹³ Chris Gilleard describes how the meaning of aging transforms in the transition from the medieval period to the early modern period alongside "the replacement of sacred time with secular time" (37). To age in secular time, rather than sacred time, changes the identity of old age:

Censuses of city populations began to be undertaken across Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Greater awareness of and concern for accurate measurement not just of prices and products but of people emerged during this period. Agedness should no longer be a singular phase of life or moral identity. Now that it was capable of being measured it could serve as a basis for a civic identity. Adult agedness had the potential to become social capital. ("Aging and Old Age" 36–37)

⁹³ David Glimp defines two opposed systems of law somewhat differently: "1) the law created by the Duke as divinely sanctioned ruler (though as noted above, the conclusion reframes this law as a collaborative effort between Duke and parliament), and 2) natural law, as the law of paternal affection and self-preservation" (363). Masten points out that Creon's household laws are "written on a 'table' (tablet) and are linked in this scene to the ten commandments (2.1.119). The Old Law—Epirus's new law for killing of old people—is thus resisted here and elsewhere in the play on the basis of an older law on which the play's title puns: the law of the Old Testament (i.e., the Hebrew Bible), as received and reinscribed through its early-modern patriarchalist interpretation" ("Introduction" 1332).

The world of *The Old Law* evokes the same transformation: the play depicts Epire's transition from a community organized by Christian values to one in which its subjects are evaluated and measured. The mechanism of the modernization and bureaucratization of old age here is the parish churchbook, which now functions as an arm of the Duke's law. It is the subplot that most clearly shows the role that bureaucracy plays in linking old age with the social exclusion that is brewing in Epire. The Duke's so-called reform, which began as a law passed by the Senate, is now carried out via the churchbook. The book becomes the authority around which the subplot revolves, and the Duke's presence is simultaneously reduced—in fact, he encounters the characters from the subplot only once they interrupt him onstage in the final scene.

The characters are now required to keep track of their ages and to chart themselves against predetermined notions of ability and disability based on their taxonomical categorization. *The Old Law's* subplot lays bare the process by which Epire's definition of old age is constructed, and shows how this legislation obliges its citizens to perform ablebodied old age, which is, as the play shows, not something “natural” or innate, but is instead a category that derives from the state and that serves the interest of the state. Due to the law's need to sort its population based on age, this play evokes a world in which people must be increasingly aware of their numerical ages. Keith Thomas describes how early modern England developed methods to record and use this information:

The real pressure on men to know their ages came from the lawyers, who constantly worked to replace practical tests of age by numerical ones, and the bureaucrats and legislators, who specified precise numerical ages for an

increasing number of civil rights and duties, often requiring the production of baptismal certificates or written proofs of age. Numerical age, in other words, gained steadily in social relevance. (“Age and Authority” 207)

Similarly, Gilleard writes that “By the time the Elizabethan Poor Laws were passed in 1598 and 1601, agedness had emerged—alongside disability, widowhood, and other conditions rendering people unfit to work—as a state-determined category among the ranks of the deserving poor” (“Aging and Old Age” 33). This development is inextricable from record-keeping, as “The capacity of the state so to order its people was itself presaged upon earlier intellectual developments—notably the increasing use of written records and the quantification of everyday life” (35). The world of *The Old Law* evokes the same transformation: the state has recognized the processes of measurement and record-keeping that can be used to identify and categorize its subjects. Though Agatha declares that she has two years yet before reaching sixty, the evidence offered by the churchbook trumps her own self-knowledge. And though the parish clerk claims that the churchbook is “the dial that goes ever true” (3.1.20), Gnothoes convinces him to fraudulently antedate Agatha’s birthdate. This scene reflects the way social identity could be constructed at the parish level of governance and reflects what Lynn Botelho describes as the “greater degree of bureaucratization and organization” in the development of European poor relief (10). The playwrights dramatize how unreliable and prone to corruption this record-keeping can be—sometimes the churchbook is lost (as Lisander claims his is). Furthermore, this insistence upon knowing one’s numerical age precisely may have struck an early modern audience as just as much of a fantastic element of the plot as the euthanasia law. Despite the movement towards increased measurement and

quantification of life that compelled more and more people to know their age, this knowledge was still not universal and could be experienced as an impractical demand. As Margaret Pelling writes, “With respect to individuals, it is recognized that, while there was a sharp awareness of the different phases of life, including old age, and the legal definition of an idiot was one who could not tell his own age, there is little hope of people knowing their age *precisely* until the eighteenth century or even later” (63). The play captures a period of transition between earlier models of Christian aging to a society that views knowledge of one’s chronological age as a fundamental aspect of personal identity.

The subplot also most clearly foregrounds the gender inequality that is systemic in the law. Gnothoes has not bothered to wait for his aged spouse to be sent to execution. Banking on his self-assessment as a great man in the parish, he bets that he can marry a second wife while the first is still living, and stages a hybrid wedding and funeral, forcing Agatha to witness her own redundancy. Gnothoes rehearses the language of instrumentalization embedded in the law and reduces Agatha’s use value to her clothing, which he plans to repurpose as cleaning articles and workday clothes for his second wife, telling the Wench that “the best of this old, old woman’s shall make thee raiments for the working days” and “Her ruffs will serve thee for nothing but to wash dishes” (4.1.113–14, 116–17). He also devises insults that damn her as superfluous, decrying her as an “old almanac—at the twenty-eighth day of December e’en almost-out-of-date!” (4.1.149–51). Agatha therefore develops strategies of resistance that, like the petitions of Antigona and Lisander, involve adopting a discourse of ability in order to defend herself:

Then the law, I know, craves impotent and useless,
And not the able women. (3.1.256–57)

Agatha reveals that she has understood how the Duke's law emphasizes the importance of ability. In response to the law's sole valuing of women's reproductive abilities, she claims that she is pregnant and must receive a five-year reprieve (4.1.128–29).⁹⁴ At the end of the play the Duke confirms her self-assessment and proclaims her “a lusty woman, able-bodied” who has “well-blooded cheeks” (5.1.427, 428). When the older male characters, restored to their judicial positions, come to pass judgment on Gnothoes at the play's conclusion, they reinforce that Agatha embodies an able-bodied type of old age, one that disavows any need of extra care. Leonides pronounces,

Then, first, this fellow [Gnothoes] does deserve punishment

For offering up a lusty able woman

Which may do service to the commonwealth,

Where the law craves one impotent and useless. (5.1.446–49)

By the end of the play the law still appears to be in effect, and not a trick at all, since the restored judges still pass judgement based on the legislation. Epire is still left with a law that “craves” the “impotent and useless,” leaving the fate of those who do not fit a paradigm of able-bodiedness chillingly unknown.⁹⁵ *The Old Law* problematizes the

⁹⁴ The notion of later pregnancies in general would not have appeared unusual to early modern people; as Steven R. Smith writes, delayed marriages along with “the lack of effective contraceptive devices meant that women started producing children later than now, but continued until a later age. . . . [P]arents would likely be in their forties when the last children were born” (“Age of Transition” 194).

⁹⁵ This argument was made in a paper I circulated at a 2012 Shakespeare Association of America seminar. Sara Schotland (2013) also points to this problem, asking, “What would have happened to Agatha had she not been blooming, or to the male characters if they were senile or disabled? The play is silent on these

institutionalization of laws related to the regulation of old age, undercutting the reassurance of the final lines of the play delivered by the Duke:

The good needs fear no law,

It is his safety, and the bad man's awe. (5.1.623–24)⁹⁶

Not only has the law, as Nina Taunton writes, “paradoxically creat[ed], encourag[ed], regulat[ed] and finally punish[ed] generational strife” (136), but also it has installed compulsory, bureaucratic ablebodiedness.

The subplot enables a critique of the Duke's plan and complicates the comic ending in which Cleanthes is celebrated and Simonides is rebuked. Neither Agatha nor her husband were ever meant to be implicated in the test, for the Duke had ordered that the law should be restricted to his court, under his supervision, for one month before extending further into Epire, in an attempt to restrict the reach of the law/test to the area of his interest. The law reads, “the example shall first begin in and about our court, which ourself will see carefully performed, and not for a full month following extend any further into our dominions” (1.1.158–61).⁹⁷ This order is unsuccessful, for the law quickly spreads and produces very real effects on the lives of characters it was never intended to touch. According to Hutchings and Bromham, it is the introduction of the

tough questions and instead rejects the assumption that individuals above a certain age will inevitably be physically and mentally feeble” (167).

⁹⁶ Scholarship on the play's final lines seems to find them universally unsettling.

⁹⁷ Carolyn Asp asserts that an early modern audience would pick up on the fictiveness of the law and view it as an “improbable” situation (153).

subplot characters into the court plot that allows for the questioning of the Duke's motives to take place:

Gnotho's [sic] appearance in the last scene raises questions about Evander's behaviour: not only whether he was right to risk confusing his subjects by changing laws, but also whether he was right, however good his intentions, to unleash the destructive forces of unrestrained self-seeking in his country, causing such unnecessary suffering to innocent people. (81)

Duke Evander's actions place him within the literary tradition of rulers who dissemble their purposes, often through disguise, in order to reform a sick commonwealth, as occurs in plays such as Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, John Marston's *The Malcontent* and Middleton's *The Phoenix*.⁹⁸ However, in this play, the Duke's decision to enact a false law as a kind of experiment undermines trust in the lawmakers themselves. The Duke's fantasy of total control over this experiment and its consequences is proven to be flawed. His law produces effects he could not foresee, which he admits during his initial response to Gnothoes's attempt to deliver his wife to execution: "This is not yet plain enough to my understanding" (5.1.395). Furthermore, Gnothoes is able to base his self-defence in the argument that he was simply acting as an obedient subject:

If further your grace examine it, you shall find I show myself a dutiful subject and obedient to the law—myself (with these, my good friends and your good

⁹⁸ See Asp, who reads the Duke as a "benevolent machiavel" whose "primary concern is to establish justice in his realm" and who must enact the law in order to see his subjects' true natures clearly (181). See also Ellis (155).

subjects), our old wives, whose days are ripe and their lives forfeit to the law.
(5.1.396–400)

Likewise, the Duke's intentionality is overtaken by the power invested in the parish registry to determine Agatha's identity as an aged and unproductive woman, an identity that is then exploited by her abusive husband.

Are there any alternatives available within the play to its depiction of numerically-based old age and its system of state-sanctioned ableism that has its basis in a law that "is predicated upon a narrowly functional view of the nature of humankind described by Aristotle in which old age is seen as a condition of unstoppable decay"? (Taunton, *Fictions* 143). Perhaps one can be found in act four scene one, when Agatha joins the aged wives of the servingmen in a dance designed to trick their husbands into partnering with them. The men's inability to recognize the masked women as their own wives suggests that the women cannot be solely defined by Epire's methods of measuring age and identity. This scene, in performance, could confront the logic of compulsory ablebodiedness with the agency of characters with non-normative bodies. And perhaps one more liberating way to read their dance is that it has no use-value that the state recognizes, and therefore exists outside of its economy of compulsory ablebodiedness.

