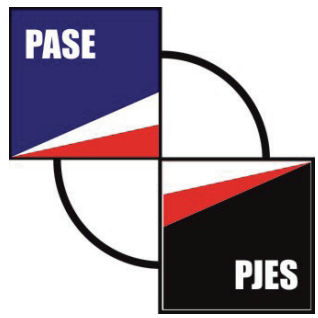

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From the editor

Ageing into Old Age: Literary Conclusions and New Beginnings

Katarzyna Bronk-Bacon, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

In his 1775 letter to William Mason the almost sixty-year-old Horace Walpole writes: "I seem to myself a Stralbrug, who have lived past my time, and see almost my own life written before my face while I am yet upon earth" (Walpole 1955, 186).[1] Little did he know that he would continue writing about his experience of ageing for over twenty more years. Walpole, like his epistolary contemporaries, reported on what it meant to age into middle age, and then senescence, and investigated the accuracy and validity of eighteenth-century precepts and promises concerning late life.[2] Walpole, Mary Berry, Lord Chesterfield or Mary Wortley Montagu – to point out just a few of the more recognized letter-writers – confronted the inculcated ideology of successful ageing with their lived experience of suffering and deteriorating bodies, and pondered upon the meaning of life which seemed both too short and not long enough, an assessment depending on their somatic and mental well-being on a given day. Their epistolary and diaristic conclusions on ageing seem both period specific (especially in terms of life expectancy and medical treatments in the eighteenth century) as well as universal and ahistorical, proving that there is an almost timeless and shared vocabulary of ageing as well as a cultural imagery that is generationally reiterated despite medical and sociological progress. Age studies, with their various subdisciplines, came into being to help pinpoint and analyse why such an alignment between the 'past*ness*' of ageing and its modern experience is actually possible. And why it is inevitable that

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1 Though misspelling, Walpole refers to Swift's race of Immortals whom Gulliver meets during his voyages. Instead of being celebrated as long-livers, they are despised even by their own families. Swift's novel opens an interesting dialogue with Julia Velten's paper in this volume.

2 For more on Walpole's experience of ageing into old age see Bronk-Bacon, Katarzyna. 2022. "'It Is Scandalous at My Age': Horace Walpole's Epistolary Aging." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 55, no 4: 497-516. 10.1353/ecs.2022.0051. I am currently working on Lord Chesterfield's correspondence and his geragogic lessons on old age. This is an extension of my existing research on old age in British culture, published among others, in 2019 *'And Yet I remember': Ageing and Old(er) Age in English Drama between 1660 and the 1750s*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

people like the eighteenth-century crème de la crème both detested and were grateful for their experience of ageing.

Age studies point to all life stages as culturally and historically idiosyncratic, and further complicated by various and often changing intersectional perspectives. Within this age(s)-focused field of analysis, humanistic and critical gerontologists as well as historians of old age issued an ardent call to redefine old age as equally ephemeral and multi-layered as any other life stage. Addressing the existing studies of the formative and foundational quality of youth and adulthood, humanistic gerontologists[3] of various subdisciplines objected to seeing old age as simply the end of life, and to even defining it as a precise point in time rather than a period with no exact temporal opening bracket. Thane (2000) in particular stresses the difficulty in defining old age in terms of chronology only, proposing to view it as a functional and cultural category as well. Scholars such as Margaret Morganroth Gullette (2004) and Michael Mangan (2013) note that one is sooner *made* (*to feel*) old by their own culture and society than one perceives oneself as such. Consequently, scholars have shown that old age must be seen as an essentially intimate and embodied lived experience, as well as a phenomenon with a set of socio-cultural prescriptive and proscriptive rules of conduct and decorum as well as sanctions and rewards pertaining to the failure or success of compliance. Old age can then be seen as simultaneously "the culmination or the dreary denouement of life's drama" (Cole 2006, xx), written as somatic and mental narratives of decline (Gullette 1997) as well as the most meaningful moment of human existence, "a time for recapitulating, connecting part to part, re-membering" (Carson 1987, xii), leading to wisdom only allowed to the members of this in-group.

Addressing all of the emerging conceptual recalibrations, Gullette claimed that indeed age "could be the next analytic and hermeneutic concept to make cutting-edge a difference" (Gullette 2004, 106) in humanist research. Having specifically worked on middle and old age in her research, she further notes that, just like with other necessary intersectionalities, to talk about ageing is to keep unravelling and disentangling "the din of representations, unseen internalizations, [and] unthinking practices" (Gullette 2004, 27). Humanistic gerontology then asks questions such as: Do we with age become the embodied repositories

3 Scholars use both "humanistic" and "humanist" with gerontology. I follow W. Andrew Achenbaum in his choice of the nomenclature.

of knowledge and guardians of traditions? Do we need to properly perform old age as the various "gerontideologies" socialize us to do (Mangan 2013, 3-5)? Are we our ageing bodies? How do our auto/self-narratives change with age? Can we "read the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning" (Baars 2016, 82)? This themed volume aims to critically address and further explore the meaning(s) behind and potentialities of old age and ageing, and turns to literature to propose avenues for further discussions on the aforementioned questions.

Sarah Falcus stresses that "telling and reading stories of age does open up a debate and embrace complexity, and may challenge our ways of thinking" (Falcus 2015, 53). Indeed it is humanities, and literature more specifically, that help to find examples for Stephen Katz's interdisciplinary definitions of ageing. In the first volume of his now seminal journal, he states:

> In the *Encyclopedia of Aging* I defined 'aging' as, on the one hand, 'the elegant and continuous means by which the forces of nature, from the microscopic to the universal, create the conditions for regeneration' (45) and, on the other hand, as having 'inspired the human artistic and cultural imagination for millennia' because it makes us confront 'the paradoxes of living and dying in time' (48). (Katz 2014, 22)

Katz's research in general allows to point out three fundamentals in ageing research that form intertwining trajectories within this special volume: 1) old age as a phenomenon, 2) the (ageing/deteriorating) body and lived experience, and 3) memory, the latter understood not only as recollecting one's spatio-temporal past but, in particular, re-membering one's somatic "past-*ness*". Such intertwining of old age with memory inevitably invites studies of nostalgia, seen as both positive and negative approaches to and perceptions of one's embodied past. The academics who joined me in this volume's challenge to investigate late life as "a nebulous existence of unpredictable duration" (Achenbaum 1989, xix) have essentially proved that even within the aforementioned categories, the potential of old age (or ageing) as a research topic is tremendous.

The wealth of concepts, themes and motifs discussed in the papers demonstrates not only the multilayered and interdisciplinary nature of old age studies, but also the complexity of the phenomenon of ageing itself. In the present volume, based on, predominantly British and American literary examples, ageing

is both a literal somatic and mental process as well as a metaphor. It is a measured and medicalised experience as well as a set of ephemeral and enigmatic sensations. Ageing is embodied and externalised, projected onto landscapes and architectural designs. It is the time lost and the time gained, a moment of reaping and the trauma of loss. Ageing brings about existential ambiguity and offers integrative clarity through life reviews. Old age is shown as a blessing and a curse; an advantage over the younger generations and an obstacle to living in any kind of symbiosis with them. It offers poetic exuberance as well as narrative stagnation. The authors within this volume address these potentialities and avenues across various historical and literary periods, perhaps quite tellingly opening the discussion with an age reading of the eighteenth-century gothic novel. It is therefore no coincidence that the guest editor of the volume begins with Walpole's epistolary lessons on ageing. Who else should initiate the discussion on ageing than the historian and writer who was so in love with the past of the world and yet very anxious about seeing his own life unfolding.

I wish to thank the authors who joined me on this project. I am also very grateful to the reviewers who offered valuable advice on making this volume critically sound and academically valid. And, finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the General, Thematic and Managing Editors of PJES who saw the validity of continuing the research on ageing into old age. We have not exhausted the discussions on ageing or old age … and fortunately so.

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Ann Radcliffe's Ruminations on the Ageing Body in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)

Roslyn Joy Irving
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, University of Liverpool, and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Abstract. In the third volume of *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Ann Radcliffe introduces an ageing clergyman, Arnaud La Luc, who is the philosophical and spiritual foundation of his parish. La Luc's ill health concerns his parishioners, who convince him to undertake a journey to the south of France for recovery. This article engages with Radcliffe's reflections on ageing and the end of life through the Gothic. Writing in her twenties, Radcliffe imagines the physical and emotional strains that might "shatter[]" La Luc to "infirmity" as his body gives way to consumption and is further weakened by threats to his son's life (Radcliffe 2009, 348). Each new setting from the Maritime Alps to the French Coast fails to cure the consumption wrecking La Luc's body, and yet, in the novel's closing chapter, Radcliffe grants this ailing figure a miraculous recovery. This choice underscores the value of ageing figures, and the importance of intergenerational exchange. La Luc embodies tradition, experience, terrestrial limits and celestial expanses and symbolises the grace acquired in ageing (Dekker 2005, 108-11). His journey is paralleled with the movements of Adeline, a young heroine trying to escape despair. Through the presentations of the ageing clergyman and the teenage heroine, this article considers how mental strength is tempered by frailty in Radcliffe's Gothic novel.

Keywords: Ann Radcliffe, ageing, death, Female Gothic, eighteenth century, travel narratives

In their recent chapter "No Country for Old Women", Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik reflect on ageing in the Gothic. They suggest that the fate of older women in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* is troubling, as these figures are set in opposition to the vitality of her heroines. As they put it: "the figure of the older woman lurks in the background, in the shape of the mother who is frequently absent, dead or thought to be dead"

(Zlosnik and Horner 2016, 186). Such a reading demonstrates the multiplicity and gendered experience of growing old and points to the capacity of Radcliffe's work to be read as a study on ageing. Similarly, Angela Wright references the reaction of the hero, Vivaldi, in *The Italian* towards Signora Bianchi as an exemplar of Radcliffe's critical awareness of the ageing female in a patriarchal society.

> Radcliffe takes care, I think, to reveal slowly his flawed, biased approach to women; his tendency to deify the young and beautiful heroine, and to dismiss all other female characters within the novel as mere adjuncts to the young heroine. (Wright 2016, 22)

However, Radcliffe's third novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (*Romance*), is conspicuously absent from these analyses. In this novel, Radcliffe offers perhaps her most extensive reflections on ageing men and women through a diverse cast of figures at different life stages. I deliberately use the term 'stages' rather than 'ages' here, as Radcliffe does not always measure chronometric time (Baars 2016, 70). Her heroine, Adeline, is "about eighteen", and her villain, de Montalt, is "about forty". The term "about" speaks to the uncertainties of time, a reality we all live with, that is amplified in the Gothic (Miles 2020). The ages of many of the characters in Radcliffe's novel are left to the reader's conjecture.

The Romance of the Forest explores the senescence of the body and maturation of the mind. Life experience becomes a significant theme in the final volume as Radcliffe incorporates elements of Rousseauvian education into her narrative (Wright 2013, 98-9; Radcliffe 2009, 249). Unlike Zlosnik and Horner, who focus on female ageing, this paper considers the ailing figure of Arnaud La Luc, a clergyman introduced in the third volume of the novel. Suffering from consumption while trying to raise his daughters and act as a spiritual guide to his parishioners, La Luc undertakes a journey in pursuit of health from Savoy to the south of France. Travel for health became increasingly popular in the Romantic imagination from the late eighteenth century; different locales and methods of travel promised different cures (Chard 2014). Through La Luc's expedition in *Romance*, the reader is invited to reflect on recuperation, melancholy and tenacity and to consider ageing a mental and physical process (Radcliffe 2009, 278). His experience is paralleled with the teenage Adeline, in search of "calmness" and "resignation" after a series of escapes and separation from the hero, Theodore (Radcliffe 2009, 288).

Daniel Couégnas has made a strong case for the paraliterary characteristics of Radcliffe's writing as she incorporated or influenced other genres, including melodrama, sentimental novels, and the fantastic (Couégnas 2006, 322). The experimental third volume of *Romance* introduces elements of travel writing and resembles Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* (Chard 2009, 392; Dekker 2005, 112). Smollett published a series of letters in the mid-eighteenth century on touring southern Europe, where he "hoped the mildness of the climate would prove favourable to the weak state of […his] lungs" (Smollett 1778, 10). In Radcliffe's novel, La Luc travels to Nice for an almost identical purpose to benefit from the "soft and salubrious air" of the south (Radcliffe 2009, 280). However, La Luc asserts, before beginning his sojourn, "[l]et us trust in God, my friends; he has power to heal all disorders both of body and mind" (Radcliffe 2009, 278). For the clergyman, faith is the only cure-all. Arnaud La Luc's journey appears completely unnecessary to the wider plot. However, I hope to demonstrate that this section of the novel is a balancing act, which invites comparison between a young woman seeking the stability of self that comes with experience (Bronfen 2014, 164) and an ageing man attempting to cling to life despite his frail and failing body.

To better understand the complexity and presentations of age(ing) in *Romance*, I will begin by reflecting briefly on the plot and some of the core cast who do not feature in La Luc's journey from Savoy. The novel starts by following the escapes of Pierre de La Motte from the "persecutions of the law", and Adeline from a father she believes has betrayed her (Radcliffe 2009, 1-11). Over the first two volumes, Adeline lives with the La Motte household in the ruins of St Clair Abbey as their ward and then as a prisoner. At the abbey, she is vulnerable to the Marquis de Montalt, a nobleman who owns the forest and ruins that the household has made their home. When Adeline attempts to run from the Marquis, with the support of Captain Theodore Peyrou, she is captured and returned to La Motte's guardianship. Meanwhile, Theodore is court-martialled for resisting his Colonel's orders and desertion. After imprisoning Adeline, de Montalt realises that the heroine is not only resistant to his marriage plans but is also his niece with a rightful claim to his estate. Therefore, he shifts his scheme to murder (Radcliffe 2009, 226).

None of the figures introduced in the first two volumes of the novel could be described as elderly. Although Pierre and Madame La Motte have reached middle age, having raised their son, now an adult, they are both described as highly reactive and sensible figures, prone to dissipation. Pierre La Motte

"was a man, infirm in purpose and visionary in virtue: in a word, his conduct was suggested by feeling, rather than principle; and his virtue, such as it was, could not stand the pressure of occasion" (Radcliffe 2009, 2). Despite being a father figure in the novel, La Motte's "infirmity" and spontaneity of "feeling, rather than principle" speaks to immaturity. Hence, he sharply contrasts with figures such as the unbending, coercive Marquis and the principled clergyman. As I mentioned in the introduction, Philippe de Montalt is relatively ageless. "He appeared to be about forty, but, perhaps, the spirit and fire of his countenance made the impression of time upon his features less perceptible" (Radcliffe 2009, 87). Radcliffe suggests that he possesses an energy that subverts the aesthetic impacts of time. Resistance to temporality is a characteristic shared by malicious figures in the novel. The discrepancy between his age and appearance renders the villain unquantifiable before his nature and crimes have been revealed.

Diane Long Hoeveler explores the potentially subversive heroine figure in the Female Gothic tradition. She suggests that Radcliffe's heroines, from Julia (*A Sicilian Romance*) to Ellena (*The Italian*), are a progressively nuanced expression of the "personal and social anxieties" facing middle-class, late-eighteenth-century women (Hoeveler 1998, 55). One of the qualities of a Gothic heroine that Hoeveler repeatedly identifies is youthfulness:

> But that is the very meaning and substance of life for the female gothic heroine: she lives suspended in the realm of experience deferred, poised between childhood and adulthood, forever in the act of becoming someone. The goal for a heroine can only be to remain a young woman, free from the ravages of time and the decay of the body. (Hoeveler 1998, 84)

As readers, we will never see Adeline age. However, in *Romance*, Radcliffe offers poignant moments when youth and age intersect and overlap, and experience might be conferred from an older to a younger generation. This is best encapsulated in La Luc's journey to the south of France. The gendered dimension of these paralleled ageing journeys, while not the focus of this article, would bear further reflection in future research. It is not irrelevant that Adeline is a young woman. Her journey is one of emotional rather than academic or physical development as it plays into discourses around female education and sensibility.

As Alan Richardson notes, the concerns of educational and gothic literature overlap. In Radcliffe's third and fourth novels, both benign patriarchs and malign villains subscribe to Rousseauvian schemas, proving that

> the line between pedagogy and tyranny is an uncomfortably fine and unstable one, particularly given the agenda for perpetuating male domination built into most of the period's programs for female education. (Richardson 1994, 204)

Despite the frailty of his body, La Luc remains a patriarchal figure, empowered by educational authority.