4.5 Intergenerational Devotion versus Collective Support

This chapter's final turn will examine where the play locates the responsibility for the care of older people. Though *The Old Law*'s overt idealization of intergenerational piety initially seems to place this responsibility with the adult children, I argue that the play subtly points to the community and state as the actors most responsible for the care of

older people who can no longer independently support themselves.⁹⁹ Moreover, I suggest that Middleton and collaborators imagine, in a limited and ultimately rescinded way, the notion of mass retirement as an entitlement based on one's citizenship in a country, going beyond the means-tested logic of the poor law pensions or the *ad hoc* types of pensions awarded to people like Edmund Spenser.¹⁰⁰

Initially, the play seems preoccupied by the idealization of intergenerational devotion. Cleanthes's loyalty to his father bears out the conventional Biblical injunction to honour one's parents that is rehearsed again and again in the contemporary literature that aims to increase expressions of filial piety towards the aged. As Steven R. Smith writes, "The Fifth Commandment to honor parents and all persons in authority or of great age was taken seriously, reinforced by sermons, catechisms, and domestic manuals" ("Age of Transition" 195). Cleanthes's dialogue upon the first entrance of his father reinforces the son's proper performance of his duty: "Ay, here's the ground / Whereon my filial faculties must build / An edifice of honour or of shame / To all mankind" (1.1.334–37). The ensuing scene of intergenerational harmony among Leonides, Cleanthes, and

⁹⁹ Bromham asserts the importance of filial piety in the play ("Contemporary Significance"), and his argument is summarized by Taunton as follows: "duty to political regimes is above both family and law, but as Bromham convincingly argues, this imperative is reversed in *The Old Law*, where a son's (and daughter's) duty to a father is shown to be paramount (Bromham, 1984, 334)" (*Fictions* 137). I argue that though filial piety definitely serves as a means by which the play rejects absolutism, the play is also interested in what duty the state has toward its subjects, not solely what duties children and subjects have towards their parents and state.

¹⁰⁰ These types of pensions were not linked to old age as they are now but were awarded as a "regular stipend, but may not be for doing anything; clerical benefices, sinecures, and scholarships seem to illustrate it" (Gilbert 28). Thank you to Nina Budabin-McQuown for reminding me of Spenser's pension.

Cleanthes's wife, Hippolita, contrasts markedly with the previous scene, in which the bad son Simonides betrays his own parents. Leonides continues to elevate filial ties by praising his daughter-in-law Hippolita effusively to Cleanthes:

I tell thee; there's few men
 Have such a child; I must thank thee for her.
 That the stronger tie of wedlock should do more
 Than Nature in her nearest ligaments
 Of blood and propagation! I should ne'er
 Have begot such a daughter of my own.
 A daughter-in-law! Law were above nature
 Were there more such children. (1.1.368–75)

Leonides couches his praise of his daughter-in-law in her ability to naturalize their relationship—by demonstrating her capability to treat Leonides with filial devotion she has proved herself as a natural daughter. As Taunton writes, these lines

promot[e] familial duties by suggesting that qualities of compassion and care may be inheritable, but the laws of society, especially with regard to marriage, may perfect nature in creating an environment combining what is most beneficent in nature with what is most valued in society so that a woman who is not a blood relative can possess more qualities and perform more good actions than a child.
 (*Fictions* 145)

Cleanthes urgently reminds Leonides that praising her loyalty will not save his life, to which Leonides responds,

Had you heard her, Cleanthes, but labour

In the search of means to save my forfeit life,
 And knew the wise and sound preservations
 That she found out, you would redouble all
 My wonder in your love to her

...

She counsels me to fly my severe country,
 Turn all into treasure, and there build up
 My decaying fortunes in a safer soil,

Where Epire's law cannot claim me. (1.1.377–381, 386–89)

Cleanthes agrees that they should flee and adds that “Every country where we breathe will be our own, / Or better soil” (1.1.394–95). Up until this point the family's dependence upon immediate kin for survival seems absolute: the only solution is for the family to leave Epire and its genocidal laws.

At this point, however, Leonides rejects the plan concocted by his children to save him and expands the definition of the filial relationship beyond the nuclear family, locating it instead in his relationship with his country. The playwrights now introduce the second childhood commonplace, operating here in a more sympathetic way than it usually does, as surveyed in this dissertation's introduction. Leonides argues against disobeying the new law in order to save his life:

I must not shame my country for the law.

This country here hath bred me, brought me up,

And shall I now refuse a grave in her?

I'm in my second infancy, and children

Ne'er sleep so sweetly in their nurse's cradle

As in their natural mother's. (1.1.402–407)

Though the conflict between loyalties in *The Old Law* is often read as a response to James's absolutist and paternalist portrayal of himself as ruler by divine right and father to the country,¹⁰¹ here Leonides does not identify the Duke, specifically, as the parental figure. Instead, the second childhood trope is carried out via an appeal to nascent early modern nationalism, as Leonides's description of the motherland draws on the trope of the earth as a womb for one's burial after death.¹⁰²

Despite the characters' performance of filial devotion, Leonides actually asserts the primacy of the citizen's relationship with the state by figuring one's country as a mother who is expected to nurture her children.¹⁰³ In doing so, Leonides establishes a

¹⁰¹ For Swapan Chakravorty, the play furthers Middleton's concern with "the conflict between patriarchal and absolutist ideals, which King James sought to unite on a common familial premise The anomaly in this demand is problematized in *Old Law* by having a prince command his subjects to slay their natural parents" (118–19).

¹⁰² Ralf Hertel argues that at the turn of the seventeenth century, a sense of "national consciousness" was emergent in England, and that people began to identify not solely on the grounds of guild identity or religious identity, but rather as part of "a different kind of collective identity that emerged and worked as a unifying force regardless of profession or belief: an identity that was based on being English" (8). On the earth as womb metaphor, see also Quintus in *Titus Andronicus*, who calls the pit into which he has fallen, and that also contains Bassanius's corpse, a "swallowing womb" (2.3.239).

¹⁰³ Taunton points out that though Hippolita proves she can step into the role of filial piety as daughter-in-law, the same is not true for Leonides and his relationship to his country:

While the divine institution of marriage can improve upon the offices of nature in providing a man and his father with a wife and daughter-in-law of perfect virtue, it is not, by analogy, possible for the old to prefer a stepmother over and above a mother. The old are not able to find solace in an

precedent in the play for older characters to claim the right to receive something from one's country in exchange for their service as citizens. Middleton uses the second childhood trope to bypass the immediate family in order to create a larger parent-child relationship between nation/country and citizen. By extension, the parent country holds the ultimate responsibility to care for its children/citizens. By invoking the second childhood metaphor, Leonides reiterates the symbiotic relationship between citizen and country, and gives that relationship precedence over the solutions offered by his children. This is the first instance in the play of one of the older characters pointing out the limitations of filial piety as a strategy of old age care, and turning instead to the concept of collective community responsibility for the sustenance of the older generation. Leonides refuses to leave, for to leave would be to acquiesce to the state's refusal of its proper role of caregiving for its older citizens. The state's new law only allows for the ablebodied old to be recognized as valued citizens, not old people who are in a state of dependency or second childhood. Leonides turns the government's assertion of its right to intervene in the lives of its older citizens against itself. The old citizens respond to the law by insisting on the state's responsibility to mother its people.

The degree to which filial piety, so frequently drawn on in prescriptive writing, actually served as public policy when it came to supporting old people has been a matter of debate. Peter Laslett argues that in early modern England intergenerational households

adopted country because their motherland, the soil on which they were born, bred and brought up, however imperfect, must also be the soil in which they are buried. (145)

were not the norm and that adult children were rarely the primary means of support for their parents:

No doubt most daughters and some sons did conduct themselves so as to assure the comfort and security of their aging parents as far as they could, but we have found it difficult to confirm that they would return home for that purpose from their jobs or their holdings in other localities. Movement of failing fathers and mothers into the households of their married offspring undoubtedly occurred, but it was decidedly not a universal pattern in the evidence we have so far surveyed. Nor does it seem to have gone on at the request of the parents themselves, certainly not at their command. (“The History of Aging” 177)¹⁰⁴

Cleanthes is enacting the heroic version of something that was not necessarily a given in early modern English society. It is possible that Cleanthes and Hippolita’s care for Leonides registered as a rebuke to the English system in which adult children were not seen as immediately responsible for the care of their parents. But it is also possible that the play does not locate intergenerational piety as the sole, or even most desirable, solution to the question of who is responsible for supporting people in their old age.

Other older male characters also suggest that the state has obligations to care for them in exchange for their earlier service to the country. Creon, a former soldier,

¹⁰⁴ Though, as Laslett writes, “The famous Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 specifically confined responsibility for the relief of the elderly to their children alone,” and not more distant kin, he clarifies that “it must not be overlooked that the legal duty of a child to assist his parents never seems to have been construed as an obligation to receive or to maintain him or her in the household” (“The History of Aging” 177, 179).

criticizes the law by noting that it breaches a contract that exists between those who did the state service earlier in their lives:

A fine law; if this hold, white heads will be cheap,
 And many watchmen's places will be vacant.
 Forty of 'em I know my seniors,
 That did due deeds of darkness too—their country
 Has watched 'em a good turn for't, and ta'en 'em
 Napping now. (1.1.208–13)¹⁰⁵

Creon's description of his peers' service shows the state's betrayal of proper reciprocity—their former service as watchmen is not being appropriately compensated in their old age. Men were exempted from military service at age sixty (Thomas, "Age and Authority" 237), and Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith suggest that these kinds of exemptions set up expectations for more formal pension schemes later, that "the effect of the existence in the early modern period of a precise age beyond which males were ineligible for military service may have impinged on popular appreciation of age as well as creating administrative precedents for retirement and pensions" (5).

The older characters assert that collective provision for care in their old age is an entitlement earned through earlier service to the country (as expressed by Creon) and is

¹⁰⁵ Schotland gestures to responsibility of the state as well: "Just as children should be grateful to their parents, the state should be grateful to elders when they are no longer productive. . . . Creon is a prototype of the old soldier neglected by the state because he can no longer bear arms—someone who would have been supported with an ample pension in More's *Utopia*" (168). Age-related exemptions from compulsory service were common in the period; Pelling and Smith list various Statutes and their age exemptions, some of which excluded sixty-year-old men and forty-year-old women from work (5).

the expression of an ideological bond between citizen and state (as claimed by Leonides). David Thomson argues that community support in old age was considered to be a right in the early modern period, and rejects the notion that the welfare state, in which the country bears responsibility for support of its members who cannot fully support themselves, is something that only emerges in later historical periods. Rather, he argues that early modern people relied on “the assurance given to individuals that in times of major life crisis they could, and indeed should, look to the collectivity for support” (175). Thomson points out that the more formalized “literature of rights” to community support that would eventually develop could only come into being because these expectations had precedence in early modern English custom. He argues that the “notion of a right to welfare assistance from the community, not the family” existed long before the arguments of Thomas Paine, who eventually “wrote of a universal right to an old age pension from age 50 (full pensions to be paid from age 60)” (175). Thomson suggests that the arguments of Paine and “Others in the eighteenth century [who] wrote of the right to poor relief or state pensions” were only possible because they were “attempts to formalize a right which already existed in practice” (175). To focus only on the importance of filial piety and filial care for parents in *The Old Law* obscures how the play articulates a pre-existing social contract regarding the right to collective provision for the aged that predates twentieth-century public pensions schemes or formal periods of retirement.

4.6 Fantasies of Retirement: “Or, A New Way to Please You”

I will now turn to how retirement is portrayed at the end of the play as a reported, offstage fantasy that briefly operates as an alternative to filial piety as a strategy to ensure

care for the elderly and, by extension, political stability. In a final scene of reunion orchestrated by the Duke, the older characters who had been presumed executed reveal that they instead spent the interim period in a kind of paradise, described by Leonides as

A place at hand we were all strangers in,
 So sphered about with music, such delights,
 Viands, and attendance, and once a day
 So cheerèd with a royal visitant,
 That oft-times (waking) our unsteady fantasies
 Would question whether we yet lived or no,
 Or had possession of that paradise
 Where angels be the guard. (5.1.603–10)

As Rowe points out, this paradise is one that remains offstage: “there is no harmonious resolution at the end of the play. Harmony once more lies somewhere offstage, here specifically in the Edenic retreat where Evander hides the aged men and women of Epire” (188).¹⁰⁶ Though Rowe considers this offstage Eden as proof of the lack of onstage harmony, I will focus on the imaginative potential inherent in this briefly reported Edenic retreat. Leonides emphasizes the dream-like quality to their retirement. Surrounded by music, food, and, best of all, “cheerèd with a royal visitant,” that is, entertained by visits from the Duke, the older characters are repaid for their suffering by being cared for so well that they perceive themselves as being either in heaven or in Eden, a reward for their

¹⁰⁶ Cleanthes, as James Helm points out, unwittingly foreshadows the offstage refuge for the older characters when he hides Leonides in the forest. Cleanthes’s plot to conceal Leonides is an “accidental imitation of Evander’s strategy” (44).

unwitting service to the Duke's traumatic statecraft. The characters who enjoyed this retirement do seem to have been exclusively male, as Agatha never experiences this retreat, nor does it ever seem to be occupied by any woman, since the reunion scene apparently restores only the men and not the women who were presumably also "executed" by the law (the stage direction only mentions the return of the men). Still, it is as if the apparent age of execution has turned out, in practice, to be the age of retirement.¹⁰⁷ In this passage, Middleton and his collaborators seem to offer a vision of idealized mass retirement, one that was not operational in the period but perhaps was available as a speculative fantasy that could only appear offstage.