In the novel's third volume, Adeline comes to the home of Arnaud La Luc, his daughter, Clara, and his sister, Madame La Luc. As a father figure to his family and the wider community, the clergyman is described in very different terms to his reactive counterparts, the La Mottes. La Luc lives "in tranquillity" in the Savoy Alps, managing his "tender melancholy" after the death of his wife over a decade earlier (Radcliffe 2009, 246-7). He is regarded as a "venerable" leader within his parish, Leloncourt (Radcliffe 2009, 258). Geoffrey Scarre suggests that 'venerability' "is a doubtfully desirable status in the human case considering that it is usually accorded only to persons who are feeble and ailing" (Scarre 2016, 96). Scarre's contention is around the use of 'venerable' to describe ageing people. Following his line of analysis, I would suggest that the respect afforded to La Luc gives the impression that he is much older than other characters in the novel, including would-be peers, the La Mottes. It also implies his frailty. The clergyman is a liminal figure existing on the boundary of life and death. Despite the implication throughout his journey to Nice and Languedoc that his consumption is terminal, he recovers in the final chapter in the climes of Montpellier before returning to Savoy. The novel closes with La Luc "sat among the elder peasants", shedding tears as he watches over a younger generation celebrating their reunion. Radcliffe suggests that senescence, while inevitable, is "idiosyncratic", an important contention highlighted by scholars in ageing studies (Scarre 2016, 94). To some extent, Arnaud La Luc's survival creates ambiguity around ageing and the trajectory from ill health to death.

La Luc's journey for health is set in opposition to Adeline's quest for mental, physical, and emotional equilibrium. Adeline first arrives at La Luc's chateau suffering from the effects of fleeing France and her worries over the welfare

of her imprisoned lover, Theodore. It is one of several bouts of illness which are physical manifestations of Adeline's anxieties (Bronfen 2014, 166). For example, in the very first chapter of the novel, the heroine becomes feverish and unresponsive after being rescued from criminals (Radcliffe 2009, 11). Likewise, she faints upon meeting de Montalt and collapses once again when he attempts to forcefully seduce her (Radcliffe 2009, 87 and 158). At the novel's end, Adeline finds the truths revealed at La Motte's trial difficult to face (Radcliffe 2009, 341). Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that this "gap in consciousness becomes a symptom even as it shields her from the lethal, archaic knowledge about to engulf her" (Bronfen 2014, 165). While a resident at La Luc's chateau, "Adeline, assisted by a fine constitution, and the kind attentions of her new friends, was in a little more than a week so much recovered as to leave her chamber" (Radcliffe 2009, 258). The heroine's ability to rapidly recover is a testament to her youth and concomitant "fine constitution". However, her new home, family and treatment, even the alpine terrain, do little to cure her "unceasing anxiety", which "corroded her heart, and embittered every moment of reflection" (Radcliffe 2009, 259). Adeline is increasingly discomposed: asleep, she cannot escape the "exaggerations of terror" for Theodore, and awake, "a dreadful despair would seize her [… and] threaten to bear down every barrier that fortitude and reason could oppose" (Radcliffe 2009, 260). Adeline's fear is a sickness so consuming that it may render her senseless or perhaps suicidal. "Fearing longer to trust her own thoughts, she would hurry home, and by a desperate effort would try to lose, in the conversation of La Luc, the remembrance of the past" (Radcliffe 2009, 260). While Adeline's body can heal, unlike La Luc's, her mind is rarely at ease, and she finds the elderly clergyman a tonic for her anxieties.

There is a comfort derived from La Luc's company, which comes from his sense of perspective. This might be what Scarre considers the ability of older people to look past the "trivial" as they age (Scarre 2016, 96). The experience of becoming a widower and of tempering his grief affords La Luc an ability to escape "temporary disappointment" through a "romantic sadness", "which elevated his mind above this world, and opened to his view the sublimity of another" (Radcliffe 2009, 247). His conversation is a "refuge from misery" (Radcliffe 2009, 260) for Adeline because it speaks to limitlessness. The clergyman has accepted mortality while finding joy in his polymathic appreciation for art, music, literature, languages, and science (Astronomy) (Dekker 2005, 108). There is a mythic quality to La Luc's knowledge, and it seems particularly interesting that the clergyman

can cushion painful (sur)realities. "Calamity taught him to feel with peculiar sympathy the distresses of others" (Radcliffe 2009, 245). Although he has experienced a loss like the one Adeline imagines, he is no longer driven to the same kind of "dreadful despair" at the thoughts of his late wife that the heroine faces when she meditates on Theodore's position. Life experience and acquaintance with "the frailties of mortality" (Radcliffe 2009, 274) is both a character trait and a service. Radcliffe implies an inherent value in ageing, as "calamities" produce empathy, stability and comfort in one's own company. La Luc does not resolve Adeline's fears, but his presence and conversation absorb her nervous energy. Hence rather than presenting La Luc as someone always in need of support, Radcliffe shapes intergenerational relationships as an exchange.

George Dekker suggests that La Luc embodies "a larger and less selfish understanding of patriarchal obligation" (Dekker 2005, 108). I believe La Luc's age is a critical component of this identity. While Dekker uses "larger" in the spatial and familial sense, in other words, an obligation to his parishioners outside the walls of his family home, the largeness of La Luc's obligations can be read as temporal. Although other figures in the novel, including the hero Theodore, represent a "benevolent patriarchy" (Dekker 2005, 110), La Luc demonstrates this as a tradition transferred between generations. This resonates with Scarre's comments on ageing, as he suggests that "the old form a bridge between the young and those who have gone before" (Scarre 2016, 96). Dekker terms La Luc an "interstellar tourist", as

> his study of astronomy permits him, without stirring from his hall, to 'launch' beyond the normal limitations of the human sphere into regions whose multiplicity, immense distances, and sublimity far exceed those even of the Alps or the ocean. (Dekker 2005, 108)

The "limitations of the human sphere" are not only reimagined by La Luc but tested by his survival. While Dekker reads the clergyman's recovery from consumption as "wish-fulfilment" on Radcliffe's part (Dekker 2005, 112), I think it can be taken as a statement on tradition, as La Luc embodies and models stability and grace for a new generation. His survival is, therefore, necessary.

Having explored the teenage heroine's despair before joining La Luc on his journey to the south of France, I will now turn to the clergyman's "declining health" and "languid countenance" (Radcliffe 2009, 277). The

clergyman gladly offers time, energy and, where possible, fiscal support to his parishioners in Leloncourt. His journey to the south of France becomes a promise of survival to them:

> His parishioners felt the life of their pastor to be of the utmost consequence to them. It was a general cause, and they testified at once his worth, and their sense of it, by going in a body to solicit him to leave them. He was much affected by this instance of their attachment. Such a proof of regard, joined with the entreaties of his own family, and a consideration that for their sakes it was a duty to endeavour to prolong his life, was too powerful to be withstood, and be determined to set out for Italy. (Radcliffe 2009, 278)

This scene demonstrates not only La Luc's integral role within his community but also the republican character of the village. Here the residents are at liberty to go "in a body" to petition the local landowner, La Luc (Dekker 2005, 110). More importantly, the views of the collective are "too powerful to be withstood". The "flourishing, healthy, and happy" (Radcliffe 2009, 240) community maintained by the curate is likewise invested in his individual corporeal experience. He is duty-bound to attempt a difficult recovery far from home, despite his faith that in death, the righteous "shall meet in a state where sorrow never comes" (Radcliffe 2009, 327).

So, La Luc departs Leloncourt with Clara, Adeline, and Peter (a servant) in a melancholy procession which evokes a funeral. It is a sequence Radcliffe would reuse in her fourth novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Dekker 2005, 112-3).

> As he moved slowly on he cast a lingering look at his little home, where he had spent so many peaceful years, and which he now gazed on, perhaps for the last time; and tears rose in his eyes; but he checked them. (Radcliffe 2009, 279)

Radcliffe's sentence structure here is protracted, breaking the line in several places with commas and semi-colons. The reader is forced to give pause, to "linger" like the clergyman as he rides away from his parish. The party moves from Savoy through the Maritime Alps, awe-inspired by the "solitary grandeur" of scenes like "those produced by the lonely visions of the Poets" (Radcliffe

2009, 279-80). Radcliffe brings her reader closer to understanding "life to be very precarious" (Radcliffe 2009, 278) through the inherent transience of journeying and an acute awareness of the severity of La Luc's condition. She also emphasises "solitude", which speaks to a wider eighteenth-century concern with isolation (Goodson 2002). Contemporary works such as Johan Zimmerman's *Of Solitude* suggested that old age and youth are interestingly united in benefiting from "occasional retirement": "to congratulate ourselves upon the tempests we have survived" or "to obtain that train of thought which is to guide us through life" (Zimmerman 1797, 6). The journey in *Romance* offers periods of reflection critical to Adeline and La Luc's recovery and their stages in the ageing process. In the south of France, the heroine grapples with being directionless and unsure of her future while the clergyman faces the challenge of survival. In many ways, Radcliffe's writing entangles different perspectives and moments in the ageing process rather than implying a vast distance between age and youth.

La Luc's journey to the south of France is an "experiment" governed by the ebb and flow of his illness. After three weeks in Nice, his consumption worsens, and he is prescribed a "sea voyage", and if that too fails in improving his condition, "the air of Montpellier" (Radcliffe 2009, 291). La Luc's decline in the ancient town is a sharp contrast to the increasing independence and composure of the heroine, as "the variety and novelty of the surrounding scenes amused her mind" (Radcliffe 2009, 287). The passage of time is a recurring theme in the novel, regularly introduced by Adeline as she 'repeats', 'recites' or 'recalls' poetry, with seven different poems included in this journey alone. For example, "Sunrise: A Sonnet" closes with the lines: "So life's young hour to man enchanting smiles, / With sparkling health, and joy, and fancy's fairy wiles!" (Radcliffe 2009, 282). Youth is presented as a fanciful albeit temporary period of "sparkling health". The hope of sunrise is naturally dampened by the course of the day. The sense of solitude and deeply poetic appreciation for nature is an example of the sentimentalism that Radcliffe incorporated into her Gothic romances (Miles 1995, 123). The maturing heroine has been forced to abandon the joys and lightheartedness of her youth through the realities of being pursued by de Montalt and having lost Theodore. Daybreak on the clifftops of Nice offers her moments of sublimity and enchantment, which perhaps draw her back to the freedom and fancies associated with the young. Once she sets sail to a new province with La Luc, an awful sense of uncertainty once again consumes her thoughts: "my future view is like the waste of waters that surround me" (Radcliffe 2009, 292).

Just as Adeline is overwhelmed by the "waste of waters", the coast is intimately connected with the vacillations of La Luc's condition. While "his spirits revived" on the boat to Languedoc (Radcliffe 2009, 296), the clergyman faces a rapid decline shortly after docking when he learns that his son has been sentenced to death (Radcliffe 2009, 306). La Luc transforms from an ageing man recovering his vitality, as he animatedly discusses the activities of the coast, to one who is "feeble and overcome with grief" (Radcliffe 2009, 309). His children, Clara and Theodore, mark this decline. For example, Clara confides in Adeline: "I shall lose my dear father too […] I see it; I shall lose my father and my brother together" (Radcliffe 2009, 310). Similarly, Theodore is struck by the "ravages which illness and calamity had made on the features of his parent" before the clergyman collapses "shuddering, and complaining he was very cold" into a chair in Theodore's cell (Radcliffe 2009, 312). The imperilled position of his son drives La Luc to the precipice of death. E.J. Clery suggests that in Radcliffe's novels, "[t]he wrecks of castles and human bodies alike testify to their function as theatres of the passions" (Clery 2004, 60). La Luc's body becomes a theatre upon which our fears around frailty are performed and through which the value of older persons is embodied. Here Radcliffe demonstrates once again that life and lives are entangled; that the young and old are contingent.

La Luc is determined to use his remaining energy to protect his son and petitions the King in Paris, undertaking another risky and extensive journey across France:

> 'If I sacrifice the small remains of my life in the service of my child,' said he, 'I shall lose little: if I save him, I shall gain everything. There is no time to be lost — I will set off immediately.' (Radcliffe 2009, 314)

As La Luc's statement indicates, he believes little "remains" of his life, and all of it is worth risking for Theodore's cause. Much like Adeline's fainting spells, La Luc's despair on failing to secure a pardon, and fatigue at travelling between the Languedoc and the capital, physically manifest in his "shattered […] frame" (Radcliffe 2009, 325). Radcliffe reminds us that "grief might be fatal" (Radcliffe 2009, 325), and it seems that of the sicknesses facing La Luc's ageing body, it is the threatened loss of a child (his heir and legacy) that breaks his resiliency.

After promising the hero's death within hours, and his father shortly thereafter, Radcliffe provides a last-minute salvation: Adeline must stand witness at La Motte's trial in Paris, thereby revealing the machinations of de Montalt and absolving Theodore. While delaying and eventually preventing his son's execution, the trials are a period of purgatory for La Luc in the south of France, unable to travel to Montpellier to recover or to Paris to gain an audience with the King. During these legal proceedings, the "extreme weakness and lassitude to which […La Luc] was reduced made travelling [to the capital city] impracticable" (Radcliffe 2009, 336). La Luc appears close to death as his body has been pushed to its limit by consumption, stress, grief, and, ironically, extensive journeying. Even after his son is proven a victim of the Marquis' manipulation of the justice system, the clergyman's condition remains terminal: "the languid smile he assumed seemed to express that her solicitude was vain, and that he thought his health past recovery" (Radcliffe 2009, 337). In this scene, Arnaud La Luc embodies all the characteristics associated with ageing and death. Theodore asserts in what he thinks is his final hours that "[t]he sharpness of death consists in parting with those who are dear to us; when that is passed, death is disarmed" (Radcliffe 2009, 327). With his son's safety guaranteed by Adeline's intervention, it seems that for La Luc, "death is disarmed". Christopher Cowley reflects on the ways we might "come to terms with death" through "reconciliation", "life review", and an acceptance that life will come to an end, a tranquillity or *ataraxia* (Cowley 2016, 204). La Luc's languid smile speaks to such peacefulness, unlike the worries of Clara, Theodore, and Adeline.

As noted at the beginning of this article, Radcliffe's works have many paraliterary features, and the author became known for her arguably predictable resolutions (Miles 1995, 55). La Luc journeys on with Clara to Montpellier, where the "climate" finally seems to have the desired effect. So, Radcliffe concludes La Luc's journey in the company of his children, visiting first Adeline's estate (included in the extract below) and then his own parish.

> When La Luc, thus restored to those most dear to him, looked back on the miseries he had escaped, and forward to the blessings that awaited him, his heart dilated with emotions of exquisite joy and gratitude; and his venerable countenance, softened by an expression of complacent delight, exhibited a perfect picture of happy age. (Radcliffe 2009, 357)

Writing in her mid-twenties, Radcliffe imagines "happy age" as an essentially peaceful state of reflection and perhaps premonition, contingent on the happiness of those you hold dear. *Romance* does not make an emphatic statement on ageing. As Clery notes, it "is, among other things, a fascinating novel of ideas" (Clery 2004, 70). By entangling Adeline's emotional explorations with the health of La Luc, the novel encourages us to "read the beginning in the end and the end in the beginning" (Baars 2016, 82), to reflect on what ageing might look and feel like, both for those becoming adults and for older people considering their past and future. Radcliffe demonstrates, above all, an appreciation for the delicacy of life and the destabilising factors in survival.

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Conserving/Confronting the Past: The Roles of Letters and Ageing in Society in *The Touchstone* and *The Aspern Papers*

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Abstract: Letters in literature intimately convey information to both the characters and the reader; letters in literature also represent captured moments that the characters can revisit over and over again to relive memories of themselves and the letter's author from the vantage of temporal distance. When characters keep letters into their old age, the letter becomes a catalyst for reflection on who they have become in their society. In Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers*, the titular papers are in possession by a famous author's former lover, now an old woman, and a young man is trying to purchase them for their literary value. The old woman uses the letters as leverage to claim power for herself and her niece. Edith Wharton's novella *The Touchstone* similarly focuses on the letters of a famous dead author, but in this case, it is a man having to confront the passionate affair of his youth, when wanting to settle into the prescribed social views on marriage and career. Both of these works use the letter as a way to explore the tensions that come with having a record of cavalier youthful behaviors with the desire to maintain a position in society – the tension between dissention and conforming. These two novellas take two different positions on this tension with James favoring the former and Wharton the latter. Both illustrate the complicated cultural forces that shape perceptions of ageing.

Keywords: Letters, ageing, love, Edith Wharton, Henry James

Letters in literature intimately convey information about characters to the reader. The intimacy of letters stems from how letters can serve as a kind of tether to the particular moment which led to their composition. Letters can be seen as ordinary objects as well, from a time when correspondence by letter writing was just a part of day-to-day existence. The amalgamation of the mundane and the memorable can give letters their narrative power. As Margaret

Gullette writes in her work *Aged by Culture*: "Narratives may have most power over us when they are most invisible, that is, infinitely repeatable in ordinary life but unnoticed and unanalyzed" (Gullette 2004, 143). Gullette's observation about the relationship between narrativity and ordinariness can be particularly tied to letter writing, because the writing of letters is the personal implementation of that narrativity. As the letter's author ages, their relationship to the captivity of the narrative of the ordinary past becomes informed by their shifting relationship to these past events. While the contents of letters can range from the mundane to the passionate, from concise to verbose, the object of the letter itself holds a sense of significance due to its tangibility. Some scholars have also noticed an equivocation between the tangibility of the letter and the physical body of the author.

In her introduction to her case study of the role of correspondence in American Literature, Elizabeth Hewitt observes that this connection is what leads to the privileging of the letter as a form, writing "The epistolary form is often privileged, for example, because the frequent conceit of familiar letters is that there is no essential difference between the letter-writer's *body* and her *letter*" (Hewitt 2004, 1). Keeping on letters or seeking out letters at times could be read as individuals wanting to add a claim on the intimate parts of an individual. When letters appear in literature, they reveal aspects of the characters that were felt necessary to communicate about themselves and share with the recipient. As Hewitt continues, "…the letter lies *between* tongue and pen. Like conversation, letters express our true sentiments; and like print, letters are permanent and leave a 'lasting record'" (Hewitt 2004, 10). Letters in literature represent captured moments that the characters can revisit over and over again to relive memories of themselves and the letter's author from the vantage of temporal distance. When characters keep letters into their old age, the letter becomes a catalyst for reflection on who they have become in their society. One aspect of that reflection could be the character being sentimental over their personal growth; however, if the letters contain a record of social transgressions, the reflections prompted become complicated. The contents of such letters can possibly threaten a character's social position, because exposure of these letters can serve as evidence for social punishment. But, the impulse of characters to keep potentially incriminating evidence can be read as illustrative of a desire to tangibly remember these times of dalliance with social transgression, times of acting outside of social parameters, even with the risk of possible exposure.

As the events of these letters fall further and further behind, the author and even the recipient of the letter might disconnect themselves from the social consequences of their youth, considering their age as giving them exemption.

Love letters, particularly, often are kept for sentimental memory. The love letter as an object provides a most intimate portrayal of its sender; the letter's author is vulnerable, indulging in expressions of emotion that might not be permissible to openly display. As Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, "This figure refers to the special dialetic of the love letter, both blank (encoded) and expressive (charged with longing to signify desire)" (Barthes 1978, 157). Women, as portrayed in English and American literature of the late nineteenth century, could especially be victimized by social censure if knowledge of these recorded, passionate desires came to light. In the introduction to *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*, Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven write,

> Female letters traditionally focused on domestic life or on love; they spoke in the private voice appropriate to women whose roles were increasingly circumscribed within the constraints of bourgeois ideology. Of course, we know that women did engage in other modes of correspondence… (Gilroy and Verhoeven 2000, 2)

While in history women could engage in these other modes, authors, particularly those who wrote in the form of realism, would often fall back on that bourgeois ideology. For the female author, the love letter allowed space for exploration of feelings that societal pressures might be pushing her to suppress. This suppression can make the content of these letters acts of rebellion. As the authors and recipients of these letters age and look back on their preserved narrative chronicling, there seems to be two reactions: either hiding behind the social maturity that often comes with aging, or a full indulgence of these social transgressions.

Both of those reactions seem to be present in the case of the letters of novelist Margaret Aubyn, whose presence haunts Edith Wharton's novella *The Touchstone*. The plot of which focuses on the consequences of her former lover selling and exposing the letters she sent him in his attempts to mature out of his more cavalier youth and settle into the prescribed social views on marriage and career. In Wharton's novella, the love letters threaten the social capital and respectability of the protagonist, robbing him of power, giving it to the specter of his

past. This role of Aubyn's letters is in many ways the opposite of the papers of Jefferey Aspern in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, which shares similar plot points to *The Touchstone*. In James's novella, the titular papers are in possession of the famous author's former lover, now an old woman, and a fanatic fan of Aspern is trying to acquire them for their literary value. However, instead of socially pressured shame for what the papers might reveal about herself, the woman uses the papers as leverage to claim power for herself and her niece. Both of these works use the letter as a way to explore the tensions that come with having a record of cavalier youthful behaviors with the desire to maintain a position in society – the tension between dissention and conforming. These two novellas take two different positions on this tension with James favoring the former and Wharton the latter. Exploring both illustrates the complicated cultural forces that shape perceptions of ageing.

The Touchstone opens not with the narrative but instead with a fictional newspaper article. A professor in England, wanting to write a biography on Margaret Aubyn, is inquiring for letters from her. What this newspaper paragraph initially reveals to the reader is: firstly, that Aubyn is probably dead, since all the verbs are in the past tense; secondly, that she emigrated to England and became an individual who could garner academic interest; and thirdly, as well as most significantly, that she "had so few intimate friends, and consequently so few regular correspondents, that letters will be of special value" (Wharton 1991, 41). The reader is then introduced to Wharton's protagonist Stephen Glennard, reading the article. Wharton describes his reaction to the article saying: "He had read it for the first time with a scarcely perceptible quickening of attention: her name had so long been public property that his eye passed it unseeingly…" (Wharton 1991, 43). This portrayal of Glennard's reaction to the call for Aubyn's letters is illustrative of what will lead to the central tension of the novella: what will selling the letters mean to Glennard? This paragraph is a reintroduction to Aubyn's intimacy for Glennard; the quote gives the reader the impression that Aubyn's fame has allowed for him to create distance between himself and the relationship that they shared. But, he cannot completely divorce himself from what the two of them had. The "scarcely perceptible quickening of attention" indicates an inextricable tie between Glennard and Aubyn. The nature of this tie is unclear, though. It could be read as residual affection or as his excitement for the opportunity to financially gain from the previous connection. Glennard is in need of funds, because he wishes

to establish a household with the woman he currently loves, Alexa Trent, who, while coming from a good family, has nothing to contribute to their household income. Glennard cannot support them on his own, and when her wealthy aunt wants to take Alexa to Europe, he is desperate to stop her. Glennard sees marrying Alexa not only as a fulfillment of his feelings for her but as a means of having the ideal of being married to a beautiful woman. Repeatedly in the early chapters, when Glennard thinks of Alexa, he thinks of her beauty and then her pragmatism and then her social competence. In these regards, as Glennard imagines her, it would seem to the reader that Alexa is the embodiment of all that society at the time would see as virtuous in a woman. And at the center of how Glennard sees his new mature life is his marriage to Alexa. Aubyn is his past, his youthful mistakes, while Alexa is his future, where he has aged into the type of man he is supposed to be. This transition is embodied early in the novella with a description of what he sees when he enters his rooms: "…a photograph of Alexa Trent, placed, in the obligatory silver frame, just where, as memory officiously reminded him, Margaret Aubyn's picture had long throned in its stead" (Wharton 1991, 49). Trying to marry Alexa also gives Glennard the opportunity to perform traditional masculinity in order to secure their lives together. He sees marrying her as the best reason to sell Aubyn's letter, exposing that woman to the public to be privileged to have a private life with the other. Glennard rationalizes his decision to sell Aubyn's letters through the lens of his affection for Alexa:

> [H]e argued, his first duty was to her – she had become his conscience. The sum obtained…combined with Glennard's professional earnings, took the edge of compulsion from their way of living, making it appear the expression of a graceful preference for simplicity. (Wharton 1991, 83)

But even with what Glennard believes to be the best reasons for revealing this most private part of Aubyn, he still on some level understands that what the parts he played, as the receiver and the exposer of the letters, will taint how he is perceived by the people who know him, particularly by Alexa. He tries to further distance himself by presenting a twofold lie to the man he sees about publishing the letters, telling him, "A poor chap I used to know – who died – he died last year – and who left me a lot of letters, letters he thought a great deal

of…the letters a woman would write to a man she knew well. They were tremendous friends, he and she" (Wharton 1991, 73-74). He denies both his position as the receiver of the letters and their nature; when asked directly if they were love letters, he denies that as well. In this regard, he tries to posthumously rob Aubyn not only of her privacy but of the space she could have to express more passionate feelings, feelings which she would be permitted to express openly. Even though he is determined in his course, he still seeks social absolution for the action he is taking. "When letters are as personal…Well, I don't mind telling you that the cash would make a heap of difference to me…I'd like to know whether you think I'd be justified…" (Wharton 1991, 75). Glennard's willingness to sell such personal documents shows how he values aging into a respectable social position, beyond the passion that defined his youth.

But it is important to note that the passion that is embodied in Aubyn's letters is hers alone. While it is clear that she loved Glennard deeply, it is also clear that he did not reciprocate those feelings. Like with Alexa, when Glennard describes Aubyn, he focuses on her looks and her literary genius as an afterthought.

> [T]he poor woman of genius with her long pale face and short-sighted eyes, softened a little by the grace of youth and inexperience, but so incapable even then of any hold upon the pulses. When she spoke, indeed, she was wonderful… (Wharton 1991, 43)

Aubyn's gift with words might lead the reader to believe that Glennard might have found more love for her through the letters, but Glennard quickly dispels the benefit of that doubt by admitting that he primarily kept the letters for his own vanity. With Aubyn's growing prestige as an author, her admiration fed his vanity. Even though he kept her admiration mostly to himself, Glennard does brag of his knowing Aubyn to Alexa, making it known that he knew her well but hiding the true nature of her feelings for him. Even with this benefit though, Glennard admits that he tired of Aubyn's affection for him and her beautifully brilliant words that expressed that feeling. Not long after reading the initial call for Aubyn's letters, Glennard reflects:

> [H]e used to avoid looking in his letter-box when he came home to his rooms – but her writing seemed to spring out at him as he put his key in the door. (Wharton 1991, 45)

But to dismiss Glennard as simply shallow in his relationship to Aubyn is complicated by Wharton when she adds, not long after the description of his avoiding his mailbox, the following:

> So few intimate friends! For years she had had but one; one who in the last years had requited her wonderful pages…with the scant phrases by which a man evades the vulgarest of sentimental importunities. He had been a brute in spite of himself…he chafed at his own inadequacy, his stupid inability to rise to the height of her passion. (Wharton 1991, 44)

While Glennard is so fixated on the appearances of the women around him, this fixation can be framed as Glennard having doubts about his own character and intelligence. This awareness of his own limitations as an individual also manifests itself in his critiquing the social order that he was so eager to be a part of. The collection of Aubyn's letters to Glennard becomes a popular bestseller, being read by everyone in their social circle. But Wharton makes clear that this circle is filled with hypocrisy, with everyone consuming these private feelings of Aubyn, while condemning the individual who released the letters. Glennard tries to ease the guilt he is feeling across the novella by trying to console himself in this hypocrisy. "[H]e knew that half the women who were horrified by the publication of Mrs. Aubyn's letters would have betrayed her secrets without a scruple" (Wharton 1991, 107). At this point in the story, Glennard is still trying to reconcile what he sacrificed to become the person that he feels like he socially should be. However, this acknowledgement of this hypocrisy illustrates how what Glennard thought would be his maturing actually is hollow and to a degree petty.

As the story progresses Glennard more and more feels that he betrayed Aubyn, but he also begins to see what he has done not only as it affects him, but what it means for the memory of Aubyn.

> He understood now that, at the moment of selling the letters, he had viewed the transaction solely as it affected himself: as an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise presentable record. He had scarcely considered the act in relation to Margaret Aubyn… (Wharton 1991, 97)

Since Glennard wanted to sell the letters to have more capital to grow socially to achieve the markers of maturity, like spouse and house. But the biggest

consequence of the realization of what putting the letters into the world is being a witness to Alexa reading and reacting to them. At first, he tries to dissuade her from reading them, telling her that reading them is not "nice", which is his way of trying to place Alexa back into the box of ideal femininity. Alexa responds to this critique saying, "It was not nice to publish it, certainly; but after all, I'm not responsible for that, am I?" (Wharton 1991, 100). Alexa spends the majority of the novella unaware that her husband is the publisher and the receiver of such intimate correspondence. Eventually though, the nature of the letters becomes too private, making both of them feel uncomfortable. When Alexa reads one of the letters out loud they both have a deep emotional reaction to the passage.

> Why had he included that one among the others? Or was it possible that now they would all seem like that?...'it *is* like listening to a key-hole. I wish I hadn't read it! (Wharton 1991, 105)

Glennard realizes the genuine nature of Aubyn's love, and Alexa realizes her participation in the violation of this fellow woman's privacy. Alongside the developing guilt and remorse of publishing the letters, Glennard decides that Alexa needs to know, but he cannot bear the shame of directly confessing to what he has done. So, he begins to resent Alexa, while both anticipating and dreading her finding out. He attempts to leave clues for her to find, and she does figure it out, though not telling Glennard that she now knows. Alexa, like Glennard, tries to save face, knowing how their relationship would be ruined, not by Glennard's having a relationship with Aubyn but by his exposing her, which in many ways could make Alexa wonder if Glennard would betray her also. Glennard indulged in Aubyn's feelings until he tired of them, and Aubyn's being older is framed as a contributing factor to his tiring. While Alexa currently has assurances of his affections, she must confront the idea that as she also inevitably ages Glennard's affections might not be steady.

At the end of the novella, Glennard is finally able to come to terms with what he did and explains his motives to Alexa: "I took everything from her, I deceived her, I despoiled her, I destroyed her – and she's given me *you* in return" (Wharton 1991, 160). While Glennard does feel remorse, he still frames the two women as commodities. However, Alexa points out to him that the remorse he feels has forced him to mature beyond the shallowness of the mere markers of progressing in life. But Wharton makes it clear that this whole experience is one that will

continue to haunt their marriage moving forward. Wharton also includes several moments throughout the novella of Glennard reflecting on what his life with Aubyn might have been; even at one moment in anger towards Alexa, he imagines Aubyn as his wife. These moments of reflection back at a time when he was younger illustrate his disillusionment with the life he had been told by society to want. Even though he used these letters to conform, Aubyn's haunted presence broke down the social power that he thought he was claiming.

In his preface to the New York Edition of *The Aspern Papers*, Henry James recounts how he "found" the story. While living in Italy, James heard how for years Jane Clairmont was in residence in the city with her grandniece. Clairmont was the half-sister of Mary Godwin Shelley, the mistress of Lord Byron, and the mother of his daughter Allegra. While Clairmont had passed by the time James learned of her being in the city, a legend had developed of a man trying to take up residence in the Clairmont house because he hoped that she might still have letters from Percy Shelley. This story captured James's imagination and led to him considering the relationship between admirers of an individual and the people and objects that individual left behind. James, himself, confesses

> [I]n fact, had I happened to hear of her but a little sooner, I might have seen her in the flesh. The question of whether I should have wished to do so was another matter… (James 1983, xxix)

This acknowledgement of both his curiosity and hesitancy at actually seeing Clairmont represents the central theme of *The Aspern Papers*, which for James is how trying to explore how forcing ties to people of the past for their fame leads to exposing the humanity of either the person trying to find information about the historical figure or of the historical figure. James expresses the reason for being relieved to not face the temptation to seek out Clairmont, therefore running "no risk, in other words, by too rude a choice, of depreciating that romance value which, as I say, it was…attached to her long survival" (James 1983, xxix). James tying the mysticism of Clairmont not to the other people she once knew but instead to her old age is an interesting move, giving deference to age and personal experience rather than to the other people once known. This deference also humanizes Clairmont and gives her power over her life narrative, and individuals who would seek her out would be only interested in a phantom of what they think the dead celebrities would be like. More often than not,

people want confirmation of what they have always believed about those celebrities. The story of Clairmont and the interpretation that James writes of her circumstances in *The Aspern Papers* reveals how individuals – particularly younger ones – look to older people – especially those with fame – as ways to cement nostalgic interpretations of the past, that have more to do with the interpreter than the individual who lived that past.

This conflict is what drives the novella. The nameless narrator is fanatically obsessed with a dead poet, named Jefferey Aspern, and his work. Early in the text, the narrator calls Aspern his god saying, "One doesn't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defense" (James 1983, 2). This character does not know for certain if there are any Aspern papers in possession of this elderly woman, but his devotion drives him to make the pilgrimage to Venice to try to get into the good graces of the old woman and get the papers, which he emphatically declares exist. His adoration of Aspern makes him act entitled to any materials of his that the lady and her niece might have and act as though he were exempt of social rules for his higher cause. He states his plan to deceive saying,

> I can arrive at my spoils only by putting her off her guard…Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm sorry for it, but there's no baseness I wouldn't commit for Jefferey Aspern's sake. (James 1983, 7)

The narrator's willingness to commit base actions to get his way exemplifies his not thinking of Aspern as a human and is not thinking of how his former lover might feel about his papers and is not thinking of any other person's memories about Aspern except his own. The narrator's colleague failed to get the papers from the old woman, so he plans to seduce the spinster niece in order to gain access to the papers. His colleague is despairing of her appearance, indicating to the reader that Miss Tina, the niece, is not an embodiment of ideal womanhood that might be appealing to the shallowness of the narrator. He seems trapped in an idealization of this author, keeping himself in a more immature state.