Mass retirement, as we understand it today, did not exist in the early modern period.¹⁰⁸ Pat Thane writes that in England "The 1881 census was the first to classify the 'retired' as a separate category rather than recording them by their previous occupation. This change may indicate the emergence of the 'retired' as a distinct social group, an expression of the growing accessibility of retirement to wider sections of the population" (279–80). And, as noted above, the relief offered by the early modern poor laws was never intended as a mass pension scheme; the system operated instead as a stop-gap measure to help support the very poor who had become incapable of fully supporting themselves. Pelling and Smith point out, "In general, arrival at a specific age created no

¹⁰⁷ This reverses Taunton's formulation that in *The Old Law* "retirement means retirement from life itself" (*Fictions* 84).

¹⁰⁸ Thomas writes that "The principle that pensions should be a collective responsibility has been traced back to the superannuation fund established for customs officers in the reign of Anne. But it was not generally accepted by the Civil Service until 1810" ("Age and Authority" 242).

entitlement to charity, poor relief, poor law pensions or medical treatment” (5). The age-related exemptions from service mentioned above allowed people to cease physical labour that had become too taxing, but they were not the equivalent of entering into a post-work state of retirement. The notion of retirement did exist in some form. Keith Thomas describes how “In rural society it was common for farmers to set up their sons and content themselves with a smaller holding or to live on interest, or to hand over altogether in return for houseroom or maintenance” (“Age and Authority” 236). Still, he emphasizes, it was not economically feasible for most people to give up work (237). Retirement schemes in which one receives some kind of pension from one’s nation as part of one’s citizenship did not exist.

Yet this is what is hinted at, or dreamed of, in the provisional retirement set up by Evander in the offstage, imagined space. For the older characters in *The Old Law*, this retirement is a condition in which the state is fully present once again. Evander is there in person and the churchbook is no longer a synecdoche of his power. From my perspective, the second half of the play’s title, “A new way to please you,” refers to the play’s vision of retirement as a deserved pleasure. The older citizens of Epire have become like a playhouse audience for whom a spectacle has been worked to provide them with aesthetic pleasure, transcendence, and union with an idealized version of sovereign power. They are owed the pleasure of being entertained by the Duke due to the legitimacy of Leonides’s and Creon’s testimony earlier in the play. After being ejected from their society for their supposed lack of ability, they reveal themselves as fully capable of enjoyment and pleasure, marking a point of connection with the old women’s dance in act four, scene one. The play offers a vision that celebrates the pleasure of old people.

Admittedly, the scenario's pleasing qualities are reported as having a shaky grip on reality. As Leonides says, the experience produces such incredulity "That oft-times (waking) our unsteady fantasies / Would question whether we yet lived or no." The retirement remains an ideal, yet provisional state that is communicated only once the older characters have returned onstage to work and are restored to their previous positions as judges.

In *The Old Law*, service to one's country creates a relationship of reciprocity between citizen and country. The play anticipates the post-Enlightenment notion of retirement as consisting of "pension schemes, not simply as forms of relief, but as manifestations of the state's, and then the nation's, indebtedness to old people for their past labours" (Bourdelaïs 111). Though the play certainly does stage the importance of intergenerational interdependency as an ethical stance,¹⁰⁹ *The Old Law* is not simply interested in depicting the restoration of Biblical precepts of filial obligation. It is also preoccupied with speculating about the responsibility of the community and country as the source of support for older people. The conclusion of the play stages not only the return of filial obligation as a cherished value in Epire, but also speculates about how the elderly might go on relying on the collectivity for maintenance and support in old age in an even broader and more universal way than existed at the time. Though *The Old Law* shows how Epire requires its citizens to opt in to a discourse of compulsory

¹⁰⁹ Schotland suggests that "that the play makes a strong argument for the recognition of inter-generational dependency and the obligation of each generation to care for its elders not only out of gratitude but in hopes of receiving similar care in turn" and that "the obligation of the adult child to care for his or her parent and the expediency of caring for the elderly are age-old problems" (161).

ablebodiedness in order to justify their utility to their country, it simultaneously allows characters to express the rights and entitlements they expect in their capacity as citizens in return. By the end of the play, the older characters have been restored to the stage, to their work, and to the condition of ablebodiedness. Still, *The Old Law* reserves the right to imagine, offstage, a state of retirement to which they might return. The next chapter, on superlongevity, also takes up the notion of the productivity of the older person, the relationship between the aging body and the state, and the political influence of the older person's voice. This time, however, the focus is on how older people are positioned as keepers of English history.

5 Superlongevity, Chronicles, and Source Credibility in the Life of Thomas Parr and *1 & 2 Henry IV*

This chapter will show how older people in the early modern period are figured as the recorders and purveyors of a national history. History becomes accessible in the older person, who is portrayed as a living chronicle and who can testify to past events and make them immediate and palpable. I argue that this status invests older people with considerable agency by construing them as being capable of either binding together the commonwealth, or of undermining it due to their access to politically inexpedient knowledge. I begin with the phenomenon of early modern “superlongevity,” the men and women who were, in this period, believed to have reached unusually long lifespans well beyond their centenaries. I examine the case of Thomas Parr, who was said to have lived to the age of 152, and the textual representations of Parr’s life that celebrate his longevity, offer him up as a spectacle, and associate him with the one and a half centuries of English kings and queens through whose reigns he was supposed to have lived. I read John Taylor’s 1635 pamphlet on Parr to argue that Taylor uses the concept of superlongevity to advance a reading of English history that repairs the disruptions that could interrupt or threaten the line of the succession. Parr becomes, as a result, a figure of strength in the tense, pre-Civil War 1630s. Later, however, nineteenth-century accounts of Parr’s life begin to cast suspicion on the types of source material used to legitimate Parr’s superlongevity.

The challenging of the credibility of older men in their capacity as chronicles also occurs in Shakespeare’s *1 and 2 Henry IV*. The older men who exhibit a belief in the ability of unseen forces, like prophecy, to direct historical events and their consequences

are portrayed as credulous and naive. The more politically savvy characters perceive that humans shape historical events and then chronicle them in history books retrospectively and retroactively to suit their own purposes. These characters' more shrewd understanding of historiography allows them to be more politically successful and the historical knowledge of older people is relegated to the realm of superstition. I also describe how Falstaff threatens political stability due to his disruptive, non-linear, and "anomalous" aging.¹¹⁰ Parr's and Falstaff's unconventional aging processes both occur within narratives that are preoccupied with the insecurity of succession and with political instability. Henry V's banishment of Falstaff at the conclusion of *2 Henry IV* excludes the tainted and inconvenient historical knowledge that the knight possesses about Hal's dissolute past. The banishment also coincides with the end to the strife that bedeviled Henry IV's reign: the threat from the rebellious northern barons and the unseemly means by which Henry IV came to power by overthrowing a legitimate king, Richard II. I then argue that Falstaff's transgressive performance of old age represents a break with an older and more transcendent model of aging. Instead, Falstaff embodies a newer, more self-directed type of aging that resembles Hal's self-interested and strategic behaviour.

¹¹⁰ This term derives from Herbert Donow, who borrows it from gerontology and identifies in Shakespeare a canon of "unconventional agers" (735), including Titus, Lear, and Falstaff, for whom "The disinclination . . . to act in ways appropriate to their ages adds to their stature as characters and to the conflict within their respective plays. . . . One case alone—that of Falstaff—would be sufficient to demonstrate that Shakespeare was quite aware of the dramatic force of the anomalous ager" (736). Donow reads Falstaff's rejection as a direct consequence of his age: "Falstaff is rejected not so much because the old man is a sinner but because the sinner is an old man, and because the old man has failed to adapt successfully" (736). See also Scolnicov (69). I have borrowed the term "anomalous" because I think it captures the quality attracts people to Falstaff and Parr's aging.

Falstaff's insistence on strategic aging, rather than chronological aging, mimics this focus on the power of the individual to shape his own fate, rather than the influence of the stars, the seasons, prophecy, or the expectations of others.

5.1 Superlongevity, Human Potential, and the Display of Thomas Parr

Chapters two, three, and four, dealing as they did with *King Lear*, the seventh stage of Jaques's ages of man, and the euthanasia of *The Old Law*, focused on how early modern literature engages with the decline narrative of aging, as defined in this dissertation's introduction. I showed, in the general introduction, how the decline narrative of aging is not the only model available in early modern poetry, analyzing how Edmund Waller's "Of the Last Verses in the Book" associates old age with new and innovative types of insight that do not demand the performance of ablebodiedness in old age. This chapter deals with another major metaphor of early modern aging that does not depend on the decline narrative. I argue that the early modern interest in superlongevity construes old age as a period of productivity and generativity in order to think through the concept of national history.

Stories of the extraordinarily long lives experienced by a small group of people provided an opportunity to explore the degree to which individuals could direct the course and quality of their own aging, and to debate the degree to which one's environment influenced one's length of life. As Pat Thane writes, "The possible lifespan of human beings intrigued theological, philosophical, and medical writers as optimism about the human capacity to control nature grew with the intellectual flowering of the seventeenth century" (59). Cases of extreme superlongevity—people who were believed

to have lived into their eleventh or twelfth decades or beyond—were perceived as rare but possible, an example of the advanced ages that Biblical characters would reach, and they set the horizon of possibility for the age that a human body could achieve. Men and women who lived to an extreme old age were rare and unique, but also representative of the potential of every body.

Thomas Parr, a husbandman from Shropshire, was understood to have been born in 1483 and died in 1635 at the age of 152.¹¹¹ In September 1635, Parr accompanied Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel, to London to be presented to Charles I and the rest of London society, at which point the event was reported in print. In London, Parr’s superlongevity was celebrated and marveled at, and his portrait was made by Cornelius van Dalen (Thomas, “Parr, Thomas” n.p.). Accounts of Parr’s life appear multiple times in print, where he is promoted as a curiosity or a “wonder.”¹¹² In a 1636 pamphlet titled *The Three Wonders of this Age*, Parr is classed as a spectacle, depicted alongside the very tall (called here “giants”) and little people (called here “dwarfes”) (*The Three Wonders* n.p.). He also appears in a 1635 pamphlet titled *The Wonder of this Age: or, The Picture of a Man living, who is One hundred Fifty two yeeres old, and upward* (Heywood n.p.). The print depicts a portrait of a white-bearded Parr wearing a cap surrounded by three

¹¹¹ Thane explains that Parr’s age “was probably attained by his, consciously or not, adopting his father’s birth-date” (61).

¹¹² Peter Laslett connects the display of centenarians to a desire to experience the Biblical miracles: “Thomas Parr and Old Meg of Hereford were marvels to be wondered at, authentic miracles like miracles in the Scripture” (“Bewildering History” n.p.). He has called the fascination with extremely long-lived men and women “the cult of centenarians” (*ibid*).

columns of text, and claims to offer “The true and exact Effigies, or Portraiture of *Thomas Parr*, borne in the yeere 1483, in the last yeere of the Reigne of *Edward* the Fourth” (n.p.). The text emphasizes the accuracy of the portrait and the uniqueness of Parr’s lifespan, which is not something that can be passed on by succession: “There needs no further Description of his Person, then this Picture. And to shew that long life is not Hereditary, hee had onely two sonnes by his first Wife, the one dyed within a Moneth, the other within a few yeeres” (n.p.).¹¹³ Both of these examples include visual representations of Parr along with accompanying text that gives a biography. Certain aspects of Parr’s life recur in the various retellings: the impact of his rural lifestyle on his longevity, his two late-in-life marriages at ages 80 and 122, and his public punishment for adultery at age 105.

The Earl of Arundel’s motivation for bringing Parr to London appears to be a desire to impress Charles I. Alan Shepard describes the objectification inherent in Parr’s treatment by his patron, suggesting that Arundel displays Parr to Charles’s court in order to curry royal favour. He also links the Earl’s antiquarian activities with an objectification of Parr that some interpret as leading to Parr’s death:

the act of having Parr carted to London is consonant with the Earl’s reputation as a zealous collector of antiquities. While his travels on the Continent usually netted him sumptuous portraits by Italian masters . . . in Parr he reels in an aged human being, a relic of the pastoral life. . . . Within a few days he is dead, a victim of Arundel’s desire to ‘exhibit’ him for the King’s amusement. As Lawrence Stone

¹¹³ Quotes have been modernized.

remarks of the fascination with collecting antiquarian specimens in the early seventeenth century, a fashion of which Arundel was a prime mover, the craze did not bespeak a genuine interest in science. Instead, ‘it encouraged the mentality of the fair-ground peep-show’ (327). Arundel is a greedy urban colonist, Parr a spectacle of biblical age, an aristocrat’s Elephant Man. (492)

It is true that Parr’s body is made into a public spectacle, an experience that he does not survive. When Parr dies not long after traveling to London, many blame his demise on the ill-effects of an urban environment and the luxuries found there, as Keith Thomas notes in William Harvey’s autopsy of Parr:

Harvey attributed Parr’s death in part to his sudden exposure to rich food and strong drink after a lifetime’s diet of cheese, buttermilk, and coarse bread; but he identified the main cause as the effect of London’s atmosphere, polluted by people, animals, and the smoke of coal fires, upon someone accustomed to the healthy air of Shropshire. (“Parr, Thomas” n.p.)¹¹⁴

However, to focus on Arundel’s actions and Harvey’s autopsy report is to render Thomas Parr too passive, passive in a way that he never really was for early modern people. The fact that one of our sources on Parr is the autopsy written by Harvey contributes to this tendency, as the autopsy takes as its subject the inert corpse. In contrast, I will show how Parr’s life and body were perceived to be possessed of agency; in fact, much of his celebrity is connected to the potential or fruitfulness he was perceived to possess. Parr

¹¹⁴ Thane points out that cases of superlongevity generally occurred among those living in rural settings: “That these were generally found among the rural poor was taken as proof that the immoderate life of modern, especially urban, society was the chief cause of ‘premature’ sickness and death” (60).

offers his audience access to a shared English history, and his experience of living through multiple historical periods lends his old age strength, authority, and a sense of wonder.

5.2 Thomas Parr, John Taylor, and Surviving English History

Parr fascinates his London audience because of the sheer breadth of English history through which he lived. The list of regnal periods engraved on Parr's headstone in Westminster Abbey conveys the longevity of his life by subsuming the lives of the kings and queens he outlived into his own. Though he lived "in" their reigns, he also outlived them all, save Charles:

THO: PARR OF YE COUNTY OF SALLOP. BORNE IN AD: 1483. HE LIVED
IN YE REIGNES OF TEN PRINCES VIZ: K.EDW.4. K.ED.5. K.RICH.3.
K.HEN.7. K.HEN.8. K.EDW.6. Q.MA. Q.ELIZ. K.JA. & K.CHARLES. AGED
152 YEARES. & WAS BURIED HERE NOVEMB. 15. 1635. ("Thomas Parr")

First Parr is identified locally through his county, and then temporally through the list of the ten expired monarchs. The persistence of his survival stands in stark contrast to the tumultuous political events that would presumably be, to the readers of the epitaph, associated with the names of these kings and queens. Parr's superlongevity, in and of itself, is not what qualifies him for a burial plot in Westminster Abbey. Instead, it is his association with the progress of English history that provides the impression of continuity across reigns.

Parr's life was also written up at greater length by John Taylor, in a pamphlet that includes a poem titled: "The Old, Old, Very Old Man." In this work, Parr's

superlongevity becomes the vehicle through which Taylor writes about the realm and its political history. The poem begins by invoking the second childhood trope alongside the crucible of “Domestic strife” into which Parr was born:

An Old man’s twice a child (the proverb says)
 And many old men ne’er saw half his days
 Of whom I write; for he at first had life,
 When *York* and *Lancasters* Domestic strife
 In her own blood had factious *England* drench’d,
 Until sweet Peace those civil flames had quench’d. (Taylor 5)

The poem opens on a historical context of civil or domestic strife that has physically wounded the country. The subsequent moves in the poem work to repair this breach using Parr’s superlongevity. Like Parr’s gravestone, Taylor chronicles all the reigns that Parr lived through, ending with Charles, the present king:

This *Thomas Parr* hath liv’d th’expired reign
 Of ten great Kings and Queens, th’eleventh now sways
 The Sceptre, (blest by th’ancient of all days)
 He hath surviv’d the *Edwards*, fourth and fifth;
 And the third *Richard*, who made many a shift
 To place the Crown on his Ambitious head;
 The seventh and eight brave *Henries* both are dead,
 Sixth *Edward*, *Mary*, *Philip*, *Elizabeth*,
 And blest remembred *James*, all these by death
 Have changed life, and almost ’leven years since

The happy reign of *Charles* our gracious Prince,
Tom Parr hath liv'd, as by Record appears

Nine months, one hundred fifty, and two years. (6–7)

Following the list of regnal periods, Taylor describes the climactericals that Parr would have experienced, explaining the physiological belief that “every seventh year of a person’s age was considered a ‘climacterical,’ and dangerous to one’s life” (Beam 112). Taylor points out that though the age of sixty-three is the ninth and “Most perilous” climacterical year, Parr “Hath liv’d of climactericals such plenty, / That he hath almost out-lived two and twenty” (7).

By juxtaposing Parr’s survival of so many climacterical years immediately following the list of the reigns through which he lived, Taylor implies that history itself possesses repetitive moments of rupture that must be survived by the body politic. English history experiences these perilous attacks in the form of a monarch’s death, an unloved king’s ambition (Richard III), or periods of internecine or international war. Parr provides the positive model for England’s survival: self-perpetuating, hardy, and able to withstand even the attacks that originate within the body. If the English monarchy is robust, like Parr, it will survive these transitional periods. Parr’s example of living through the reigns of ten monarchs thus provides a comforting continuity—he does not passively outlive physical illness, but instead possesses a remarkably strong body that (like a strong body-politic) will meet and overcome attacks to its integrity.

Outside the formal boundaries of the poem itself, Taylor raises another form of attack on the body politic: pretenders to the throne. Taylor follows the conclusion of his verse with a postscript in which he relates the stories of Lambert Simnell and Perkin

Warbeck, two historical pretenders who, at different points during the last two decades of the fifteenth century, challenged Henry VI's legitimacy and put themselves forward as the true heirs to the royal succession. The status of their stories within the pamphlet—they appear in an appendix to the verse—replicates their uneasy relationship to England. The pretenders challenge the king's legitimacy and offer counter-narratives of alternative birthrights and lines of succession. These stories appear to discomfit Taylor and he writes, "although all of them are not to be held worthy of mentioning, yet many of them are worthy to be had in memory" (22). Though he knows he must include them as important historical figures, Taylor seems to protect against these counter-narratives by keeping them outside the verse proper. He tames them by pointing out that these incidents all occurred within Parr's lifespan, and shows how, one after the other, the pretenders were put down by the rightful king at the time. As Taylor writes, "So much for Impostures and Counterfeits" (23). They are still worthy of remembrance alongside the other "changes in Manners, the variations of Customes, the mutability of Times, the shifting of Fashions, the alterations of Religions, the diversities of Sects, and the intermixture of Accidents" through which Parr lived (22). Indeed, Parr's lifespan not only comprises the rise and fall of princes, but it also runs concurrently with the English Reformation, and the political "Accidents" that arose due to the ongoing religious conflicts and reversals within the country. That Taylor's allusion to "the alterations of Religions, the diversities of Sects, and intermixture of Accidents" occurs in the postscript, alongside the other troubling examples of the pretenders, suggests that they also constitute the sort of conflict that Parr's example can subdue.

Taylor's pro-Protestant account notes that Parr lived through the reversals of the state religion between Catholicism and Protestantism that characterized the Tudor period from Henry VIII on, but presents Parr as exhibiting a cautious wisdom by keeping his own council regarding how to identify religiously:

All which time, *Thomas Parr* hath not been troubled in mind for either the building or throwing down of Abbeys, and Religious Houses; nor did he ever murmur at the manner of Prayers, let them be Latin or English, he held it safest to be of the Religion of the King or Queen that were in being; for he knew that he came raw into the world, and accounted it no point of wisdom to be broiled out of it. (24)

Taylor's representation of Parr privileges stability and the self-regulation of the mind and religious passion in order to preserve order. Parr is not "troubled in mind" by Henry VIII's selling of monastery lands, which so drastically changed land use in England, nor does he "murmur" in response to the frequent changes in prayer service he would have heard in church. Instead, Taylor's Parr exhibits the wisdom that is the prerogative of old age by withholding partisanship and by pragmatically accommodating himself to the will of the monarch. By doing so, Taylor's Parr interrupts a cycle of religious violence that, Taylor implies, is visited upon those who do not align themselves with "the Religion of the King or Queen that were in being."

5.3 Political Contexts and Historiography

Like Shepard, who reads into Harvey's autopsy report a preoccupation with the political conflicts that existed in the 1630s period of Charles's Personal Rule,¹¹⁵ I suggest that similar concerns underpin Taylor's pamphlet on Parr's life. As Patricia Panek writes, Taylor was a Royalist:

His political and religious satires supporting the Royalists during the English Civil War, in fact, were particularly successful and much imitated. His Royalist sympathies, however, made it too dangerous for him to remain in London at the outbreak of the English Civil War. He followed King Charles I to Oxford, where he was treated well by the king's court and the university scholars. . . . King Charles made him a yeoman of the guard in recognition of his years of service to the Crown. (261–62)

Knowing that Taylor would become, according to James Mardock, "the most popular and prolific Royalist propagandist in England" (11), it is tempting to read the foreshadowing of the trouble to come in Taylor's pamphlet on Parr. Taylor's commitment to the Royalist cause is evident in the Parr pamphlet's resolutely pro-monarchy stance, as Parr is used to shore up the king and to criticize various disruptive forces that undermine the stability of

¹¹⁵ Shepard argues that the political context of the 1630s underpins Harvey's autopsy report, suggesting that Harvey critiques Charles's Personal Rule by critiquing how Arundel uses Parr:

Holding in mind Arundel's imperial arrogance, his treatment of Parr brings up for Harvey the limits of his own commitment to an economy in which the rich use the poor as entertainment. Old Parr's 'suffocated' body is read, I have argued, as an omen of Stuart England, polluted and polluting, nearing its own last breath. As an old man's life has been suffocated by the conditions of excess in London, Harvey insinuates, so may go the commonweal. (499)

the realm. Taylor, however, cannot deny that those disruptive forces may finally result in a fatal climacterical.