When the narrator arrives in Venice and to the home of Juliana Bordereau and her grand-niece Tina, he finds that Miss Tina is also trapped in a liminal state that keeps her from ageing. While the narrator's immaturity is something that he has brought on himself, because of being so encompassed with his obsession, Tina's immaturity seems to be imposed on her by her aunt. When the

narrator begins to visit with Miss Bordereau and Miss Tina, trying to become their lodger and insert himself into their social circle, Miss Bordereau brings the following censure against Miss Tina: "She had a very good education when she was young. I looked into that myself…But she has learned nothing since" (James 1983, 19). She expresses this criticism because she does not approve of Tina's friendliness to the stranger in their home; Miss Bordereau does not trust him, or really anyone, and thinks of her niece as too naïve or stupid to discern for herself if someone has ulterior motives. But Tina's reply hints to the reader of some depth to her character. "'I've always been with *you*,' Miss Tina rejoined very mildly, and of a certainty with no intention of an epigram" (James 1983, 19). Miss Bordereau and the narrator both dismiss this reply from Tina, illustrating how she might be resentful of being isolated from a life where she could be a part of society and have a household of her own. The two women's lives in Venice are described in the opening of the novella with James writing: "She herself had been established in Venice some fifteen years…the two shy, mysterious and, as was somehow supposed, scarcely respectable…" (James 1983, 1). This perception of the women's lack of respectability further isolates Miss Tina. Her exile with her great-aunt from society seems to keep her in stasis, seemingly lacking the maturity that comes from socializing. Although past young adulthood, it seems she has not been allowed to live. Society holds Tina guilty by association because of her aunt's decisions in her youth. Miss Bordereau still faces criticism for being a man's mistress. The narrator has an acquaintance that still expresses judgement at her being a mistress, even though this occurred in her youth. The narrator sees her relationship with Aspern as understandable because "[a]s if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet!" (James 1983, 3). The narrator does not see her love as Aspern from her point of view nor does he celebrate her taking autonomy in the kind of relationship she wanted, again indicating how he cannot comprehend anyone seeing the poet as anything else. Miss Bordereau withdrawing from society could be seen as both an imposed state and a chosen one. She does not seem to regret it when talking with the narrator.

Instead she celebrates the independence and control that she has been able to exercise outside of society's scrutinizing gaze. She tells the narrator,

> 'I've always got most things done I wanted, thank God! The people I've lived with have humoured me,' the old woman continued, speaking out of the white ashes of her vanity. (James 1983, 65)

The narrator's fixation on the age of Miss Bordereau also indicates that he cannot acknowledge how she might feel about the papers, how they tie her to her past and memories that she found pleasurable. At one-point Tina tells the narrator that her aunt lived off the letters, not that she lived off them monetarily but rather emotionally (James 1983, 88). The sentiment that the papers inspire in Miss Bordereau along with her feelings of control in her isolation reveals to the reader how these ties to the past are a source of emotional power for her. To culminate this feeling of power, she requests that Tina destroy the papers upon her death; however, Tina does not directly promise to do so. Tina then decides to use the papers for her own ends, holding them over the head of the narrator to get him to marry her, allowing her to have the markers of adulthood as prescribed broadly by society. But the narrator's obsession with Aspern alienates Tina, causing her to realize that she would be isolated again. Tina decided to honor her aunt's final wish and destroys the papers, having her life on her own terms. The text implies that she begins to cultivate a life for herself, maturing while the narrator is still stuck. James ends the novella with him still mourning the loss of the papers, still not understanding the women who possessed them. The reader realizes that Tina self-actualizes like her great-aunt; however, unlike her aunt, this growth comes from her own internal reflections instead of life experiences. Her maturity shows an alternative way to age.

Both novellas focus on private letters from famous authors and the consumption of those private moments as entertainment for outsiders, and the tension that comes with that kind of presumption into that space. Wharton and James have not been exempted from that kind of curiosity from their readers. As Lyall Powers opens his collection of Wharton's and James's letters, "An obvious justification for publishing the letters exchanged between Henry James and Edith Wharton is that the correspondents were both important professional literary artists" (Powers 1990, 1). Because of their fictions, readers might feel entitled to their realities. But as they imbue in their works, reality is complicated for these people in very human ways. *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle* describes it in this way, "In a sense, the inner circle contrived to live in three separate worlds, none without its tax: the real world…the 'romantic' world…a separate world of work and personal struggle" (Goodman 1994, 18). These three separate spheres also inform how these authors portray reality for their characters. Both Wharton and James working in the mode of realism led to them ascribing several of the bourgeois ideologies that dominated their time.

> The fictions of James and Wharton suggest a qualified acceptance of a socially conservative understanding of discretion, whereby verbal and behavioral prudence are required in order to survive in a vigilant, moralistic society. (Levine 2002, 11)

However, both James and Wharton used age as a way of distancing some of their characters from those ideologies, allowing for more liminal spaces for the characters between the three realities Wharton and James might have used to frame their understanding of and engagement with the world. Age was even more significant for Wharton, because of her not becoming an author until later in her life, having the advantage of age and life experiences to make her more critical of social structures. While not about themselves specifically, Wharton and James use *The Touchstone* and *The Aspern Papers* to critique these structures that mattered to them. Millicent Bell in her biography, which traces the friendship of Edith Wharton and Henry, considers the intersection between these two novellas writing:

> James's interest lay in the psychology of the young man [and his worship of an author]…Edith Wharton's interest was aroused by the situation of the aging Muse who, being so eminent a priestess, could never be anyone's divinity. (Bell 1965, 229-230)

While Bell specifically mentions ageing as a theme of Wharton, James also uses the age of his female characters to illustrate passion. The letters in these novellas not only tether characters to the past, but illustrate how the characters continue to engage with that past.

> A vigorous defense of an activist style of growing old is offered by Simone de Beauvoir… 'in old age we should wish still to have passions strong enough to prevent us turning in upon ourselves'… Old age is not a time for wisdom or summing up. It is a time for continual engagement. (Moody 1986, 21)

Glennard turns in on himself when he realized what he was passionate about – fulfilling societal expectations – is hollow and will not sustain him as he continues to age. Tina lets go of that same desire, instead making her own way and

attempting to free the narrator of his hollow passion as well. In this way she illustrates how to move past the past with serenity, letting it move on with the people who lived it.

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"Now to Sum Up": Old Age as the Privileged Vantage Point of Narration in the FinalChapter of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

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Abstract. This paper explores the issues of old age as they appear in the final chapter of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931). Woolf recorded her own mixed feelings about growingold in her diaries: her writing, both personal and fictional, shows a keen interest in life's different stages and their specificities. These concerns are reflected in *The Waves*, a novel composed of a series of soliloquies from six characters, tracing their lives from childhood into old age. The final chapter is dedicated to old age and only one character, Bernard, remains. This paper explores the role old age plays in narrative construction by investigating this chapter and showing how it offers a keener view of the general experience of old age by paying close attention to a well-characterised singular experience. The paper considers the literary representation of an individual experience of old age as it relates to broader cultural understandings of old age by looking at the symbolism of natural cycles, the impulse towards self-narration, and the mind/body duality as an issue for the ageing body. This leads to discussion of isolation and community in old age.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, narration, retrospective, old age, community

A keen observer of the human experience, Virginia Woolf does not let readers down when it comes to the representation of old age in fiction. Though she herself died relatively early at the age of fifty-nine, her fiction still attentively portrays characters in old age. Her diaries document some distaste for the ageing process, such as the following: "I detest the hardnessof old age – I feel it. I rasp. I'm tart" (Woolf 1985, 347). Such instances show a concern withthe physicality of the ageing process; it is conceived as a transformation that comes from exposure and friction. Woolf's view of old age is not limited to this consideration, however,as evidenced by an earlier diary entry:

> Now I'm 50 (I signed this boldly in the hotel book-the good Yak refrained – another proof of inferiority complex), now I'm grey haired & well through with life I suppose I like the vital, the flourish in the face of death (Woolf 1982, 91)

The approach of death does not inspire meekness but, on the contrary a vital boldness anda strength in self-expression. The hardness of old age also shows that the self has become more solid.

While Woolf engages with certain tropes of the coming-of-age narrative in *Jacob's Room* (1922), youth is not the central focus in her works. She conceives the construction of the self more holistically over longer periods of time. Her use of her "tunnelling process" with older characters shows their experiences of youth as just some of the many that defined them – this goes against the common positing of youth as the defining period of one's life. Indeed, Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz have considered old age in fiction in their study of the "various ways in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers have incorporated the bound and static nature of old age into literary fictions" in which they consider the limited roles of older characters (Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz 1976, 448). Woolf considers old age more complexly by subscribing to a prior turn in fiction that Liisa Steinby identifies thus: "Individuals are no longer considered as instances of general humanity or specimens of ahistorical character types, but an individual now appears as a unique personality" (Steinby 2017, 138). Modernism offers further exploration of this view, investing it in full. With *The Waves* (1931) Woolf establishes six characters with strongly established singular psyches. The narrative follows them in fragments from early childhood into old age. The characters' sensitivity to time passing has often been noted and has been used in discussion of narrative gerontology by Goyal and Charon (2010). Ageing has also been studied in *Mrs Dalloway* through the lens of Woolf's engagement with the symbols of Mother Nature: Katherine Sedon discusses the portrayal of Clarissa as dealing with her own experience of ageing – both in moments of realisation and in moments of anxiety (Sedon 2011, 178). The symbolism of natural cycles is also present in *The Waves* and serves the representation of ageing: the novel's italicised interludes use descriptions of the natural world to set the tone for each phase of life the chapter that follows is set in.

The connection between a general, universal symbol such as the natural world and the portrayal of singular character's emotions and experiences

lends narrative strength to *The Waves* as a novel. As the novel progresses, the characters each deal individually with

the universal experience of ageing, offering a multi-faceted view of the process for the reader. In the final chapter, however, only one character is still present – Bernard. Throughout the novel he has been distinguished from the others as being the "sentence- maker" or story-teller; he continuously seeks to contain life within language. His discursive dominance at the close of the novel offers an idiosyncratic view of ageing and one's position to the approach of death.

This article explores the role old age plays in narrative construction by investigating the final chapter of *The Waves* and showing how it offers a keener view of the general experience of old age by paying close attention to a well-characterised singular experience. The study begins by considering a vision of old age supported by natural cycles and the place of agency and individuality in relation to that vision. It then goes on to more deeply consider individuality via the question of point of view and the desire to "story" one's life once in old age. Finally, these questions lead to discussion of the duality between body and mind and how cultural views of ageing lead to investment of the mind at the expense of the body and physical presence.

Old Age in the Natural Cycle

As with each new chapter representing a different stage of life, the ninth and final chapter of *The Waves* is preceded by the description of a landscape that sets the tone for what is to follow:

> Now the sun had sunk. Sky and sea were indistinguishable. The waves breaking spread their white fans far out over the shore, sent white shadows into the recesses of sonorous caves and then rolled back sighing over the shingle. The tree shook its branches and a scattering of leaves fell to the ground. There they settled with perfect composure on the precise spot where they would await dissolution. (Woolf 1931, 181)

Previous sections described the sun progressively rising then declining. The end of narration is announced by the end of the day, light no longer

diminishing but having disappeared. The opening of this final section creates a symmetry to the first section: "*The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it*" (Woolf 1931, 3). The before and after of daylight, of the lifespan, have in common the quality of indifferentiation between individual objects. It is inlight, in life, that identity is possible.

The novel does not only propose a one-dimensional symbolic correspondence,however. As Goyal and Charon point out in their study, "The novel's underlying structural division, its juxtaposition of the cyclical rhythm of the natural order (poetic form) against alinear and irreversible pattern in human (individual, historical, cultural) time" (Goyal andCharon 2010, 72). While the natural world and its order contribute to our vision of the ageing process, they do not completely cover it. Instead, there is a tension created between the different cycles of time and the novel investigates the knots created in the timeline when individual expression does not align with the larger movement.

Such tension has been studied by Katherine Sedon:

> In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf revises the Mother Nature archetype to better fit her perceptions and experiences of aging. In doing so, she employs nature imagery as vantages into particular moments of being that portend the social retrogressions and psychological devaluations of aging women—instances we might call moments of aging. (Sedon 2011, 163)

These issues are also present in the monologues of the female characters in *The Waves,* as they apprehend the social linking of femininity with youth. Beyond gender, the novel also represents moments of ageing in which the character understands the phenomenon as inevitable because supported by the natural order. This is paired with the feeling of being pushed out of the main flow of society. As Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz explain: "Certainly old age itself no longer inspires veneration in a society where economic productivity is a supreme value" (Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz 1976, 449). In the final chapter, Bernard expresses a sensitivity to an injunction that seeks to push him out of life:

> Curse you then. However beat and done with it all I am, I must haul myself up, and find the particular coat that belongs

> to me; must push my arms into the sleeves; must muffle myself up against the night air and be off. I, I, I, tired as I am, spent as I am, and almost worn out with all this rubbing of my nose along the surfaces of things, even I, an elderly man who is getting rather heavy and dislikes exertion, must take myself off and catch some last train. (Woolf 1931, 227)

There is an absence of any agent from which this order might originate but the repetition of "must" communicates the imperative to the reader, especially contrasted with Bernard's tiredness and reluctance. The image of catching a train also casts him as a mere passenger in a larger pre-determined movement that cannot be stopped nor modified on account of his opinion or sentiment.

Beyond the six main characters, Percival, the seventh, voiceless character upsets the natural cycle. His lifespan does not follow the progression of a day, his sun instead dropping from its peak. Bernard describes his reception of the news:

> Into this crashed death – Percival's. 'Which is happiness?' I said (our child had been born), 'which pain?' referring to the two sides of my body, as I came downstairs, making a purely physical statement. … But for pain words are lacking. ... So I went out. I saw the first morning he would never see. (Woolf 1931, 202)

The shock of death in youth brings a pain for which Bernard struggles to find words. Even as his own life progresses, he continues to struggle with the loss of his friend:

> I saw the first leaf fall on his grave. I saw us push beyond this moment, and leave it behind us for ever. And then sitting side by side on the sofa we remembered inevitably what had been said by others; "the lily of the day is fairer far in May"; we compared Percival to a lily – Percival whom I wanted to lose his hair, to shock the authorities, to grow old with me; he was already covered with lilies. (Woolf 1931, 203)

Part of the upset over Percival's untimely passing comes from an interruption of the expected natural cycle: seeing those we have known in youth

grow old alongside of us. Ageing is seen as an expected and natural progression for all. Losing one's hair is generally a negative experience, but within the framework of natural ageing, it is a symbol that we have held to the most desired path – a long life. Percival loses his own natural cycle and instead his body is absorbed into a larger natural cycle: that of the earth and the seasons. Leaves falling on his grave show that whatever pain his untimely death may have caused, the world will go on without him. Upon learning of his death, Bernard is also torn between pain from the news and happiness from the birth of his son ("(our child had been born)"). Despite the initial conflict, the arrival of the new generation aids in moving forwards, indeed, "generational time serves to naturalise ideas about temporality" (Falcus and Sako 2019, 27).

Despite its proximity to death, old age has its own existence and definition as a period of life. The cultural presence of death in the collective imagination of a society does however depend on its circumstances. Woolf's generation had an intimate knowledge of death – theBritish having lost male friends and relatives in the First World War. As Beer writes:

> [A]ll of Virginia Woolf's novels brood on death, and death, indeed is essential to their organization as well as their meaning…. Death was her special knowledge… but death was also the special knowledge of her entire generation, through the obliterative experience of the First World War. (Beer 1989, 185)

The question is less whether old age is defined by a strong consciousness of death but whether life in general is defined by it within a given time period. Representations of old age are determined by the ideas a culture has regarding the end of life stories – if so many people's stories end in death then death becomes a more strongly present theme. Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz indicate that "We expect fiction and drama, on the other hand, to unfold towards some sort of *telos*" (Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz 1976, 448). If death has a high cultural presence, it will be projected as *telos*.

While the final chapter of *The Waves* does engage with the specificities of old age beyond a mere awaiting of death (as we shall see in the following section), it also shows Bernard's advance into death. In her work on temporality, Liisa Steinby notes an interesting aspect to the end of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*:

> At the end of the novel another time perspective comes to the fore: that of eternity. In the last sentence of the novel Moll writes that she and her husband have now returned to England, 'where we resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived' (MF, p. 295). Thus old Moll and her aged husband turn their faces from time to eternity (cf. Mäkikalli, 2006, pp. 95-113). The reader, however, cannot avoid the impression that Moll has not abandoned her previous life strategy in the first place: what she is now doing, in deciding to repent for the rest of her life, is securing comfort in her life hereafter. (Steinby 2017, 144)

Despite Moll's claims, the reader understands the end of the novel within the framework of prior characterisation. Moll has been built up as artfully conniving thus far and the reader should not be willing to put aside an entire novel's characterisation in the name of a clean ending. A similar process operates in the final sentences of *The Waves* – the final sentences represent Bernard's mental state as he confronts death. This death is then indirectly confirmed by one final italicised passage, only one sentence long: "*The waves broke on the shore*" (Woolf 1931, 228). While death brings ideas of conformity and loss of self, Woolf offersa vision of an idiosyncratic death. Bernard enters into death with the same character he used to navigate through life – and whose construction has been observed by the reader in the preceding pages.