The solution to these threats seems to be, for Taylor, in the potential Parr represents for historiography. Historians have established the ways in which older members of early modern communities functioned as historical sources. As Thomas writes, “In a semi-literate society, still much dependent on oral tradition, it was the old who controlled access to the past. They were the repositories of local history and custom, of pedigree and descent” (“Age and Authority” 233–34).¹¹⁶ It thus follows that a person understood to have lived an uncommonly long time would have access to an uncommonly extensive record of English history. By calling Parr a “chronicle,” Taylor plays on the convention that associated print chronicles with

a public identity for the chronicler. This is signified in the practice, standard from this time, of identifying individual chronicles as the work of an author. . . . As polemic and argumentation increased with the confessional and dynastic quarrels of the day,

¹¹⁶ Alison Thorne uses Thomas’s quote as well in support of her argument, which I will take up in the second half of the chapter on Falstaff (54). The association of old people with the oral transmission of history is still with us. David Troyansky notes that oral histories taken from “elderly informants” are still used in order to “hear from the past” (“Historical Research” 58). See also Naomi Liebler on Shakespeare’s “less sentimental view” on old people as repositories of memory: “No one pays much attention to old men’s memories anywhere in Shakespeare’s work—nor, probably, in the world it reflected, except perhaps when kings require the confirmation of precedent. As a measure of human significance, memory alone can be cold comfort. And yet, for a discourse so consistently dismissed, Shakespeare represents old men’s reminiscence with surprising frequency” (“And Is Old Double Dead?” 80).

so the shoulder of an author's printed name in the margins was increasingly put to the wheel of argument. (Woolf 15–16)

For Taylor, Parr's potential to participate in history-writing is a populist move, in keeping with Taylor's characteristic defense of those (including himself) who write for the public despite a "want of learning" (in Panek 258). To someone who spent his career defending the participation of the non-elite in poetic participation, the story of a husbandman who is brought to court to relate English history to the king would be appealing.

It is this "want of learning," however, that forces Taylor to present Parr's historiographic potential as something entirely in the realm of the contingent and conditional. Taylor's poem produces a speculative historiography located in the potential speech of Parr—speech that does not actually take place. First, Taylor imagines Parr and his forefathers as chronicles themselves, contracting the span of English history in just three generations of superagers:¹¹⁷

But had the father of this *Thomas Parr*,
 His Grandfather, and his Great grand-father,
 Had their lives threads so long a length been spun,
 They (by succession) might from Sire to Son
 Have been unwritten Chronicles, and by
 Tradition shew Times mutability. (15)

¹¹⁷ This plan requires that Parr's father, grandfather and great-grandfather all become parents at a late age, but this does not seem to have been perceived as out of the realm of possibility for those possessed with superlongevity. Harvey's autopsy of Parr takes pains to note the healthy condition of his reproductive organs.

Taylor then imagines the oral history that Parr might have heard from his father, as passed down by his great-grandfather: “The death of famous *Edward* the confessor, / (*Harold*) and *William* Conq’ror his successor; / How his Son *Robert* wan *Jerusalem*, / O’er-came the *Saracens*, and Conquer’d them” (15) and on and on through the reigns of Rufus, Henry, Steven, Maud, the Plantagenet kings and the circumstances around “King *John*, and of the foul suspicion / Of *Arthurs* death, *Johns* elder Brothers Son” (15). He would also have access to “how fourth *Henries* faction did divide / The Realm with civil (most uncivil) war / ’Twixt long contending *York* and *Lancaster*” (16). The knowledge inherited from Parr’s ancestors would then blend seamlessly with the history through which Parr lived. As Taylor moves into more recent Tudor/Stuart history he becomes effusive with praise, imagining Parr as the chronicle of

how that royal maid

Elizabeth did Govern (best of Dames)

And Phoenix-like expir’d, and how just *James*

(Another Phoenix) from her Ashes claims

The right of Britain’s scepter, as his own,

But (changing for a better) left the Crown

Where now ’tis, with King *Charles*, and may it be

With him, and his most blest posterity

Till time shall end; be they on Earth renown’d,

And after with Eternity be crown’d. (16–17)

It is not solely the fact that Parr’s ancestors did not share his superlongevity (not being inheritable, as the other texts on Parr emphasized) that prevents him from being able to

represent the entirety of English history in his person. For Taylor, it is also, paradoxically, Parr's lack of access to the education that prevents him from producing the desired historical knowledge:

Thus had *Parr* had good breeding, (without reading)
 He from his sire, and Grand sires sire proceeding,
 By word of mouth might tell most famous things
 Done in the reigns of all those Queens and Kings,
 But he in Husbandry hath been brought up,
 And ne'er did taste the *Heliconian* cup,
 He ne'er knew History, nor in mind did keep
 Ought, but the price of corn, hay, kine, or sheep. (17)

The very conditions that may have led to Parr's longevity (his idealized rural life), are also the conditions that keep Parr's full participation in historical discourse in the subjunctive mood. Taylor is conscious of degree and the impact one's station has on one's education, pointing out that "'Tis strange, a man that is in years so grown / Should not be rich" (17). Taylor wryly acknowledges "That he that's born in any Land, or Nation, / Under a Twelve-pence Planet's Denomination, / (By working of that Planets influence) / Shall never live to be worth thirteen pence" (17). At this point Taylor identifies with Parr's want of learning, stating "Whereby (although his Learning cannot show it) / He's rich enough to be (like me) a Poet" (18).

As a result, Taylor's account presents history in a curious way: historical fact is offered counterfactually.¹¹⁸ Instead of imagining counterfactual narratives of English history (those, for instance, represented by alternate lines of succession), Taylor explores in Parr the potential for counterfactual historiography, for a different type of chronicle. If Parr had had "good breeding," Taylor imagines, then he would have been able to deliver English history to the king. But this was not to be. The accounts of Parr's actual conversation seem to convey a disappointment in how he rendered the past. Instead of relating stories about past monarchs, Parr apparently discussed the changing prices of crops and livestock, reflecting his own occupation but not his witnesses' preoccupation with political history. Keith Thomas confirms that Parr ultimately disappointed his spectators: "In London, Parr was put on show. . . . Disappointingly, he proved able to recall very few of the public events of his long lifetime, being more interested in the price of corn, hay, cattle, and sheep" ("Parr, Thomas" n.p.).

Frustratingly for his spectators, Parr does not produce the desired history. Instead, he offers the type of historical data that is now invaluable to social and economic historians. On the topic of Parr's memory, Harvey's autopsy emphasizes the healthy state of his brain but reiterates Parr's lapses in the type of memory desired by his interlocutors. In fact, Harvey suggests that Parr remembered even less than Thomas and Taylor suggest, and includes the "prices of goods offered for sale" along with "the public events" among the information Parr had forgotten from his youth:

¹¹⁸ See Amir Khan (2015) on how to mobilize the counterfactual in Shakespearean tragedy criticism.

His brain was sound, and quite firm and solid to the touch. Therefore until just before his death, although he had been blind for twenty years, he could hear very well and understand what he heard, answer questions readily, and react normally to situations. He was even able to walk when lightly supported between two men. His power of memory however had failed considerably so that he had no clear remembrance of his own actions as a young man, of the public events, famous kings and leaders, wars and civil disturbances in his early youth, of customs, men, prices of goods offered for sale or the other occurrences usually remembered by men. He remembered only his actions of most recent years. (In Keynes 224)

However, the conclusion that Parr's memory failed him during his audience with the king conflicts with Taylor's description of Parr's canny ability to avoid making controversial public political statements. As mentioned above, Taylor at one point describes Parr as pragmatically keeping silent during the religious reversals caused by the Reformation. Taylor depicts Parr as being aware of these political changes and choosing to keep silent in a pragmatic and successful effort at self-preservation. Parr's decision to discuss safe topics in front of the king need not only be read as memory failure, it can also be read as an expression of political tact and caution. Regardless, despite the fact that Parr's memory may not have supported the role that Taylor imagined for him, it remains true that old age in general was esteemed as a source of historical knowledge. The promise offered by superlongevity was not that of the cult of youth, the desire to stay young, but was instead the opportunity to be older longer.

5.4 Nineteenth-Century Parr: Suspicion and Commodification

Parr's story continued to circulate in the nineteenth century, sometimes as a target for rational skepticism and sometimes by being appropriated into advertising culture. A 1890 *New York Times* column printed in *Yorkshire Factory Times*, titled "Do People Live Longer Than a Century," treats Parr and other remarkable cases of superlongevity with a skepticism that decries that these reports "are still honestly believed in":

Now, all such stories of longevity are absurd, and have no foundation to rest upon. With the exception of the old lady of Desmond [another case of superlongevity], such cases of extreme old age mostly occur among the humbler grades of society, where authentic records are never kept. That old Irishwoman, whom the reporter pays his respects to, and who tells him that she was born in county Cork, when the French landed in "the old country," is not a story-teller, nor a humbug, but only an ignorant person as to her own individual history. When the exact reporter hunts up his story-book, and makes her over 100, he is simply a victim to his credulity. Even Bible proof, such as of a baptism, is not to be credited, for often such things are written years after the birth or baptism of an individual and errors creep in. Tombstones are proverbial liars. There are sad wags in this world who go round amid the graves with chisels, and tinker with the figures of the slabs. There are wags who seem to have a certain spite in regard to antiquaries. To know exactly how long men will live is the business of life insurance companies, English registration and national debt offices. ("Do People Live Longer than Century" 2)

This excerpt organizes historical sources into the credible and the incredible. First, the ability to ensure reliable record-keeping is based on class, as the columnist's skepticism is rooted in an unwillingness to accept the testimony of those of a lower rank. Yet this "old Irishwoman" who is dismissed as "only an ignorant person as to her individual history," is also presented as almost contagious in her ability to pass on bad history to the reporter. Though such oral testimony, this writer claims, does not belong to the sphere of "authentic records," its inauthenticity is still dangerously tempting and convincing.

The writer also passes judgment upon earlier periods' methods of communicating historical data. As D. R. Woolf writes, it was conventional for "early modern histories . . . [to] betray a continued orientation to aurality in the face of an ever-increasing density of printed materials" (81). By the time Parr's story reaches the nineteenth century, however, it seems that the connection between reliable historical testimony and the spoken word is weakening. By doubting these older, lower-ranking reporters, the columnist undermines the method by which the early modern accounts of superlongevity established the credibility and "authenticity" of the claims to extreme old age. The *Times* article takes up the issue of source authenticity by aligning the self-narrativizing of old people with other earlier and, per the author, more discreditable methods of record-keeping, such as the dates on gravestones and baptismal records, condemning both as an inadequate "foundation" of knowledge about age. By turning instead to the bureaucratic offices of "life insurance companies, English registration and national debt offices" as the preferred sources of records, the columnist delineates how a properly modern history would be written: by using a methodology with which one could ensure accurate reporting and by discarding the unreliable sources that claim to substantiate the existence of

superlongevity. The super-aged body is therefore dismissed as belonging to a credulous era whose methods can now be subjected to skeptical rigor and debunked. Furthermore, a cautious reader or journalist should be able to determine between good and bad sources. The authority with which Taylor once invested Parr is now undermined due to the impossibility of reconciling the miraculous or spectacular aspects of his extreme old age with the metrics of a life insurance company, which would have no model to recognize the incongruous, uninsurable, spectacular body of a 152-year-old person.