> And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancingagainst us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!' (Woolf 1931, 228)

Bernard shows himself as confident and expressive when faced with a challenge – even if itis the greatest challenge of all. Bernard has aged as himself and

now dies as himself. The novel does not represent "death" but *Bernard's* death, just as the final chapter does not represent old age but *Bernard's* old age.

Woolf's character-focused technique allows for the affirmation of the individual in old age. She puts forth unique older characters who are to be understood as more than mere parts of a broader natural cycle. They live out their own character-lives rather than simply occupying a conceptual step in our understanding of being.

"Storying" – Old Age and Perspective

Another way Woolf creates strong characters is by embracing points of view. In *The Waves*, studying old age within the framework of narrative shows the importance of character perspective in narrative construction.

Culturally, we associate old age with story-telling, either because the elderly are seen as a source of knowledge (Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz 1976, 450) or because of the impulse to frame life within narrative as the end approaches. As Goyal and Charon indicate:

> The impression is growing among those who care for the elderly that a life review, in search of meaning, brings not a cushion of consolation to the dying process but, more radically, a discovery of the point of having lived at all. (Goyal and Charon 2010, 80)

There is a desire to invest events with meaning. Events must thus be structured and reorganised into a cohesive whole for meaning to then shine through. This allows a better coming to terms with the process of ageing: "There has been a growing interest in narrative in studies of ageing, with narrative recognised as an important mode of expression of and way of understanding the experience of ageing" (Falcus and Sako 2019, 14).

This general understanding of narrative can also be noted in narratological studies of literary examples of the life review. A narratological perspective considers further interest in the functioning of the mind: "Most novelists have taken for granted the transparency of the fictional mind" (Cohn 1978, 7). Properly understanding old age in literature requires not just studying its representation but also its narration. As an old man, Bernard situates his point of view: "When I look down from this transcendency" (Woolf 1931,

223), which showshis position in later life as a privileged vantage point from which to consider current and prior events.

Bernard is the only character present in the final chapter, the time of more advancedold age. The other voices are extinguished after the penultimate chapter, leaving the thus-far six-sided narrative chorus behind and putting forth only Bernard's singular voice. The chapter opens thus:

> 'Now to sum up,' said Bernard. 'Now to explain to you the meaning of my life. Since we do not know each other (though I met you once, I think, on board a ship going to Africa), we can talk freely. The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed. This, for themoment, seems to be my life. If it were possible, I would hand it to you entire. I would break it off as one breaks off a bunch of grapes. I would say, 'Take it. Thisis my life.' (Woolf 1931, 183)

The immediate concern is one of summing up, holding the connotations of quantification. In his retrospective, Bernard desires to circumscribe his experience of life in a way that can be communicated to another. Since the first chapter, in his childhood, Bernard has been the character interested in language and "phrase-making" – a term that designates his desire toencapsulate life into language. It is fitting therefore that he should be tasked with the final retrospective. While the process of summing up echoes broader cultural associations for old age, Woolf is not merely conforming to these but also affirming her character.

From his privileged vantage point of old age, Bernard is able to retrospectively consider the definition of his identity across time (and space):

> I became, I mean, a certain kind of man, scoring my path across life as one treads a path across the fields. My boots became worn a little on the left side. When I came in, certain re-arrangements took place. 'Here's Bernard!' How differently different people say that! There are many rooms – many Bernards. (Woolf 1931, 200)

The wearing out of his boots and the use of the verb "scoring" show that Bernard's physicalexistence creates and indent on the world he traverses. The longer

his presence, the deeperhis indent and the more physical impact there is from his existence. This fixity however iscontrasted with the flux of "re-arrangement." He acknowledges the transformative natureof the self. He then goes on to more deeply consider the definition of the self:

> What I was to myself was different; was none of these. I am inclined to pin myselfdown most firmly there before the loaf at breakfast with my wife, who being now entirely my wife and not at all the girl who wore when she hoped to meet me a certain rose, gave me that feeling of existing in the midst of unconsciousness such as the tree-frog must have couched on the right shade of green leaf. 'Pass' … I would say. 'Milk' … she might answer, or 'Mary's coming' … – simple words for those who have inherited the spoils of all the ages but not as said then, day after day, in the full tide of life, when one feels complete, entire, at breakfast. (Woolf 1931, 200)

While Bernard acknowledges that his identity depends on the various ways he appears, hisdeeper sense of community, and of identity, is found with the one who knows him most intimately – his wife. In attempting a definition of himself, Bernard chooses to "pin [him]self down" in his current quotidian interactions with his wife. He acknowledges that she too isno longer who she once was. They are most defined by who they are to each other and not by who they once were.

Returning to the opening of the chapter, Bernard's interlocutor "you" is not identified. The mission of summing up is given a sense of urgency by the repetition of "now". Though Bernard still remains strongly characterised, there is a sense of the ending having already begun. Bernard is ready to summarise his existence and hand it over as a story – which would not be compatible with continuing to live it. Analysing Ricoeur's view of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* Jansen states "there is a double movement: forward, the growing up of a young man, and backward, the remembrances" (Jansen 2015, 21). In this chapter, the forward movement is much lessened with only few new elements entering into the narrative. The narrative is created from re-examination and re-contextualisation: a re-telling of the story that summarises it out of communicative concern.

> Bernard reflects on the linguistic and narrative difficulties of storying his life: The crystal, the globe of life as one calls it, far from being hard and cold to the touch, has walls of thinnest air. If I press them all will burst. Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle, making the cauldron bubble like boiling silver, and slip through my fingers. Faces recur, faces and faces – they press their beauty to the walls of my bubble – Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda and a thousand others. How impossible to order them rightly; to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole – again like music. (Woolf 1931, 197)

The comparison to music underscores the compositional and artistic aspect of story-telling.The images of fish and a bubbling cauldron show life, his object, as something alive and in perpetual movement. Bernard partakes in the artistic project of extracting a partial, static object from an entire, moving experience. The challenge of making an account of one's lifeis the same challenge met in the creative process of art.

The preceding passage also shows the importance of the other characters for Bernard. Throughout the final chapter his mind returns to the experiences he shared with them – including a re-telling of the first chapter:

> In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea. I saw something bright-en--no doubt the brass handle of a cupboard. Then Mrs Constable raised the sponge above her head, squeezed it, and out shot, right, left, all down the spine, arrows of sensation. (Woolf 1931, 184)

The events are initially narrated by Bernard as follows:

> Mrs Constable, girt in a bath-towel, takes her lemon-coloured sponge and soaks it in water; it turns chocolate-brown; it drips; and, holding it high above me, shivering beneath her, she squeez-es it. Water pours down the runnel of my spine. Bright arrows of sensation shoot on either side. (Woolf 1931, 18)

The initial telling conveys a sequence of sensations, whereas the re-telling also offers more contextual information. The presence of the sea is established in the beginning of the novel but at the time of initial narration, the characters do not name the place they are in as a nursery – this is a retrospective framing.[1] Autobiographical retrospection results in "tensions and ambiguities" (Cohn 1978, 145). Variation in distance with prior events affects the construction of the focal character's mind: "by omitting clear signals of quotation, they run together their narrator's past and present thoughts, thereby suggesting that their ideas on a certain subject have remained the same" (Cohn 1978, 164). Bernard's retrospective view encapsulates the sequence of feelings and ties them to the place where he experienced them. Time and space are linked:

> Sense of time affects sense of place. To the extent that a small child's time is not that of an older person, neither is his experience of place. An adult cannot know a place as a child knows it, and this is not only because their respective sensory and mental capacities differ but also because their feelings for time have little in common. (Tuan 1977, 186)

While the adult cannot live in the same way the child can, the removed perspective of ageing creates the capacity for story telling: "Since small children are seldom able to reflect on their experiences and describe them, we need to make use of the recall and observations of adults" (Tuan 1977, 185). This narrative creation is more than a simple possibility, however; it is a human need: "To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible" (Tuan 1977, 187). Later on in the final chapter, Bernard sits down to wait for his train. Suddenly his mind brings up images from his childhood: "And by some flick of a scent or a sound on a nerve, the old image – the gardeners sweeping, the lady writing – returned" (Woolf 1931, 206). The involuntary resurgence of images shows that they still play a role within his psyche as an old man and also shows their need to be integrated.

> 1 In the first telling the word nursery appears indirectly via the labelling of an object as belonging to it: "that is the nursery looking-glass" (Woolf 1931,19).

Woolf's investment in character development means that Bernard is able to carry characterisation through ageing and death, showing these moments as belonging the individual despite their simultaneous cultural value.

Old Age in the Mind/Body Problem

Exploring the period of old age at the individual level, and one's perspective of it, also brings forth the problem of duality between mind and body. Though ageing is often paired with a retreat into the inner, mental realm and Woolf's writing is associated to a psychological shift, the body and the physical realm still have an important role to play in this closing chapter.

The functioning of the mind might be understood from a study of the language one uses – an aspect explored in the field of cognitive linguistics and applicable to narratology:

> Language arises from our conceptualizations of the world, and analysis of language and language use is therefore crucially linked to our minds and how they interact with our nonmental environment. (Fludernik 2010, 925)

The interface for the interaction of the mind with the "nonmental" world is the body. Hence the representation of sensory experience must also be taken into account. As can be observed via the ageing characters, and hence ageing interior monologues, in *The Waves*, our interaction with the environment changes as we age.

> Bernard's attitude towards his ageing body does however still shows the cultural tendency to associate the decline of the body in old age with more investment of the mind: But no more. Now to-night, my body rises tier upon tier like some cool temple whose floor is strewn with carpets and murmurs rise and the altars stand smoking; but up above, here in my serene head, comes only fine gusts of melody, waves of incense, while the lost dove wails, and the banners tremble above tombs, and the dark airs of midnight shake trees outside the open windows. When I look down from this transcendency, how beautiful are even the crumbled relics of bread! (Woolf 1931, 223)

Mind and body are dissociated, with the mind breaking off from the body's heaviness and physicality and rising above – offering the transcendent view previously mentioned. Bernard also describes himself as follows: "Yet I was preserved from these excesses and have survived many of my friends, am a little stout, grey, rubbed on the thorax as it were" (Woolf 1931, 186). Stoutness shows an excess solidity – a consolidation and density of being. "Grey" and "rubbed" point to a loss of sharpness – time has brought erosion; the self is lessdefined (in contrast and contour).

The body being our interface with the world, its state and our relation to it influencethe mental process of perception:

> Perception is corporeal; it is mediated by our bodies and the technological extensions employed by the body (such as walking sticks, spectacles and hearing aids, and even clothes). The body is more than the site of the sense organs and the brain, but forms a fundamental part of the perception process. Its size and orientation, its locomotion and its own sensuous capacities (balance, for instance) are important issues for perception. (Rodaway 1994, 25)

Hence, the ageing body cannot only be considered in its aspect of diminishing. The experience of the ageing body brings particular modes of perception. The body still informsthe construction of a self still in progression, even in later stages of life. This construction ispointed to with arboreal metaphor of growing rings:

> The mind grows rings; the identity becomes robust; pain is absorbed in growth. Opening and shutting, shutting and opening, with an increasing hum and sturdiness, the haste and fever of youth are drawn into service until the whole being seems to expand in and out like the mainspring of a clock. (Woolf 1931, 198)

Haste and fever are exchanged for sturdiness. This transformation echoes an excerpt from Woolf's diaries: "Perhaps I've washed off something of the sentimentality of youth, which tends to makes things melancholy" (Woolf 1985, 91). Youth is given to the motion of emotion, whereas ageing, with its physical fixity, brings a more stable view of life.

Stability is lost, however, when we become uncertain of our knowledge of the physical world. As Falcus and Sako write on dementia:

> Memory loss fundamentally challenges our understanding of the relationship between past, present, future and of the life course, imagined, most often, as a continuous and coherent unfolding of events and self. (Falcus and Sako 2019, 24)

Bernard does not suffer from dementia but does illustrate deterioration. While his monologue is largely composed of retrospective, he also shows some uncertainty in his account:

> It is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs. (Woolf 1931, 212)
> For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny, or Rhoda – so strange is the contact of one with another. (Woolf 1931, 216)

When Bernard thinks back on his relationships, the other characters have become images in his mind (both for him and the reader). Narrative in *The Waves* is dematerialised, anchored physically only by the verb "said" and the name of a given speaker. The presence of multiple speakers confirms an implied reality via cross-reference. In the final chapter, however, Bernard is alone. Any physical reality can only be believed from his speech. The decline in his sense of self hence brings a decline in the stability of references. As Rodaway indicates: "Perception is a social, or shared experience, as well as an individual one" (Rodaway 1994, 35). Narrative space in *The Waves* only exists insofar as it is shared by the different characters.

These passages also show the importance of community in old age. It is because Bernard no longer has his life-long friends that he doubts their existence and his own. The search for solidity might occur though interaction with objects – as Tuan states "Objects anchor time" (Tuan 1977, 187). Other studies have identified the importance of objects and places in old age (Goyal and Charon, 2010). Bernard anchors himself to the physical world when overwhelmed by time passing:

> Should this be the end of the story? a kind of sigh? a last ripple of the wave? A trickle of water in some gutter where, burbling, it dies away? Let me touch the table – so – and thus recover my sense of the moment. (Woolf 1931, 205)

Sense of the moment and sense of self are intrinsically linked. Both are more easily lost in isolation.

Though Woolf's narrative does not overly focus on objects and physical actions, the importance of physicality is expressed via Bernard's problems stemming from dematerialisation and the consequences of unattachment. Loss of self in ageing is most keenly felt in the solitude born from loss of community.

The final chapter of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* offers a portrayal of old age that does not rely on stereotypes. It gives the reader a representation of a singular character's unique experience while also bringing forth universal themes. As a character, Bernard is inserted both within the progression of his own lifespan and the larger movements of natural cycles. His expansive character psyche is solidly constructed and transports the reader through various epochs and considerations – all contributing to a characterisation that holds firm in the final chapter. While the novel accurately shows the retreat into the mind that can happen as the body decays, it also complexifies the mind/body duality by affirming that even as our material being wanes, our sensorial experiences still shape our minds and thus partake in the construction of our character – a dynamic that holds throughout life and until the end, both in and out of the pages of fiction.

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"The Gallantry of the Aging Machine": Ernest Hemingway's Colonel Cantwell and Masculine Aging in Modernist Literature

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Abstract. Age, like race and gender, is a socially constructed category, and in the 20th century, American society constructed aging as a process of inevitable natural decline, typically from age fifty or so. In Ernest Hemingway's 1950 novel *Across the River and into the Trees*, the semi-autobiographical protagonist expresses ambivalence about his aging body and perceived mental decline in ways that echo the anxieties the author expressed privately about his own aging as well as his accompanying fear that literary modernism had also already peaked. The ageism evident in reviews of *Across the River and into the Trees* suggests that Hemingway was justified in his anxieties about the perceived obsolescence of literary modernism. Struggling to articulate a more positive vision of aging while simultaneously acknowledging the more negative popular view, Hemingway tries in *Across the River and into the Trees* to teach his readers what it feels like emotionally to grow older in a youth culture.

Keywords: Hemingway, aging, masculinity, modernism, ageism

Age, like race and gender, is a socially constructed category, and in the twentieth century (and the twenty-first), American society constructed aging from midlife on as a process of inevitable natural decline, typically from age fifty or so. For example, in his 1950 novel *Across the River and into the Trees*, Ernest Hemingway's middle-aged protagonist, Colonel Richard Cantwell, clearly sees his own aging in terms of what Margaret Morganroth Gullette calls a "decline narrative". As she goes on to explain,

> [O]ur culture provides subjects with a master narrative of aging—something like the master narrative of gender or race: popularly disseminated, semiconscious, so familiar and acceptable that it can be told automatically. The plot of this one is peak, entry, and decline, with acceleration on the downslope. (Gullette 1997, 161)

One characteristic of this "decline narrative" is that it is always about "'identity stripping,' because it is a story of losing what we had" (Gullette 2004, 130).

In *Across the River and into the Trees*, Cantwell thinks of his own aging as an experience of decline and loss, perceptions linked in this essay to a broader cultural anxiety about masculine aging in modernist literature.[1] Hemingway's semi-autobiographical protagonist expresses ambivalence about aging in ways that echo the anxieties the author expressed privately about his own aging as well as his accompanying fear that literary modernism had also already peaked. The ageism evident in reviews of *Across the River and into the Trees* suggests that Hemingway was justified in his anxieties about the perceived obsolescence of literary modernism. Struggling to articulate a more positive vision of aging while simultaneously acknowledging the more negative popular view, Hemingway tries in *Across the River and into the Trees* to teach his readers what it feels like emotionally to grow older in a youth culture.