This is not to say that Parr's life story was completely evacuated of all perceived generativity in the nineteenth century. Parr's uniqueness and extraordinariness were commodified in an 1842 advertising pamphlet for life-prolonging pills, titled "The Extraordinary Life and Times of Thomas Parr, Who Lived to be 152 Years of Age, With Remarks, on Disease and Health, and the Means of Prolonging Life." The authenticity and authority that are denied to the figure of the Irish woman above are restored to Parr, now depicted as sharing his secret to a greatly extended lifespan. The pamphlet promotes its purported historical authenticity by claiming to be Parr's life story in manuscript form, which has been discovered in the possession of a descendent. The pamphlet writer manufactures the following quotation from "Parr," with the date given as 1630:

These do certifie yt ye undermentioned is ye method of preserving health, which, by ye grace of Almighty God, has caused me to attain to my miraculous old age. Albeit, in my youth, I was afflicted with ye Bloody Flux, and King's Evil, but which all left me by using some dayes ye herbs as herein written. . . . Moreover, I bequeath to my second great grandson ye method I employ for preparing ye

medicament—Given this day, and in ye 147th year of my age. (The Extraordinary Life and Times of Thomas Parr 2)

The advertisement copywriter provides a biography for Parr that includes the year of his birth, the employment of his parents, and the invention of the facts that Parr had “the Bloody Flux, and King’s Evil,” which he has treated by “a reputed witch, who prescribed charms and mummeries, which the reader will anticipate had no effect but to alarm his mind, and render him miserable” (3). During this time, the writer claims Parr learns about “the various herbs, and their medicinal properties” (3). Women’s witchcraft fails against Parr’s practical experience with nature, for he eventually “abandoned the nonsense of witchcraft and commenced in earnest to apply his knowledge to a practical end, viz., of attempting to cure himself” (3). Parr then develops a recipe incorporating life-preserving herbs that grants him his superlongevity.

Unlike early modern explanations of Parr’s longevity, which attribute it to a byproduct of his rural diet and lifestyle, in the 1860s superlongevity is advertised as something that can be investigated, extracted into pill form, and then purchased. This pamphlet is not interested in Parr, as Taylor was, in his role of oral reporter, but instead as a medical innovator who could lend plausibility to the advertisement’s mountebank-like claims of the pills’ effectiveness. Like the *Times* column, the pill advertisement also removes Parr from the realm of orality to written text, offering an authorial manuscript in his hand, rather than the fantasy of oral communication of history as expressed in Taylor’s poem. Over time, these centenarians’ stories become less and less credible, and the belief in their claims’ validity appears more and more credulous. Peter Laslett criticizes the early modern acceptance of the validity of these age claims, even by

scientists such as Harvey, as a failure to bring “a properly sceptical attitude” to the phenomenon of superlongevity (“The Bewildering History” n.p). By failing to authenticate these claims according to the rigorous historian’s methodology, even representatives of the scientific revolution such as Bacon and Harvey are “hoodwinked by a series of charlatans who exploited the prestige attached to very great age, thus maintaining and extending the centenarian cult” (n.p). However, I suggest that early modern people were indeed concerned with issues of authenticity and credibility. The interest in Thomas Parr demonstrates that authenticity and credibility is located elsewhere: in the memory and person of the superager. Parr is valued for his ability to be a credible source, and to corroborate history with his body. I will expand upon the distinction between credible and credulous history-telling in next section, which returns to Shakespearean drama and the representation of older people and history in *1* and *2 Henry IV*.

5.5 Old Age and Historical Credibility in *1* and *2 Henry IV*

If Parr’s longevity is understood to bear witness to history, so do, as Janice Rossen points out, older characters in Shakespearean history plays, where “the most important feature of an elderly character is that of memory—above all, a recollection of particular people” (220). However, the power of the older character to act as a repository of collective memory is not always deployed in a manner sympathetic to the political establishment. Though Thomas Parr’s superlongevity is portrayed by Taylor as capable of binding a fractured country together, *1* and *2 Henry IV* show how older people can threaten political stability due to their association with alternate historical narratives such

as prophecy.¹¹⁹ I argue that whereas Taylor imagines Parr’s superlongevity as a guarantor for the historical continuity of England, in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, older men’s access to historical knowledge and power is presented as more destabilizing because it can be associated with unstable prophecy and, by implication, an unstable future.

The nineteenth-century reappraisal of Parr questions the credibility of Thomas Parr’s claims to superlongevity, as well as the types of evidence used to corroborate it. *2 Henry IV* shows how the credibility of old men’s historical knowledge can be marginalized by the more politically savvy characters. Shakespeare’s references to history-reading divide the characters into the credible and the credulous, depending on how they identify the causes behind contemporary political events. The characters who set stock in the authority of Fate or of prophecy—and these characters tend to be either old or dying—are depicted by others as threateningly naive. For instance, the old person as chronicle is invoked at a charged moment when Henry IV appears to be dying. His younger sons, Clarence and Gloucester, are concerned that “the people” will read their father’s fits as mirroring the disordered state of the country and then search for parallels between Henry’s illness and the death of their ancestor, Edward III:

GLOUCESTER The people fear me, for they do observe

Unfathered heirs and loathly births of nature.

¹¹⁹ See Naomi Liebler’s “‘And is Old Double Dead?’ Nation and Nostalgia in *Henry IV Part 2*” for an analysis of how Justices Shallow and Silence operate as “almanacs of both personal and political recollections that articulate the relation of war and remembrance to memory and nostalgia” (78). The historical memories of these Justices, Liebler argues, position “‘history’ as localized and alternative versions of the play’s (and the tetralogy’s) larger concerns with time, succession, memory, obsolescence and war—all inevitable and simultaneously dangerous to incumbent order” (78).

The seasons change their manners, as the year
 Had found some months asleep and leaped them over.

CLARENCE The river hath thrice flowed, no ebb between,
 And the old folk, time's doting chronicles,
 Say it did so a little time before

That our great grandsire Edward sicked and died. (4.3.121–28)

The apparently imminent death of the king gives rise to a heightened sense of historicity. Gloucester and Clarence know that popular opinion will turn to the past to find the present's historical precedent, and that the people will interpret the end of Henry's reign as a repetition of the end of Edward III's. Their portrayal of this type of history-reading resembles the methodology of humanist historians, described here by Ivo Kamps:

the single most crucial premise of humanist historiography—the assumption that history can teach us about the present because history repeats itself—closely resembles the medieval notion of time as cyclical. That is, humanists held that whatever predicament confronts us now, a search of history will yield an identical situation in the past which can be used to guide successful conduct in the present.

(13)

The Dukes fear that “the old folk” are basing their search for historical pattern and precedent on superstitious phenomena of “unfathered heirs and loathly births of nature” and out-of-control nature, the rising tide of the Thames without the balancing ebb. Though, on the one hand, their methodology of searching for historical precedent resembles that of the humanist historians, on the other it resembles the prognostication of prophecy, a prediction of the future. The blurring of history and prophecy is of concern to

the dukes. Far from suggesting that they believe in these supernatural connections, Gloucester and Clarence are concerned with how the English people will interpret these events as part of a historical pattern, and how the “old folks,” or chronicles, will associate the rising level of the Thames with the end of Henry’s reign. Concerned with the management of the perception of the king’s death and what it means for their house’s grip on the crown, they resemble their elder brother who, in part one, promises to master Machiavellian *realpolitik* in his reformation speech (Hal’s strategy for self-reformation will be taken up later in the chapter).

Henry IV’s repeated association with prophecy, on the other hand, separates him from his sons and aligns him with the implied credulity of “time’s dotting Chronicles,” whose attitude towards history inches more closely to prophecy than that of the humanist historians.¹²⁰ Though the historical Henry IV died when he was in his forties, Shakespeare’s Henry is frequently perceived as an old man, possibly because he is often read as a parallel for Falstaff, and because he is ill and dying in part two. When Henry seeks out political knowledge, he turns to the book of fate. In part two, when he discusses Northumberland’s changing alliances—first loyal to Richard, then to the present king,

¹²⁰ Thorne argues that

For Elizabethan audiences the whiff of Romish superstition that clung to the oral tradition may perhaps have accentuated the latent Protestant connotations of Hal’s programme of ‘reform’. In any event, the new King’s public offensive against ‘rotten opinion’ clearly participates in the concurrent impulse within late Elizabethan and Jacobean culture to secure the boundaries of a national historiographical tradition, grounded in the unimpeachable authority of documentary evidence, by expelling local memory from the precincts of ‘proper history.’ (63)

and now a rebel—the king wishes that he could foresee future political events, which he describes as ordained by Fate:

O God, that one might read the book of fate,
 And see the revolution of the times
 Make mountains level, and the continent,
 Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
 Into the sea;
 . . .

*O, if this were seen,
 The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
 What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
 Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.* (3.1.44–48, 3.1.52.1–4)¹²¹

First Henry desires the knowledge available in the book of fate, and then rejects it as having a stultifying effect: to know its contents would overwhelm the reader with fatalism, and arrest one's ability to take action. Instead, the book of fate is a text that, upon reading, prevents action and makes one unwilling to get on with history. Henry recalls Richard II as having been prophetic:

[*To WARWICK*] You, cousin Neville, as I may remember—
 When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
 Then checked and rated by Northumberland,

¹²¹ These lines are italicized in the Norton edition because they are in the 1600 Quarto text and not the Folio text.

Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy?—
 ‘Northumberland, thou ladder by the which
 My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne’—
 Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,
 But that necessity so bowed the state
 That I and greatness were compelled to kiss—
 ‘The time shall come,’—thus did he follow it—
 ‘The time will come that foul sin, gathering head,
 Shall break into corruption’; so went on,
 Foretelling this same time’s condition,
 And the division of our amity. (3.1.61–74)

Henry’s counsellors resist his interpretation of the fated nature of historical process because he cedes too much power to forces beyond his control. In response, Warwick urges the king away from prophetic discourse and towards a more pragmatic reading of history. Warwick acknowledges that Richard accurately foresaw Northumberland’s betrayal of Henry IV because of Northumberland’s earlier betrayal of Richard. But Warwick redirects Henry’s attention to the rationality of Richard’s act of seeking guidance from historical precedents and reminds the king that

There is a history in all men’s lives
 Figuring the natures of the times deceased;
 The which observed, a man may prophesy,
 With a near aim, of the main chance of things
 As yet not come to life, who in their seeds

And weak beginnings lie intreasurèd. (3.1.75–80)

Warwick's description of the "history in all men's lives" accords with the humanist model of historiography as described by Kamps. Though Warwick uses Henry's term, *prophesy*, his advice does not seriously attribute to fate or Fortune the power to impact future events. By doing so, one can perceive the seeds of future events when they occur in one's lifetime:

Such things become the hatch and brood of time;
 And by the necessary form of this
 King Richard might create a perfect guess
 That great Northumberland, then false to him,
 Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness,
 Which should not find a ground to root upon
 Unless on you. (3.1.81–87)

Warwick recommends the honing one's powers of perception to foresee not a set fate but the probability of the many ways in which "seeds" of events may grow, and how the consequences of actions may "hatch and brood." Warwick recommends that Henry be, in effect, like his son.

Warwick focuses on how the individual can recognize past patterns in present-day politics, a methodology that is incompatible with how the play depicts the fulfilment of the prophecy of Henry's death, which comes true in an unpredictable and almost bleakly comic way. Henry's final illness affords him a heightened awareness of irony when it becomes clear that his expectation that he will die in Jerusalem will be undermined by the reality that he will merely die in a room of that name:

Laud be to God! Even there my life must end.
 It hath been prophesied to me many years
 I should not die but in Jerusalem,
 Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land;
 But bear me to that chamber; there I'll lie;
 In that Jerusalem shall Harry die. (4.3.363–68)

Instead of undertaking a pilgrimage to the holy land to atone for the questionable manner of his succession, the king dies in a room named for a holy place. Henry misreads the apparently clear prophecy, whose manifest meaning is belied by a second meaning that becomes clear once it is fulfilled. That the prophecy is indeed fulfilled seems to legitimize it. However, the notoriously misleading nature of prophecies, which tend to be fulfilled in unpredictable and counterintuitive ways, make them unserviceable to the practical and pragmatic history-readers like Warwick. The fulfillment of the prophecy ends up blurring the boundary between chronicle history and superstition, as Shakespeare destabilizes the chronicle as a neutral source of historical knowledge in *1* and *2 Henry IV*. Because Henry continues to rely on prophecy, he cannot fully inhabit an old age in which he acts as the purveyor of experience and political wisdom. Henry IV's old age is not attributed the value that Parr's is, for Henry learns the distinction between unreliably ambiguous prophecy and reliable history only at the moment that he realizes he will die.