Literary and Cultural Discourses about Aging in *Across the River and into the Trees* and Other Modernist Novels

Decline narratives of aging are preoccupied with loss. Cantwell, who bears the physical and psychological scars of past trauma, muses frequently on his bodily losses: the right kneecap permanently damaged in the war (Hemingway 1950, 19), his "hand, which had been shot through twice, and was slightly misshapen" (Hemingway 1950, 55), his "beat-up" body (Hemingway 1950, 109) and facial scars (Hemingway 1950, 111-12), and his survivor's guilt. Cantwell repeatedly examines himself in mirrors and then disparages his own appearance (Hemingway 1950, 76, 111, 169). Cantwell is, in his own words, "half a hundred years old" (Hemingway 1950, 26, 63, 180). Right after Cantwell tells himself, "Keep your temper, boy", the narrator dispassionately observes, "But he was not a boy. He was fifty . . ." (Hemingway 1950, 7-8). And Cantwell must have silently had a birthday during the first 50 pages or so, because he later tells the waiter Arnaldo that he is "Fifty plus one" (Hemingway 1950, 75). When Renata later asks him, "Do you think it is true that men make their

1 Carlos Baker was the first to identify age as a theme of the novel, but see also Peter Lisca (1974, 300), Michael Seefeldt (1995, 252), James Meredith (1995, 98), Mark Cirino (2016, 11), Jopi Nyman (1998), and Stanley Cooperman (1965). See also Phillip Sipiora (1999) and David Wyatt (1999) for broader discussions of aging in Hemingway's life and fiction.

own faces after fifty?" he tells her, "I hope not. Because I would not sign for mine" (Hemingway 1950, 127). It is clear that for Cantwell, as for many aging adults, "Becoming an older body under the sign of decline involves masochistic internalizations that run all the way to self-hatred . . ." (Gullette 2004, 133). Given his multiple condemnations of his appearance, Cantwell seems unquestioningly complicit with his own denigration.

Cantwell is particularly obsessed with what he perceives as age-related mental lapses and castigates himself for these failings. He momentarily forgets his driver's name and accuses himself of "getting stupid" (Hemingway 1950, 14). As Gullette observes,

> Losing a tooth or forgetting a name, waking up in a sweat or not reaching an orgasm, if decline owns the narrative, become 'symptoms' that sweep us forward on the slick rails of the ideologized life course from 'age-related' to 'death.' (Gullette 2004, 133)

Cantwell is certainly guilty of that kind of catastrophizing. For example, he repeatedly fails to maintain the vigilance expected of a soldier at the front and then blasts himself as "damned careless" (Hemingway 1950, 100). Annoyed when people arrive or leave without his noticing (Hemingway 1950, 41), Cantwell is very hard on himself when it comes to minor lapses in vigilance, even though it is peacetime, and these lapses therefore have no negative consequences. He is obsessed with even his most insignificant failings, suggesting that it is age itself, and not its actual consequences, that concerns him.

Perhaps because he is in love with a young woman who is not yet 19 (Hemingway 1950, 82), Cantwell is particularly preoccupied with the sexual prowess of older men. The *Gran Maestro* tells him that their imaginary fraternal "Order" has promoted the cook "to the rank of Commendatore" because "He comported himself as a man three times on his fiftieth birthday"—interestingly, an accomplishment Hemingway also claimed for himself (Hemingway 1950, 60, and 1981, 658). The Grand Master took the cook at his word because "He looked ruined" (Hemingway 1950, 60). Hemingway explains further:

> [The Order] was named after a particularly notorious multi-millionaire non-taxpaying profiteer of Milan, who had, in the course of a dispute over property, accused his young wife, publicly and

> legally through due process of law, of having deprived him of his judgment through her extraordinary sexual demands. (Hemingway 1950, 57; see also Mandel, 1995)

Thus there are several oblique references to the sexual capacities—or incapacity—of other men of his age or older. It is not entirely clear whether Cantwell himself is immune from that particular indignity; he (improbably) consummates the relationship with Renata in a gondola, but most critics agree that because she is menstruating, he manually stimulates her to orgasm.

For a 51-year-old man, Cantwell initially seems oddly preoccupied with death. "Every time you shoot now can be the last shoot ... ", he tells himself in the book's opening chapter (Hemingway 1950, 7). Then the reader learns that Cantwell is coping with chronic heart disease and drugs himself with mannitol hexanitrate to pass a mandatory physical exam. Although his significantly younger doctor sees through the ruse, he nevertheless declines to challenge Cantwell's test results (Hemingway 1950, 8-11). Mannitol hexanitrate is a vasodilator used to prevent additional heart attacks; based on what he tells the *Gran Maestro*, Cantwell has already had at least three (Hemingway 1950, 138). Charles M. Oliver elaborates:

> Colonel Cantwell has had four heart attacks when the novel opens 'two hours before daylight' on Sunday morning, Cantwell recalling the fourth (which had occurred the day before) in flashback two thirds of the way through the novel. (Oliver 1990, 143)

During that episode, Cantwell emerges from a telephone booth, abruptly feels ill, and asks the concierge for a glass of water (Hemingway 1950, 196). Baker also describes that incident as a heart attack (Baker 1972, 274).[2] Thus, Cantwell certainly knows that his time is limited.

It could, of course, be argued that it is his health condition that causes him to experience age as decline: "The later life of men was collapsed by heart-attack discourse" (Gullette 1997, 154). As one scholar of aging studies more bluntly puts it, "Older men are constructed as pre-death" (Hearn 1995, 101). But many

2 For a detailed explanation of Cantwell's medical condition, symptoms, and pharmacological treatment, see Russo (1990, 177n7).

people in their fifties would feel not aged but robbed in their prime if they were diagnosed with a terminal illness. As a book reviewer for the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* observes,

> The author's constant use of 'old' in connection with his 50 year old [sic] hero will be unconvincing to those readers who feel more vigorous at or past 50 than they ever felt in their lives. (Butcher 1977, 308)

Even Cantwell himself concedes that he's not all *that* elderly: "I couldn't even be an elder statesman. I'm not old enough" (Hemingway 1950, 227). At the end of the novel, the fact that Cantwell dies in the afternoon reinforces the idea that his death is premature (Russo 1990, 155).

Hemingway's work is typical of twentieth-century novels about midlife protagonists, including such canonical literary works as Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Because Gullette is the first and best-known scholar to have addressed masculine aging in a broad swath of modernist literature, her explanation of this phenomenon in modernist novels is worth quoting at some length here:

> Suddenly a host of characters in their forties and fifties or in some vague middle age began to appear and simultaneously decay. Many of the most striking and ultimately canonical of these were about men. . . . All these men lose their mental power and noticeably stop being productive through some complicated interactions with aging. . . . Aschenbach is in his fifties, St. Peter is fifty-two, Diver even younger". (Gullette 1993, 27)

Interestingly, because "the characters are not remotely old in years", these novels are not about elderly men: "'Aging' means aging into the middle years. And none of these characters can bear the process" (Gullette 1993, 30). The abrupt declines these characters experience are never satisfactorily accounted for, and their inexplicably sudden deterioration is inadequately explained because it is overdetermined; it is an expression of the writer's and the broader culture's age-related anxieties (Gullette 1993, 29).

Thomas Strychacz has argued that Hemingway presents masculinity as contingent rather than essential, as a rhetorical performance needing the legitimation of others (Strychacz 2003, 8). Masculinity must therefore be demonstrated, over and over again, before an evaluating audience. Given that definition of masculinity, what will happen if aging means Cantwell can no longer perform (especially physically, militarily, and sexually)? To develop Hemingway's pun, what happens when Cantwell *can't* perform masculinity *well*?, Jopi Nyman suggests, "Death is a gendered solution that does away with the problems posed to masculine identity by old age, illness, and dependency" (Nyman 1998, 38). Death solves the problem of a potential impending loss of masculinity and thus cures Cantwell's anxiety.

To a large extent, as Gullette's work indicates, Cantwell's problem is cultural rather than personal. In part because hegemonic masculinity is associated with physical strength, professional success, virility, and social power and control, Western cultures lack guidelines for how to be a man in old age:

> [A]s a result of the ungendered image attributed to older persons, and the construction of older men as an invisible, paradoxical, and unmasculine social category, Western hegemonic masculinity scripts are concluded at middle age. (Spector-Mersel 2006)

Cantwell is not the only man who struggles with maintaining masculinity as he ages.

Hemingway's Personal Experience with Aging

There is reason to believe that Hemingway shared Cantwell's angst. In an essay on Hemingway at fifty, David Wyatt suggests that "Hemingway had a terrible time with getting older" (Wyatt 1999, 596). When he was only 26, Ernest wrote his friend Ernest Walsh, "But the hell of it is that I am not competition [sic] with my contemporaries but with the clock—which keeps on ticking . . ." (Hemingway 2015, 11). Hemingway's own ambivalence regarding youth culture's importance to literary modernism is evident from his comments in a 1929 letter to Fitzgerald:[3]

3 See Monteiro (1997) for a study of Fitzgerald's influence on Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees*. Kirk Curnutt (2002, 2005) and Suzanne del Gizzo (2015) have both discussed Fitzgerald's own struggles with aging and American youth culture. I am grateful to Suzanne del Gizzo for letting me read her essay, which was presented at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society Conference in Waterford, Ireland, in July 2015.

> Everybody loses all the bloom—we're not peaches—that doesnt [sic] mean you get rotten—a gun is better worn and with bloom off—So is a saddle—People too by God. You lose everything that is fresh and everything that is easy and it always seems as though you could *never* write—But you have more métier and you know more and when you get flashes of the old juice you have more results with them. (Hemingway 1981, 306)

In the next paragraph, he adds, "the stuff when you are no longer young is better than the young stuff—" (Hemingway 1981, 306). Amusingly, Hemingway was consoling Fitzgerald just after Scott's 33rd birthday, and "no longer young" Ernest was 31 at the time. Clearly Hemingway was susceptible to the lure of youth culture.[4]

Moreover, Hemingway and his fellow modernists defined themselves as young artists rebelling against their elders. In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, he complained of Virginia Woolf,

> She belongs to a group of Bloomsbury people who are all over 40 and . . . they dislike what they consider the intrusion of anybody much under 40 into the business . . . They live for their Literary Reputations and believe the best way to keep them is to try and slur off or impute [impugn] the honesty of anyone coming up. (Hemingway 1981, 264; Baker's emendation)

Hemingway was (perhaps understandably) incensed when the *Books* supplement of the *New York Herald Tribune* published a review of his third short story collection, *Winner Take Nothing,* under the headline "Ernest Hemingway Has Put on Maturity". Hemingway particularly resented a line in reviewer Horace Gregory's laudatory final paragraph: "In this book Ernest Hemingway has again assumed leadership for a generation that is facing the difficult problems of approaching middle age" (Gregory 1977, 140). Ernest, then 34 years old, responded angrily in a letter to his editor at Scribners, Maxwell Perkins: "That bird, when he labelled me as approaching middle age was trying to get rid of me that

4 Youth culture is generally defined as a postwar phenomenon (Savage 2007, xv; Hobbs 2016, 5), but Jon Savage argues that "postwar youth culture is not as new as it might seem" and traces its roots in cultural changes occurring as early as the late nineteenth century.

way—Others having failed. . . . When does Middle Age commience? [sic]" (Hemingway 1996, 202). Hemingway makes approaching middle age sound like imminent death. As James H. Meredith observes,

> By the 1950s, 20th-century America had become a youth culture, but Hemingway, who had once been a purveyor of that culture, at the age of 51 was now paradoxically becoming a victim of it. (Meredith 1999, 98)

He was no longer the hot young writer, and both he and his critics mourned that perceived loss.

Although Hemingway was only 51 years old himself when *Across the River and into the Trees* was published, he also had good reason to be uneasy about his own deteriorating health. Like his protagonist in *Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway himself took mannitol hexanitrate—"Ernest to control his high blood pressure, the Colonel to keep his heart pumping" (Reynolds 1999, 202). Biographer Michael Reynolds tells us that while writing the novel, Hemingway was "intensely aware that his erratic blood pressure could, at any moment, blow a hole through a major artery" (Reynolds 1999, 206). Meredith has suggested of Hemingway that, "from a personal standpoint, the war [that is, World War II] not only almost killed him; it also sped up his already accelerating aging process as well" (Reynolds 1999, 96). Hemingway had many reasons for feeling physically vulnerable and older than his biological age.

Finally, Hemingway had an additional reason for anxiety about his own future, as Gerry Brenner has pointed out (Brenner 1983, 169). Hemingway's father had suffered from diabetes and heart disease and shot himself at the age of 57, an age that 50-year-old Hemingway was rapidly approaching as he wrote *Across the River and into the Trees*. Ernest was obviously experiencing a common and predictable fear (shared by many adults 50 and over) of experiencing the ill health a parent has endured before dying—exacerbated, in Hemingway's case, by a fear of inheriting his father's suicidal depression.

Aging and the Literary History of Modernism

Hemingway might have been especially concerned about aging because he had achieved professional literary success so early in life. He had published what are arguably his three best books (*In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *A Farewell*

to Arms) by the time he was 30. His books during the next two decades—*Death in the Afternoon*, *To Have and Have Not*, *Green Hills of Africa*, and the more highly regarded *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—were not so consistently well received. Given the rapidly changing reception of his own books, he might well have felt that the cultural importance of modernism as a literary movement was fading rapidly. In her 2017 biography of Hemingway, Mary V. Dearborn contends that *Across the River and into the Trees* was "born, without a doubt, from Ernest's deep fears about his writing future and his reputation" (Dearborn 2017, 521-22). Some of those fears and anxieties about his own aging seeped into *Across the River and into the Trees* and cost Hemingway his aesthetic control of his material.

Hemingway was part of a modernist cultural milieu so early in life that a volume about his circle has been titled *Everybody Was So Young* (Vaill 1998). Other literary works of the period also demonstrated a preoccupation with youth. Consider such titles as Wilfrid Owen's 1917 poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth", Hemingway's own 1922 poem "Along with Youth", Wyndham Lewis's 1932 nonfiction work *Doom of Youth*, and Vera Brittain's 1933 memoir *Testament of Youth*. Hemingway's contemporary Malcolm Cowley wrote in *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* of what he called "the omnipresent culture of youth" among the expatriates who founded literary modernism (Cowley 1951, 237). Cowley argued in his introduction that the Lost Generation, which he defines as those who graduated from college (or were of age to do so) between 1915 and 1922, felt that their unique experiences (especially in World War I) united them with each other in opposition to earlier generations (Cowley 1951, 8).

Technology further divided young people of the 1920s from earlier generations. The explosive growth of print media led to magazines that catered to youthful audiences by celebrating (or sometimes bemoaning) dance parties, jazz, college athletes, and the "flapper" (McDonald 2013, 255). Young people flocked to the cinema, and films glamorized their young stars. Even the growing availability of automobiles contributed to the increasing freedom and sexual independence of young adults (McDonald 2013, 259).

The ideology of youthfulness was so vitally important to the Jazz Age that Scribners once promoted one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels in the *New York Times* by appealing to potential readers' experience of youthfulness: "WERE YOU EVER UNDER THIRTY? Then read *This Side of Paradise*" (qtd. in Meade 2004, 20). Zelda Fitzgerald once wrote approvingly in a short article titled "Eulogy on the Flapper" that "Flapperdom" mandated that women maximize the social

capital of youth: "It is making them intelligent and teaching them to capitalize their natural resources and get their money's worth. They are merely applying business methods to being young" (Fitzgerald 1991, 393). Elsewhere she wrote in a 1928 article of "the current insistence upon youth as the finest and richest time in the life of man" and explained further:

> [T]here has never been a time when so many positions of importance have been occupied by such young men or when the pages of newspapers and anthologies have borne the names of so many people under thirty (Fitzgerald 1991, 409).

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sound and The Fury,* and *Sons and Lovers* were all published before their authors passed the age of thirty. Modernism was widely (if perhaps unfairly) perceived as a product of the young.

Perhaps literary modernists' self-conscious insistence on youthfulness and the contrast between that insistence and Hemingway's own insecurities about aging and masculinity as expressed by his aging autobiographical hero together help explain why reviewers frequently evaluated *Across the River and into the Trees* in ageist terms. Lee Cheney Jessup, writing for the *Nashville Banner*, opens his review by mentioning the eager anticipation of readers longing for another *A Farewell to Arms*:

> They have reckoned, however, without consideration for the intervening years, and the fact that "Farewell to Arms" is the product of a young man's enthusiasm and vitality.
> The latest of Hemingway's is the product of a sadder and wiser personality. (Jessup 1977, 293)

The *Christian Science Monitor* called the novel "autumnal" and concluded that Hemingway "is on the brink of no longer having anything vital to say" (Kalem 1977, 307). Cowley writes that the novel is "a tired book" (Cowley 1977, 300), employing one of the most commonly used descriptors in the novel's contemporary reviews. Presumably, "tired" is code for a novel obviously written by an old man. Lewis Gannett described Cantwell as "a tired young-old man, in love with lost youth" (Gannett 1977, 289). The reviews suggest a critical

perception that modernism—the literary movement of which Hemingway was in the vanguard—was artistically exhausted and therefore being eclipsed. After all, by September 7, 1950, when *Across the River and into the Trees* was published (Baker 1972, 265), Hemingway's mentor Ezra Pound was institutionalized, and many of his other mentors, friends, and rivals were dead, including Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Maxwell Perkins, and James Joyce. True, T.S. Eliot had received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, but that might easily have seemed to Hemingway like a sign that the modernists' best work was behind them rather than a ratification of that work's literary excellence. As Cowley observed in writing of the 1920s, "it was hard for us to get used to the idea that there were rebels younger than ourselves, who regarded us as relics of an age that was passing" (Cowley 1951, 224). The expatriate modernists thought of themselves as the young avant garde and did not relish being supplanted by a still younger generation.

Isaac Rosenfeld, writing for the *Kenyon Review*, offers one of the most perceptive analyses of the critics' responses to Hemingway:

> It is easy to understand how Hemingway took hold of our imagination. The characters he created of the lost generation gave us an image of ourselves which we were glad to accept. (Rosenfeld 1977, 329)

The obvious corollary is that the character Hemingway created in *Across the River and into the Trees* was 50, tired, and dying—an image of themselves that few members of his generation would have found it easy to accept. Uncomfortable identifying with Hemingway's latest autobiographical avatar of his generation, the reviewers staged their uneasiness about their own aging in writing so disparagingly about Hemingway's depiction of their imaginary contemporary, the aged and terminally ill Richard Cantwell.

Across the River and into the Trees and the Optimistic Possibilities of Aging

Yet oddly, there are discordant notes that suggest that while Richard Cantwell sees age as decline, Hemingway could also envision more optimistic possibilities. For example, the narrator is kinder in his observations about the protagonist's physical appearance, observing of Cantwell:

> He did not notice the old used steel of his eyes nor the small, long extended laugh wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, nor that his broken nose was like a gladiator's in the oldest statues. Nor did he notice his basically kind mouth which could be truly ruthless. (Hemingway 1950, 112)

As William E. Cain notes of a similarly paradoxical comment about Santiago's appearance in *The Old Man and the Sea*, "Hemingway is prompting us to see the difference between how something appears (and what it might mislead us to believe about a person) and who someone is" (Cain 2006, 114). The fact that Cantwell's mental lapses are insignificant further indicates that Hemingway is not as convinced as Cantwell is that all aging is decline. The narrator suggests that Cantwell has gains as well as losses, something Cantwell himself, preoccupied with his perceived physical and mental deterioration, rarely acknowledges. Hemingway is evidently less convinced that the aging process involves exclusively negative changes than his protagonist is.[5]

Cantwell himself seems to recognize that the decline narrative is not inevitable when he recalls the Countess Dandolo:

> [S]he is over eighty, and she is as gay as a girl and does not have any fear of dying. She dyes her hair red and it looks very well. She is a good companion and an admirable woman". (Hemingway 1950, 47)

Similarly, Cantwell notes of the *Gran Maestro*, who is two years older than he is (Hemingway 1950, 55),

> The *Gran Maestro* was festive and well with the morning. He took his ulcers day by day, and his heart the same way. When they did not hurt he did not hurt either. (Hemingway 1950, 202)

It is possible to be very elderly ("over eighty") or ill (plagued with ulcers and a cardiac condition) and nevertheless remain "gay" and "festive". It is just Cantwell himself who cannot manage it.

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5 Suzanne del Gizzo sees similar contradictions in *The Dangerous Summer*, Hemingway's posthumously published memoir about a bullfighting rivalry in Spain during the summer of 1959 (del Gizzo 2016). While Hemingway was in somewhat better aesthetic control of *Across the River and into the Trees* than he was in this later book, the same anxieties inform the logic of both narratives.

Even the metaphor from which the title of this essay was taken sounds more admiring than condemnatory:

> The motorboat came gallantly up beside the piling of the dock. Every move she makes, the Colonel thought, is a triumph of the gallantry of the aging machine. We do not have war horses now like old Traveller, or Marbot's Lysette who fought, personally, at Eylau. We have the gallantry of worn-through rods that refuse to break; the cylinder head that does not blow though it has every right to, and the rest of it. (Hemingway 1950, 52)

As Wyatt suggests, "For an aging man, as the Colonel surely feels himself to be, the gallantry consists in accepting the gift of however much remaining time there might be" (Wyatt 2016, 54).

Drawing on Carlos Baker (1972, 280-82), several critics argue that the many faltering machines in the novel—including a "failing [speedboat] engine, the [elevator's] unstable current" (Stolzfus 2003, 25), and even "the balky locks and keys" (Seefeldt 1995, 258)—all become "tropes for Cantwell's failing heart" (Stolzfus 2003, 25). Interestingly, however, in each case, the machines *do* eventually work; the "mechanical disorders" are only momentary (Baker 1972, 279). The implication is that despite temporary mechanical disorders, most of us work pretty well in our fifties and, with luck, beyond.

One key moment for this reading occurs when Cantwell, walking the city, encounters two younger men whom—tellingly—he refers to as "former fascists" (Hemingway 1950, 186). Fascism celebrated youthfulness; in his book *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, Jon Savage writes, "The futurist insistence on the vitality of youth became the central part of the Fascist program" (Savage 2007, 195). Not realizing he understands Italian, the young men criticize Cantwell's gray hair, his uneven gait, and his combat boots and uniform before asserting his sexual impotence. Angry, he lies in wait for them, abruptly confronts them, and spits on the pavement at their feet. They promptly turn and run. Afterward Cantwell tells himself, "I should not blame them, since they were defeated", adding, "But their manners were not good in respect to a man of my rank and age" (Hemingway 1950, 187). The fact that he can vanquish them with "his old and worn death smile" and an unspoken threat suggests that Colonel Cantwell has lost none of his authoritative bearing, regardless of his age (Hemingway 1950, 187).

Perhaps the most persuasive argument that Hemingway is not as pessimistic as Cantwell about aging lies in Cantwell's improbable relationship with Renata. How decrepit can Cantwell be if he has managed to attract the romantic love and sexual desire of a teenager? Furthermore, the fact that she willingly listens as he lectures her at length about life suggests that she believes he has wisdom to impart. Hemingway, too, seems convinced that what Cantwell has learned throughout his life is valuable and should be shared with a younger person who can learn from it in turn. Certainly he had had similar experiences himself while covering World War II for *Collier's*. In a 1949 profile of Hemingway for *Life* magazine, Malcolm Cowley notes,

> Younger men and women come to him for advice about their literary problems and their love affairs, while he talks to them as if he were ninety years wise instead of only forty-nine. (Cowley 1950, 41)

The fact that the reviewers almost universally disparaged this aspect of the novel perhaps indicates that Hemingway was more optimistic about the value of aging than his reviewers were.

Finally, the novel's Venetian setting further emphasizes Hemingway's theme of the beauty and glory of what is already in a state of decline. "No one is ever old in Venice", Cantwell thinks to himself (Hemingway 1950, 93). Venice, which is in many ways the novel's main character (Stolzfus 2003, 25), is literally decaying and falling into ruins, yet its splendor is undeniable. The implication is that what is old can be valuable and beautiful not *despite* its age but *because of* its age.

In Thomas Mann's *Tod in Venedig* ("Death in Venice"), an important influence on *Across the River and into the Trees* (Seyppel 1957; Baker 1972, 266-67), the fifty-something protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, comes to Venice for his summer vacation, falls in love with a beautiful young boy, and dies rather suddenly, presumably of cholera. Before he dies, he gets a haircut and even wears makeup in a sadly misguided attempt to look younger:

> [A]lmost his last act is to have himself tailored and barbered and cosmeticized into a garish simulacrum of youthfulness—thus re-enacting the spectacle of the obscene and embarrassing young-old man which he had found so loathsome on the voyage into Venice. He has become exactly that which he most abhorred. (Tanner 1992, 359)

Aschenbach's love for the boy named Tadzio—which initially sounds like "adieu"—is really Aschenbach's narcissistic love for his own lost youth (Gullette 1993, 29). Similarly, Hemingway's Colonel Cantwell falls in love with a beautiful young woman who is the same age he was when he first came to Italy in World War I and was wounded at Fossalta, and her name, Renata, means "rebirth" (Lisca 1974, 292).

But Cantwell, unlike Mann's Aschenbach, never tries to disguise his age cosmetically. Like Aschenbach, he mourns his lost youth and is disgusted with his present age, but unlike Aschenbach, he refuses to pretend. His attitude (and, I suspect, Hemingway's) is Wordsworthian resignation:

> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,
> We will grieve not; rather find
> Strength in what remains behind. (Wordsworth 1904, 355-56)

The narrator gently reminds us that, in spite of Cantwell's terminal heart disease, he still wakes up happy every morning (Hemingway 1950, 289). Age does not necessarily bring despair.

Hemingway expresses very similar attitudes about aging in his fiction both before and after *Across the River and into the Trees*. In his 1933 short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", Hemingway presents what initially seems like a narrative of decline, in which a melancholy old man visits a café. The two waiters at the café discuss the old man, revealing that he has recently attempted suicide. They both believe him to be at least 80, and he seems plagued by loneliness and despair. Only gradually does the reader learn that the older waiter not only sympathizes with the old man but also shares his depression, which suggests that the old man's despair is not purely a result of his age. Similarly, in Hemingway's 1952 novella *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago is ostracized by his community for his unluckiness as a fisherman, which might indicate that because he is now old, he is no longer able to fish successfully as he once did. But in the course of the narrative Hemingway shows the reader that Santiago is not just capable of defying ageist expectations and landing a massive fish; he is also capable of teaching Manolin how to be a man. Marco Portales identifies a tradition of representing old men in American literature as moral educators of the young; while he focuses on nineteenth-century literature, he mentions

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* as a twentieth-century example of the tradition he traces (Portales 1989, 146). Similarly, Seefeldt suggests that "The persistent cross-generational theme—Cantwell constantly 'teaching' an eager Renata, as well as learning from her—implies an instinctive need to speak to younger generations" (Seefeldt 1995, 251). Hemingway's older protagonists, apparently exhausted and useless to society, nevertheless teach their protégés how to live.

Phillip Sipiora suggests that "there is a great deal to learn about aging successfully in Hemingway's fiction" (Sipiora 1999, 61). Similarly, Hemingway himself went on, despite the unfavorable critical reception of *Across the River and into the Trees,* to write *The Old Man and the Sea* (which won him both the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the Nobel Prize for Literature), portions of *The Garden of Eden* (his most experimental work, published posthumously), and *A Moveable Feast* (his best-selling memoir, also published posthumously)—hardly works anyone would characterize as signaling an artistic decline.

Across the River and into the Trees becomes a meditation on aging masculinity (particularly the stereotypical physical masculinity represented by the warrior) in which Hemingway expresses curiously ambivalent attitudes about what it is like to be in a 51-year-old aging body. Although Cantwell himself is preoccupied with his own decline, Hemingway's narrator subtly insists that aging is not the horror that Cantwell seems to believe it is. On the contrary, Cantwell wakes up happy every morning, does not try to disguise his aged appearance, still has the power to scare off would-be attackers with little more than a glare, and spends his last days in a city internationally known for both its age and its beauty. Hemingway presents the decline narrative in painful detail but ultimately subverts it by insisting on details that undermine its totalizing version of aging.

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Guardians of the Truth: The Elderly in Agatha Christie's Detective Fiction

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Abstract: In detective fiction written by Agatha Christie, the elderly characters are portrayed as being closely tied to the truth and consequently hold a crucial position in the narrative. As depicted in works centred on Miss Marple, old age represents a stage where one reaches the ability to understand human nature. The experience of the past enables the characters to recognize recurring patterns in human behaviour and use them in the search for the truth. Knowledge of this kind is subsequently elevated above rationality and deduction in the investigation process. The analysis conducted in the paper thus suggests that the elderly are the guardians and protectors of the truth that was purposefully hidden, twisted, or long forgotten, which is the case in Christie's non-Marple works such as *Elephants Can Remember* (1971). Despite their inconspicuousness, the elderly become the decisive piece needed to solve the puzzle. It is the ultimate realization of old age that although the world keeps changing, human nature remains the same.

Keywords: Agatha Christie, British detective fiction, Miss Marple, elderly, spinster

Introduction[1]

Considering Agatha Christie's prolific career of more than 60 novels published around the world – not to mention her short story collections, drama, and other literary contributions – an attempt to provide a generalization of all elderly characters portrayed would be somewhat problematic. Due to her invention of Miss Marple, who became one of the most iconic characters of the Golden Age of British detective fiction, the presence of an elderly figure may be considered a prominent feature in her writing. Be it in the role of friendly advisors, wealthy but vulnerable victims opposing the plans of their families, or mere peculiar

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village characters, the elderly tend to serve a clear purpose in Christie's fiction. Therefore, the paper's scope covers a specific type of older people that requires special attention. It is the case of those who have a strong connection with the truth, a generation whose upbringing taught them to value what is true and uphold the principles it represents.

Ultimately, their abilities, achieved and sharpened by old age, prove to be the necessary means to defeat the murderer. Christie's writing style further highlights this. In a fictional world where conversationalist detection is at the forefront, the power of knowledge, memory, thought, and the spoken word prevails over physical strength, which is more advantageous in works accentuating action. Such gifts are possessed by the elderly Miss Marple, whose unique position in the narrative enables her to investigate, intervene with the events and act in the name of justice. Additionally, the paper discusses the role of elderly characters who do not participate in the investigation itself but are situated at the core of the crime. Their presence contributes to discovering the clues and ensures the final triumph of the truth. The following pages thus also deal with the less notorious sleuth Mr Satterthwaite. The same applies to minor characters in works like *Towards Zero* (1991), *4.50 from Paddington* (2016), *A Caribbean Mystery* (2002), or *Elephants Can Remember* (2011), the analysis of which demonstrates a prototypical use of the elderly as the protectors of the truth.

Old Age, Human Nature and the Power of Experience

The paper focuses mainly on characters specifically depicted as a man or woman of an advanced age, and for whom, as may be argued, such description bears significant consequences in the narrative. However, philosophical approaches to the concept of old age show that classifications on the basis of age alone may be imprecise and insufficient. Although the mid-70s tend to be accepted as advanced age, this stage of life is manifested individually depending on biological, social and cultural factors (Scarre 2016, 6-9), which are the cause of stigmatization (Overall 2016, 17-18). Emphasizing the frailty of their bodies, Christie establishes the elderly in terms of biology, but the decisive factor appears to be retirement. It allows these characters to connect to the world around them without the pressures of daily schedules and follow their curiosity.

The most distinctive of the variations presented is the character of a spinster. Unmarried and without children, spinsters compensate for their lack of first-hand experience by witnessing other villagers' life stories. As observed

by Snell, Miss Marple as the spinster becomes "the micro-history expert … of a parochial history figured in local people" (Snell 2010, 36). The way passing years transform their community grants them the knowledge of human nature. Apart from *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1986), where the phrase appears prominently, it is also referred to in the author's previous novels.[2] Miss Marple proves to be the true master of the technique. Based on similarity, she recognizes patterns in people's behaviour, thus decoding their potentially dangerous tendencies. As Marple herself explains, "[o]ne begins to class people … just as though they were birds or flowers, group so and so, genus this, species that" (Christie 1986b, 252). Since she sorts them according to previously encountered categories, Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker classify her as a "structuralist detective" (Shaw and Vanacker 1991, 74). This recognition of the patterns corresponds with the intuition on which, in contrast with Poirot's cases, Miss Marple's stories, to an extent, rely. Equivalently to the skills mentioned above, intuition is strengthened with increasing age, as one gradually learns how to listen to one's inner voice. As stated by Marple, it is

> like reading a word without having to spell it out. A child can't do that, because it has had so little experience. But a grown-up person knows the word because he's seen it before. (Christie 1986b, 97)

Elderly ladies are portrayed as sharing information via their networks of neighbours in the village. With respect to the image of older people as seekers of the truth, it is necessary to examine how gossip fits into such a view. Shaw and Vanacker notice that if gossip presents both misleading and truthful propositions, the investigating figure resolves the conflict by making the correct selection between one and the other (Shaw and Vanacker 1991, 67). The argument seems to be supported by Maryann

2 Notably, it is included in *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1991). Incidentally, the novel introduces two old female characters, Mrs Harfield and Miss Viner. While not directly connected to the murder investigation, the latter provides the protagonist Katherine Grey with an almost prophetic piece of wisdom. Katherine and her elderly friends reside in St Mary Mead, the village associated with Miss Marple. Even though the novel was published earlier than *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Christie's *Autobiography* (2011) does not reveal any intentional influences or connections between the two works or any other Miss Marple story.

Ayim's discussion of gossip. After she compares it to Pierce's notion of scientific inquiry, she sees it as a means of inquiry similar to the process applied in scientific research (Ayim 1994, 88). In order to utilize the technique properly, the investigative gossipers "select when to listen and whom to listen to" (Ayim 1994, 90) while simultaneously testing their theories against the acquired evidence (Ayim 1994, 91).