Henry IV resembles the "old folks" that Clarence dismisses, relying on what is increasingly seen by the practical courtiers around him as an incredible history source. His faith in prophecy impolitically cedes too much control to external forces of fate and Fortune. The disturbing unreliability of prophetic knowledge is apparent upon its

fulfillment: it comes true in an unexpected way that disappoints the king and thwarts the end-of-life redemption he had hoped for in his old age. Instead of redeeming himself by atoning for Richard's downfall, the king finds out how little control he has over his old age and the end of his life.

Allowing external forces to shape one's future is unacceptable to the next generation, and Hal is decidedly more assured of his ability to control public opinion, to write his own history in advance, and to plan his own redemption, something his father never manages. Hal's strategy for his eventual political success does not leave anything to fate. Instead, it requires him to possess an innate understanding of how the seeds of his own behaviour will influence the political impression he makes on his subjects. The prince plans to spend his youth amongst disreputable companions occupied in "loose behavior" (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.186) in the anticipation of creating an even greater political impact when he eventually reforms:

By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
 And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
 I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
 Redeeming time when men think least I will. (1.2.189–95)

Warwick refines Hal's stratagem in part two when he assures Henry IV that

The Prince will in the perfectness of time
 Cast off his followers, and their memory

Shall as a pattern or a measure live
 By which his grace must mete the lives of other,
 Turning past evils to advantages. (4.3.74–78)

Warwick's endorsement shows that Hal's plan to rewrite his own wild past, even while he is still living it, is a canny political strategy that is recognized as such by the more subtle counsellors in Henry IV's court. To be this kind of statesman requires a remarkable amount of foresight: it demands the ability to anticipate the public's reaction to one's calculated shifts in behaviour. Hal and Warwick understand how the memory of Hal's reputation can be instrumentalized in their own favour, and spun in support of the future king's administrative abilities. They are both believers in the power of the individual to shape his or her future. In this way, they resemble Falstaff and his approach to aging, to which I will now turn.

5.6 Falstaff and Anomalous Aging

Shakespeare portrays both political change and aging as motivated by the self-interested actions of the individual. The ability of the individual to direct both historical events and aging is set in opposition to the notion that history and aging are phenomena directed by fate or Fortune. The acquisition of power is demystified in *Henry IV* as the product of self-interested actions rather than divine appointment. Similarly, the most subversive ager in the plays, Falstaff, performs his own aging as a process controlled by the individual for his own benefit, rather than externally determined by his place in a fixed macrocosmic order. If the most salient feature of Parr's aging process is his body's dogged resilience against weakness, the most prominent feature of Falstaff's aging is how

non-linear and performative it is. As Maurice Charney puts it, “Falstaff is a consummate actor, and . . . he is brilliant in the role of the young old man” (90). Deploying different readings of his own age in order to win arguments with his critics, he creates a pastiche of the tropes of early modern aging, adopting them in a strategic fashion to suit his own rhetorical needs.

Rather than aging chronologically, Falstaff ages strategically, adopting the persona and tropes of old age when challenged by authority or as an opportunity to display wit. When the Lord Chief Justice demands that Falstaff confirm his age, the knight responds by invoking second childhood: “My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon with a white head, and something a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with hallowing and singing of anthems. To approve my youth further, I will not. The truth is, I am only old in judgement and understanding” (2 *Henry IV*, 1.2.170–74). Falstaff’s use of the second childhood trope differs from Goneril’s demeaning insult to Lear or Jaques’s use of second childishness to nihilistically satirize old age in his rewriting of the Ages of Man. Here, Falstaff appropriates second childhood and, by preemptively turning it against himself, uses it to challenge his opponent. During this exchange with the Lord Chief Justice he adopts the language of intergenerational conflict: “You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young. You do measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls. And we that are in the vanguard of our youth, I must confess, are wags too” (1.2.159–62). Falstaff also identifies as young during the Gadshill robbery in part one, crying “They hate us youth. Down with them, fleece them!” (2.2.78–79).

When necessary, Falstaff will also perform old age, initially attempting to avoid the Lord Chief Justice by instructing his page to “tell him I am deaf” (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.58). Falstaff challenges the expectation that older men exhibit grave behavior: when the Justice chastises him that “There is not a white hair in your face but should have his effect of gravity” (1.2.147–48), Falstaff replaces gravity with something that much more aptly expresses his appetitive character: “His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy” (1.2.149). Later in the same play, Falstaff occupies the role of *senex amans* with Doll Tearsheet, claiming, “I am old, I am old,” to which she replies that she prefers him to “a scurvy young boy” (2 *Henry IV* 2.4.243, 244–45). Hal and Poins, who watch these events from a hiding place, mock the age gap between Falstaff and Doll. Their mockery is consistent with the general opprobrium cast on relationships between, in Hal’s words, the “conjunction” of “Saturn and Venus” (2.4.237, 236). Aware of the effect he has on others, Falstaff draws the attention of other characters and the audience to his aging body and the cultural stereotypes that attend it. By doing so, he not only exercises his wit at the expense of others, he also causes others to become wittier. Falstaff links the critical generativity that he inspires with the medical gaze of a doctor analyzing his urine:

FALSTAFF Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?

PAGE He said, sir, the water itself was a good healthy water, but, for the party that owed it, he might have more diseases than he knew for.

FALSTAFF Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men. (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.1–9)

His body may be the object upon which the physician exercises both his wit and his medical expertise, but Falstaff insists on the reciprocity of that relationship and on his role as collaborator in directing his audience's gaze at him. If others become witty in his presence it is only because Falstaff's superior wit acts as a catalyst.

Falstaff also subverts the idealized notion that the old are meant to act as guides or mentors to the younger generation. He adopts the appropriate age range of the wise counsellor figure when he claims to be between the ages of fifty and sixty during the tavern scene in act two, scene five of *1 Henry IV*, describing himself as "A goodly, portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r Lady, inclining to threescore" (2.5.384–87). Nina Taunton argues that the plays pervert parenting models from the advice literature tradition. Both plays contain

the presence of not one elderly father figure but two, neither of whom lives up to the demands of parenting, yet each of whom needs to exert his influence upon the young prince as a means of safeguarding his own future. In these two plays neither the real father nor the proxy have done the prince any 'good turnes and seruices', nor do they measure up to treatise standards of aged wisdom and spirituality. ("Planning Ahead" 130)

Indeed, Falstaff both enacts and undermines the role of aged advisor, serving instead, in the words of the Lord Chief Justice, as the prince's "ill angel" (*2 Henry IV* 1.2.151).¹²²

¹²² Douglas J. Stewart suggests the relationship between Falstaff and Hal ought to be read against "the heroes of Greek myth, whose adolescence was almost never spent in their fathers' homes, but under the tutelage of Chiron in the centaur's cave" (5), with the centaur as placeholder for the absent father figure (7).

At times Falstaff explicitly rejects the ideal of the wise old man: “I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. An old lord of the Council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too” (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.72–77). Hal replies, “Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it” (1.2.78–79). And yet Falstaff claims that aspect of idealized old age for himself when defending himself against the Lord Chief Justice: “I am only old in judgment and understanding” (*2 Henry IV* 1.2.174).

It is precisely Falstaff’s foregrounding of age as a performance that opens him to criticism. As Herbert Donow writes, Falstaff’s “refusal to bend his ways to his time of life opens him to the censure of others in the play” (737), censure that is especially evident in the Lord Chief Justice’s attempt to fix his age:

Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity? And will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

(1.2.163–69)

Ernest Cox writes that these “characters of age” invoke the literary tradition of representing the elderly; they are “the body of descriptive details, largely physical, which

The mythical father replacement is “notable for extreme wildness and extreme self-indulgence, by definition a counter-force to civilization. Yet they often have near-divine powers, and are frequently repositories of ‘wisdom’” (7).

have become negotiable in both dramatic and non-dramatic literature” and that operate as a shorthand for communicating old age (46). The Lord Chief Justice’s mock encomium, which describes Falstaff as both moist and dry, draws on the humoral model of the attributes of aging that is surveyed in the introduction. His commentary on Falstaff’s broken voice and decreasing leg is reminiscent of Jaques’s description of the pantaloon, whose “youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide / For his shrunk shank, and his big, manly voice, / Turning again toward childish treble, pipes / And whistles in his sound” (2.7.159–62).¹²³ Charney notes that the victory in their argument depends upon who will successfully construct the other as the elder (88). To do so, each character uses a different metric of measuring age; whereas the Justice provides a physical description that depends upon physiological markers of old age, Falstaff counters with a psychological model, claiming that he experiences himself as young and that he has lost his voice only through youthful behaviour, the “hallowing and singing of anthems” (2 *Henry IV* 1.2.172–73).

Falstaff’s old age appears transgressive and appealing because he eschews the moral codes traditionally associated with the role of older people. He disconnects old age from the moral and temporal frameworks inherited from the medieval period, in which one secures a positive experience of old age by practising upright behavior during the earlier stages of one’s life. Upon his first appearance in *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff asks Hal, “what time of day is it, lad” (1.2.1). Hal responds by locating Falstaff outside of conventional time, suggesting that for Falstaff time is more likely to be marked by the

¹²³ Charney writes that “This catalogue of the physical infirmities of old age is more appropriate to Jaques’s ‘Seven Ages of Man’ speech in *As You Like It* . . . than to the Falstaff we see on the stage” (89).

features of his hedonistic lifestyle: “Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day” (1.2.6–10). Instead, Falstaff freely wastes time with no concern to how it may impact his moral standing or its impact on his aging.

Though Hal initially suggests that this hedonism amounts to a waste of time, the prince later reveals in his soliloquy at the end of 1.2 that this same hedonism is an essential component in his own long-term political strategy. However, his plan to “so offend to make offence a skill, / Redeeming time when men think least I will” (1.2.194–95) contradicts the maxims of prescriptive aging, which exhort, over and over again, that one cannot really redeem time in this way, and that one’s behaviour in youth directly correlates with one’s behaviour in old age. J. A. Burrow notes that in the treatise *Les Quatres Ages de l’Homme*, Philippe de Navarre (c. thirteenth century) “remarks on the need for men to remember God when they are young Virtue cultivated in youth, Philippe says, becomes ‘seconde nature’ and lasts into later life” (“Young Saint” 386–87). Alice Tobriner concludes from her examination of early modern broadside ballads that “if the debility was to be avoided, an upright life beforehand became mandatory” (154). Thane quotes a medieval English proverb to the same effect: “He that in youth no virtue uses, in age all honour he refuses. / What youth does, age shows” (44). And, as shown in the introduction, Cicero makes this point as well.

Hal aims to break this association of sober behavior in youth with wisdom in old age. In the world of *Henry IV*’s cynical politics, the model of aging in which wisdom in

old age is secured through temperate living as a youth is irrelevant. Instead, Hal perceives that the performance of age-related behaviour can be instrumentalized and turned to his own strategic advantage. In general, *1* and *2 Henry IV* show how royal power legitimates itself, an attitude reflected in the period's political theory. James Knowles describes how *1 Henry IV* "was written at a point when early modern political thought and historiography had started to articulate a shrewd and skeptical political analysis rooted in Machiavelli and Tacitus" (415). The characters are likewise shrewdly self-interested and mercenary. Falstaff expresses his mercenary creativity throughout 1.2 of *2 Henry IV*. After associating youth with the pox and old age with gout, and after claiming both the positive and negative stereotypes of old age, wisdom and greed, along with the high spirits associated with youth, he ends by showing he will make a commodity of all:

A pox of this gout!—or a gout of this pox!—for the one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe. 'Tis no matter if I do halt; I have the wars for my colour, and my pension shall seem the more reasonable. A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity. (1.2.224–28)

Like Hal, Falstaff understands that he lives in a pragmatic, mercenary world in which he can even commodify disease.

Some critics celebrate Falstaff's approach to aging as liberating, imagining Falstaff as his own type of prescriptive text that offers a less conventional vision of the aging process:

Falstaff is not an old man in any proper sense. . . . When for instance he plaintively tells Doll Tearsheet, "I am old, I am old," we know better. Like Cleopatra, age cannot wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety. Or, let us

say, however the years may for a moment lie heavy on him, the next he throws them off like Faust in the Hexenküche. If one is allowed to grow old on those terms then indeed the best is yet to be. (Miles 291)

Brian Gibbons attributes Falstaff's popularity with audiences to their "sympathetically identifying with Falstaff's role, which enacts in such verbal fantasies a triumph over restricting rules of every kind" ("Representation of Ageing" 47). I argue that the perceived liberation in Falstaff's method of aging is due to its self-directed nature. He appears, like Tamburlaine, in *Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1* by Marlowe, to "hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains, / And with [his] hand turn Fortune's wheel about" (1.2.174–75), despite the condemnation this behavior draws from his onlookers. Falstaff makes this claim to being Fortune's administrator or servant when he hears of Henry IV's death and, filled with excitement, is immediately convinced he has acquired vast new political powers:

Master Shallow—my Lord Shallow—be what thou wilt, I am fortune's steward—
get on thy boots; we'll ride all night.—O sweet Pistol!—Away, Bardolph! [*Exit*
BARDOLPH] Come, Pistol, utter more to me, and withal devise something to do
thyself good. Boot, boot, Master Shallow! I know the young King is sick for me.
Let us take any man's horses—the laws of England are at my commandment.
Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice. (2
Henry IV 5.3.120–27)

Falstaff's overall goal has been to secure a place for himself at Hal's court once Henry IV dies. His battle with the Lord Chief Justice over who is properly performing their age is part of a larger war over whether Falstaff will obtain the court influence that he desires.

Ultimately, Falstaff loses because he is outmatched by the self-interested behaviour that he has modelled for Hal. Falstaff's gamble to serve as Fortune's steward, or, rather, Henry V's advisor, ultimately fails.

The banishment of Falstaff also cleanses the Crown's recent political history. When Hal publicly rejects and banishes Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*, he begins by firmly identifying Falstaff as old:

I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
 How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!
 I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
 So surfeit-swelled, so old, and so profane;
 But being awake, I do despise my dream. (5.5.45–49)

Hal, now Henry V, chastises Falstaff for transgressing age-related behavioural norms. The king's criticism reminds his public that Falstaff's anomalous aging is profane and impious. By exhorting the knight to pray, the newly crowned king performs the moral superiority that he promised to display at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*. The effect of Falstaff's rejection goes beyond the banishment of Falstaff's subversive performance of old age. The rejection also serves to symbolically cleanse politically incongruous narratives from Henry V's official political history. Alison Thorne argues that the rejection of Falstaff reinscribes history within the control of the king, and shows how that play sets "official" history against potentially subversive counter-narratives:

Apart from allowing Hal to stage his own 'reformation' by displacing responsibility for his former rebelliousness on to the renegade knight, his repudiation of Falstaff (whose lawless behavior has conveniently tainted popular

traditions by association) provides the ideal platform from which to publicise his resolve to reassert centralized State control over his subjects' illicit memories and the multiplying histories they have spawned. (62)

History-telling can either legitimize the crown or undermine it by offering counter-narratives. Thorne argues that

Hal's 'reformation' of self and commonwealth presents striking parallels with the so-called English historiographical 'revolution' that was gathering pace at the turn of the sixteenth century. . . . More rigorous standards of historical scholarship also militated against the use of informal types of historical narrative. . . .

Consequently, the popular legends, tales and traditions that survived in the collective memory came more and more to be regarded by the elite as trivial, vulgar and erroneous fabrications of no historical interest other than as objects of curiosity. (62)

By connecting Hal's reformation with a methodological shift in history-writing, Thorne draws attention to how political history-writing comes to eschew that which is deemed superstitious.

The ability of older people to witness and report the progress of English history demonstrates one of the types of authority early modern aging was perceived to possess. This ability to act as a chronicle could be seen as politically stabilizing or as politically subversive. John Taylor uses Thomas Parr to provide a teleological reading of English history that celebrates the rule of Charles I. However, in the case of *1* and *2 Henry IV*, the historical knowledge of older people is associated with overly credulous reliance on prophetic interpretations of history that threaten the political stability of the Lancastrian

kings. These texts also engage with the increasing sense that individuals can influence the course of their own aging. Though the causes of superlongevity were not fully understood, and though the phenomenon was certainly perceived as a manifestation of the spectacular and the miraculous, extreme longevity did appear to early modern people to have environmental causes. The possibility therefore existed for anyone to achieve this type of longevity, as long as they avoided the unhealthy city and its decadent diet and lifestyle in favour of an idealized rural existence. In *1* and *2 Henry IV*, the individual's power to direct one's own aging is taken to extremes by Falstaff. Falstaff's relationship to aging shows, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, that old age is not a private operation that occurs on or within the individual body, but is a slippery social performance witnessed and policed by others. Falstaff reveals how aging becomes political, exposes prejudices of others, and shows how old age is contested and constructed.

6 Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that old age in the early modern period exceeds chronological and numerical definitions and is instead a contested social construction. By historicizing the representation of early modern old age and also by tracking its changing representation throughout a play's reception history, this dissertation has shown how depictions of older people are contingent on a period's cultural and political environment.

In early modern drama, old age is forged within relationships: relationships between older people and their family, community, and country. I have shown how caregiving within these relationships is a central concern. Chapter two, on *King Lear*, focuses on the presence or absence of empathetic caregiving and shows how a medical/clinical stewardship over Lear's old age has emerged not only in the interdisciplinary adoption of *Lear*, but also in performance and in literary criticism. The gerontological interpretation of *Lear* builds on a trend in the play's reception history that focuses on the condition or quality of Lear's old age, as audiences and critics perceive in *Lear* the plight of the aged poor in the nineteenth century, or refuse to accept the tragic end to Lear's old age by preferring Nahum Tate's version over Shakespeare's.

One solution for the "problem" of Lear's old age has been found in the fantasy of female filial devotion. A. C. Bradley expresses this wish when he imagines Lear retiring to Cordelia's fireside, though he simultaneously recognizes that Shakespeare does not provide an ending that supports the vision of old age as presided over by a dutiful daughter in the private household. In chapter three, I have shown how the rewriting of Shakespearean old age as a problem to be solved by female filial piety is replicated in the visual interpretations of Jaques's seventh stage of the *Ages of Man* that were produced in

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By inserting the dutiful and loving care of the idealized daughter into Jaques's stage of second childishness, the visual artists revise his nihilistic and cynical final stage in a Tate-like rewriting of Shakespeare's *Ages of Man*. I have argued that the reception histories of both *King Lear* and *As You Like It* obscure the male figures of intergenerational care (found beyond the boundaries of immediate familial kin) in favour of the image of the caring daughter. Attention to this shift shows how the assumption that women are naturally more suited to the caregiving role, a conviction held by the nineteenth-century commentators on this scene, became entrenched. This attitude persists: in Canada, the majority of caregivers for people with dementia are women (Yang n.p.).

These chapters show how the negotiation over where to locate care for older people—whether within the family or the in the broader early modern network of affective relationships—unfolds in the plays' reception histories. Chapter four, on *The Old Law*, shows how early modern drama also offers a third option. Though this play initially appears to promote filial piety as the solution to intergenerational conflict, the play ends up making a more subtle argument in favour of community and state responsibility to its aging citizens. The older characters forcefully articulate the state's ethical responsibility toward its citizens. The notion of the entitlement to community support is figured first in the argument that one's country is like one's mother who has the responsibility to care for her children, and second in the conclusion's brief evocation of something that resembles an idealized retirement community. However, this articulation of rights comes at an expense of a compulsory ablebodiedness for Empire's

citizenry, making the demand for care when one becomes dependent inherently paradoxical.

Compulsory ablebodiedness in old age barely conceals the widespread anxiety over the notion of dependency in old age, which often takes metaphoric form as a “second childhood.” Second childhood is a complex metaphor that, in its most pejorative sense, proposes that old age is a degraded reiteration of childhood dependency. Second childhood implies an evacuation of selfhood, and, as Amelia DeFalco has argued, removes the older person from conventional narrative participation, as older people are portrayed as emptied of psychological heft. If “first childhood” is looked on with eager anticipation for an infant’s unwritten future, second childhood in old age implies the loss, or draining away, of the experience that filled a person with a life’s story. Jaques’s use of the second childhood trope draws on the pejorative understanding of second childhood, and I have argued that the visual depictions of the Ages of Man speech tend to share with Jaques the objectification of second childishness that he insists constitutes the “mere oblivion” of the end of life. Despite their attempt to recuperate the final stage by adding a female caregiver to the scene, the visual artists end up reproducing Jaques’s assumption that extreme old age is voiceless and therefore alienated from narrative empathy. The final period of life becomes a state of second childishness that the observer dreads and from which she or he feels fundamentally alienated. However, as argued above, the second childhood trope is not exclusively used this way in early modern drama; it was also used to articulate a set of rights and a relationship to one’s nation or state, as Leonides and Creon do in *The Old Law* by figuring their country as a motherland that has a duty to care for older people.

The portrayal of old age as a burden on families and countries is endemic and is one effect of portraying old age exclusively as a period of dependency. Yet the notion of dependency in old age should not be simply thrown aside as ageist. To be dependent is, as many have argued, a condition that one experiences throughout one's life. As Lynne Segal writes,

A critical plank of age studies needs to be the recognition that "dependency" is part of the human condition, whatever our age. We only gain any sense of ourselves through our ties to others; yet, it is just those ties of dependence that we tend to repudiate upon entering adulthood. The idea that "dependence" may be a collaborative process is rarely addressed. Least acknowledged is that old people in need of care, much like young dependent people, might give back as much as they receive: a situation best captured through notions of interdependency. (Para. 4)

Despite the generic function of intergenerational conflict in much early modern comedy, early modern theatre also provides many examples of this intergenerational interdependency, notably in the relationship of interdependence shared by Orlando and Adam.

If much of the preceding discussion has shown that older people are figured in terms of their demographic burden on the nation, this dissertation also reveals that the relationship between the figure of the older person, his or her voice, and the state, is far more complex. I have shown how early modern superlongevity attributes to older people the ability to bind together the country and to chronicle a nation's history. Chapter five shows how this agency was attributed to Thomas Parr, who is displayed both as a rare example of superlongevity and also as an example of the potential of every human body.

While *2 Henry IV* associates the chronicle knowledge of the old with unreliable prophecy, the portrayal of Thomas Parr as having unique access to English history draws on the longstanding notion of older people as oral historians, and also shows how older people were used to imagine new possibilities for a country's future. John Taylor uses Parr to imagine the possibility of a class-crossing historian, perhaps imagining him as a potential epic poet who can speak the history of a country. The ending of *The Old Law* also uses its older citizens to imagine potential alternatives to the present conditions, as the older characters describe their offstage period of retirement in a way that seems to presage later arguments that would emerge in favour of a formalized period of retirement and pensions. These works show how the symbolic role of older people is not solely to represent the past. Instead, the older person is deeply implicated in the imagining of futurity, an idea summarized best by Edmund Waller's image of the older speakers, poised on the threshold between mortal and immortal worlds, looking backwards and forwards at same time.

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