Miss Marple's capability to decode the patterns in human nature therefore leads her to the truthful results of her inquiry. Although the experience is gained by living in the same village for years and the role of community does represent an essential feature in Miss Marple stories, she is not limited by the closed circle of St Mary Mead's residents. In spite of the existing claims that Miss Marple, as an investigating figure, fits primarily to the English countryside (Snell 2011, 34), the readers are reminded of the contrary in *A Caribbean Mystery*. Having left the established relationships between her fellow villagers and her native country, Miss Marple finds the personality prototypes just as accurate as in the British village (Christie 2002, 31).

In connection with detective fiction written by Christie, spinsterhood has been thoroughly studied through the lens of gender. The power of the experience that comes with old age is nevertheless possessed by elderly male characters as well. Mr Satterthwaite, an amateur detective figure in *The Mysterious Mr Quin* (1984), is a seasoned gentleman whose involvement in other people's affairs is fuelled by curiosity. With his "oddly elflike" (Christie 1984, 1) appearance, he silently judges events that unfold before his eyes like drama. Much like Miss Marple, he primarily follows his instincts. However, he does not act on his own accord – it is Mr Quin who initially sets him on the path of detection. A mysterious man who suddenly appears and vanishes to give Satterthwaite directions recognizes the potential of the old man to uncover past secrets. Michael Cook accentuates the almost supernatural presence of Mr Quin and describes the connection between them:

> It is significant that Christie chooses to make Quin the ghost, the essence of preternaturalness and intuition, whose observations seem all-knowing and miraculous. Satterthwaite, on the other hand, has a style that is earthbound; he is a man who uses the tools given to him, once the intuitive leap is made. (Cook 2014, 97)

Despite their undeniable successes, both Mr Satterthwaite and Miss Marple

approach their quest for the truth with modesty, which not only further proves their wisdom, but also results from experiencing ageing itself. The awareness of their own limits gives them the strength to accept themselves in their old age and the true state of the world. Acceptance enables them to live in harmony with the truth, which is an ability lacking in the other stages of life.

Christie also explores the struggles that the elderly population has to face daily due to their advanced age. Regarding old ladies, it is a fact that their judgment is questioned. For instance, that is the case of Elspeth McGillicuddy in *4.50 from Paddington*, who witnesses a murder committed on a train. Subsequently, she approaches her friend Marple and asks for help. Contrary to Elspeth and Miss Marple's expectations, the body is not discovered the following morning. As a result, the validity of Elspeth's words is doubted by the police officers. Although not entirely dismissed, the testimony is, on several occasions, considered inaccurate, fuelled by fantasies and influenced by crime novels. As illustrated by the discussion between Inspector Bacon and the Chief Constable, Christie stresses that age, rather than any other characteristics, is the reason one is not being taken seriously:

> As far as all that goes, I dare say it's just make-believe – sort of thing old ladies do make up, like seeing flying saucers at the bottom of the garden, and Russian agents in the lending library. (Christie 2016, 74)

It is only after Marple's insider Lucy finally discovers the body that the pursuit of justice finally earns credibility in the official circles. The elderly characters also cannot escape feelings of isolation. Mr Satterthwaite especially avoids groups of young people, as he does not share the same values as they do. He does not participate in the drama between the characters, and, in "The Coming of Mr Quin," first speaks only after being addressed by Mr Quin. Charlotte Beyer suggests that "[h]e remains a marginalized figure, until he steps in able to solve the mystery, but it is his outsider position that enables him to see and understand" (Beyer 2016, 71). In the post-war Miss Marple novels, the spinster feels the divide between her and the younger generations due to the changing world around her. This is described by Snell, who sees her as "in her place but out of her time" (Snell 2010, 36). One of the moments where it is apparent is when she observes the village in *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1986):

> St Mary Mead was not the place it had been. … You could blame the war (both the wars), or the younger generation, or women going out to work, or the atom bomb, or just the Government – but what one really meant was the simple fact that one was growing old. (Christie 1986a, 2)

Later, Miss Marple can solve the mystery behind Heather Badcock's poisoning. She recognizes that even after all this time, her human nature method still applies. By seeing the parallels between Heather and Alison Wilde, Marple understands that while the world might have changed, human nature and all its weaknesses are still the same.

Those Who See

Unlike the younger generations, Christie's old characters are highly attentive to their surroundings. Miss Marple's additional advantage lies in her inconspicuousness. It is connected to her character as a spinster, which demonstrates "the dialectic between seeing and being seen, omniscience and invisibility" (Mezei 2007, 104). Mr Satterthwaite's method of investigation relies primarily on the observation of people as well. In "The Coming of Mr Quin", he notices a detail usually overlooked by men his age – Mrs Portal's hair is dyed. Considering the short story collection was first published in 1930, such a fact suggests either a change in her identity or efforts to conceal something in her past, which proves to be the core of the whole mystery. Later, Mr Satterthwaite is the only one aware of Mrs Portal eavesdropping on the conversation between him, Alec Portal, and the others.

Furthermore, he pays close attention to her physical reactions to the content of the discussion. However, he discloses the observation from everyone else before making a final judgment. Beyer argues that Mr Satterthwaite is exceptional due to his ability of "seeing differently" (Beyer 2016, 74). In an attempt to understand the character of others with nothing more than listening and looking closely, it appears as if he tried to create a mental connection between them and himself. After Satterthwaite sees her unusual paleness, he senses that Mrs Portal may be in trouble. As a result, he prevents Mrs Portal from committing suicide. This is not the last moment when his observant nature saves an innocent life.

Nonetheless, Christie's works do not restrict the gift of seeing solely to the

two notorious characters. On the contrary, her texts accentuate the relationship between what are seemingly hidden and elderly figures, who can look truth in its face. Regardless of their ailing health and the constant changes in modern society, these elderly characters remain deeply connected with their surroundings. Not only do they notice even the slightest change in spaces they have occupied for years, but they also actively seek updates on relationships shaping their immediate community. The mind they possess is on high alert, ready not only to see but also perceive and process the world around them. It is a quality such as this that aligns them with the journey towards the truth, and, additionally, what makes them become the obstacle for the murderer.

In *4.50 from Paddington*, Mrs McGillicuddy unexpectedly finds herself on such a journey. When travelling by train, it does not escape the sight of the old lady that another train is approaching, running in parallel with hers. As one of the window blinds lifts, it reveals the back of a man strangling a blonde woman. Chris Ewers emphasizes the importance of the train's speed in "Genre in Transit: Agatha Christie, Trains, and the Whodunit" (2016). According to his observations, the two trains create a static moment, as if time stopped and allowed the scene to happen (Ewers 2016, 103). Elspeth, an elderly outsider in the modern, fast-paced times, is not absorbed in the "usual blur of onrushing trains" (Ewers 2016, 103). Instead, she takes the time to observe the passing scenery. Elspeth's presence of mind in that one crucial moment is what sets the action into motion. Even though her role may be attributed to a coincidence, in her thoughts she believes that it was her destiny to be at the right place at the right moment: "If the blind of the carriage had not happened to fly up… But that, of course, was Providence" (Christie 2016, 8). There is a feeling of duty which she cannot ignore despite her own travel plans. Since it is not within her powers to interfere with the situation itself (Ewers 2016, 104), she wishes to contribute by her testimony to uncover the truth – fully aware that she is the only one who can do that.

The murderer continuously disregards the danger that the two ladies pose for him. After Elspeth answers Marple's calling to fulfil her duty once again, she arrives at Rutherford Hall. Miss Marple pretends to choke on a bone, thus putting her suspect in the same position as the murderer on the train. Consequently, he is recognized by Mrs McGillicuddy. Unaware of the witness, he underestimates Miss Marple's sharp mind and falls into her trap. The well-calculated, detailed plan crumbles due to Elspeth keeping her eyes open, seeing what nobody else could.

Similarly, the presence of the retired Major Palgrave on the island of St

Honoré causes the criminal's downfall in *A Caribbean Mystery*. Widowed and with no immediate family, Palgrave connects with the outside world by means of telling stories. He may be seen carrying around a stack of photographs in his wallet, readily providing his fellow guests at the Golden Palm resort with the history behind each of them. Most of the snapshots were taken at locations like Kenya, where Palgrave spent several years. One of them was, however, obtained via his social network as a gift from a doctor at the club. The medic coincidentally took a picture of a man whose wife committed suicide. The circumstances of the incident were rather suspicious. With the help of another doctor, it is revealed that a similar case occurred again and that the man in the photograph is a serial wife killer who likely committed both crimes. Major Palgrave now keeps the snapshot and poses a rather daring question to Miss Marple: "Like to see the picture of a murderer?" (Christie 2002, 19). Miss Marple immediately understands it has become a part of "his repertoire of stories" (Christie 2002, 19), since it is evident that it "had been worked up a good deal in repeated telling" (Christie 2002, 19). At the end of the conversation, Palgrave pauses for a while, stares over Marple's right shoulder and freezes because he recognizes the man among the guests at the Golden Palm resort. Unfortunately, his gaze meets the eyes of the murderer, and he pays for the exchange of stories with his life.

Miss Marple identifies Palgrave as a typical retired major, "[a]n elderly man who needed a listener so that he could, in memory, relive the days in which he had been happy" (Christie 2002, 10). The photograph itself represents more than a mere old man's natural curiosity. His obsession with it shows that, to him, they are special objects of attachment. In general, possessions bear significance for the plot in detective fiction, as they provide additional layers to the characters connected with the crime (Mills 2016, 29). The same applies to Palgrave, whose interest in photographs is fuelled by feelings of nostalgia. Reminisces of the past are his only reason to keep the snapshots for all these years. Although it results in his death, such a tendency of his transmits the information to Miss Marple, which proves to be essential in solving not only his murder, but also crimes from the past and near future.

Instead of disbelief, Palgrave faces the lack of interest of the other guests. Initially, this includes Miss Marple herself, as she is unable to listen attentively. Palgrave's death is dismissed as a natural occurrence due to his age. He is quickly forgotten and life on the island continues as if nothing had happened, showing the seeming insignificance of an elderly man:

> Life here was sunshine, sea, and social pleasures. A grim visitor had interrupted these activities, casting a momentary shadow, but the shadow was now gone. After all, nobody had known the deceased very well. (Christie 2002, 51)

Some even express their relief – the superstitious Señora de Caspearo believes Palgrave's "evil eye" (Christie 2002, 214) brought bad luck to the island. The mention of the glass eye, reminiscent of the wounds in war, makes Miss Marple realize that, in fact, Major Palgrave was looking in a different direction since he could not see with the glass eye. Due to what he had seen, Marple and Rafiel are able to save the life of the intended future victim. In the end, Palgrave became one of the most significant participants in the series of events that began many years ago. He also earns a place in Miss Marple's memory:

> As one grew older, … one got more and more into the habit of listening; listening possibly without any great interest, but there had been between her and the major the gentle give and take of two old people. It had had a cheerful, human quality. She did not actually mourn Major Palgrave but she missed him. (Christie 2002, 52)

Miss Marple's achievement to prevent a crime in *A Caribbean Mystery* represents a ground breaking point in the development of her character, leading to the later events in *Nemesis* (1988).

Those Who Remember

The next section explores the elderly in correlation with memory and the past. *Towards Zero* introduces the idea of the zero hour, in other words, the moment of the murder. The roots of the act, though, lie in a distant past. Mr Treves, a retired solicitor and criminologist, criticizes detective fiction's structure as it begins with the crime itself. He says that "[a] murder is the culmination of a lot of different circumstances, all converging at a given moment at a given point" (Christie 1991, 206).

Searching for the truth in the past is therefore the detective's task. Time keeps on passing, which the murderers may use to their advantage. To purposefully

hide the truth, they rely on the fact that nobody remembers what happened and there is nobody left to care about the said events. In a world where everyone expects the future without looking back, there are the elderly who were present at the time. Because of their outsider position in the events – as neighbours, servants, or mere bystanders – the culprit is not even aware of their existence. But the old people carry their memories like a treasure and are more than happy to share them with others. Without their recollections, the clues would never be discovered, and there would be no starting point for the investigation. It is their memory that protects the truth as it is from being twisted in anybody's favour.

Christie focuses on the significance of memory in *Elephants Can Remember*. The crime committed in the novel is regarded as a fading moment in the past. It might have caused a sensation when it made the headlines at the time, but the rest of the world moved on without waiting for definite answers. Not as much for Mrs Burton-Cox. Her son is engaged to the daughter of a married couple who was found shot on the edge of a cliff. While wild theories, including a suicide pact, circulated among the public, Mrs Burton-Cox wishes to know the truth. Celia, the future bride, is secretly troubled by unanswered questions about the incident. The detective figures in the text are Ariadne Oliver, Celia's godmother, and Hercule Poirot. Mrs Oliver, first repulsed by Mrs Burton-Cox's request to revisit the case, serves as the interrogator of the elephants, as she calls those who remember events from the distant past (Christie 2011b, 34). Even though Mrs Oliver admits to not having a close bond with Celia, as she is also one of her many goddaughters whom she barely sees throughout the years, Ariadne remembers sharing mutual acquaintances with the victims. She assembles their contacts from her address book and tries to reconstruct who might have been present in the area when the suspicious tragedy took place.

Kate M. Quinn sees memory as one of the fundamental tropes of the crime genre, exploring the relationship between the memories themselves and the way one's own recollections may change over time (Quinn 2020, 310). Considering the detection itself relies on what the investigator learns from past witnesses or suspects, the question of reliability is of the essence here (Quinn 2020, 311). Since many years have already passed, Mrs Oliver assesses the value of information given to her based on the elephant's personality.

Elephants Can Remember presents to the readers an intriguing solution to the issue of recollection. Unexpectedly, solving the complicated case of suicide and murder does not require the memories of Mrs Oliver's elephants to be as fresh

as years ago. Instead, she realizes that there are fragments of the truth in their memories, which represent the missing pieces needed to fill in the blanks. Whether it is the old grumpy Julia Carstairs or a retired nanny, they contribute with crucial information about Celia's mother Margaret, for instance her habit of wearing wigs, her sister being admitted to a mental hospital, or a former love triangle between Margaret, her twin sister Dorothea, and her husband. A crucial indicator of the truth appears when recollections of the elephants seem to contradict one another. While some of them remember how fond the dog was of Margaret, others report its aggressive behaviour, resulting in her having scars from its bites (Christie 2011b, 128). Owing to the elderly elephants, the preserved knowledge of the past clears the name of Celia and her husband.

In *Towards Zero*, the memory of Mr Treves alters not only his fate but also a fate of an extraordinary love square. As he finds himself at a dinner in Lady Tressillian's house, complicated relationships between the guests create a tense atmosphere. Here, among his companions, he recognizes a child murderer whom he encountered years ago as a criminologist. The eighty-year-old man proceeds to tell a story about the culprit without mentioning the gender. Mentally unstable and full of jealousy, the child planned the crime for vengeance. Although the police treated the case like an accident, Treves suspects otherwise. He remembers that the murderer possessed a specific physical feature. The culprit lives free somewhere in the world, but the old man remembers and would identify the peculiarity anywhere (Christie 1991, 92). His recollection leads to death, as the said murderer forges a placard informing about a lift being out of order. Indirectly orchestrated by the culprit, the result is that the old man's weak heart in combination with alcohol causes his demise. Mr Treves is momentarily defeated by means of his frail body.

Despite the suspicions, the police are not alerted, once again, on the basis of his poor health and age. The guests sense that there is a meaning behind the story, but initially, they decide not to reflect on it, as is shown by Thomas Royde's reaction: "I don't see that it's relevant in any way. It's not as though Treves were alive and could tell them anything" (Christie 1991, 178). Most importantly, this is precisely how the murderer feels. There is no more danger from Treves, and preparations for the upcoming crimes may resume. Nonetheless, the criminologist's legacy prevails as the story finally reaches the investigators in the novel, Superintendent Battle, Inspector Leach, and an amateur sleuth Angus MacWhirter. In the end, they are able to identify the culprit based on the physical peculiarity and prevent

the zero hour – his initial goal to frame an innocent person for murder.

Guardians of the Truth

It is no coincidence that Mr Treves recounts the story in the circle of Lady Tressillian's guests. As an intellectual and experienced man, he is fully aware of the dangerous nature of the knowledge that he has (Christie 1991, 9). Thomas Royde and Mary Aldin later realize what his aim was – to confront the murderer face to face and, additionally, to warn him against any possible action in the future. That is supported in the narrative passages, where he is described as expressing himself in a slow manner, "apparently choosing his words with great deliberation and care" (Christie 1991, 91). On the night of his death, Treves concludes the story by questioning if the child "still got a murderer's heart" (Christie 1991, 92). Whether or not he was ready to take further action is never revealed to the readers, but the story itself manifests the bravery of an elderly man such as Treves. He is determined to fight for the truth despite the danger. Such an act, therefore, transforms him into a guardian whose protection of what is right and true is not broken even after his death.

The role of the guardian is elevated to a new level via Miss Marple in *Nemesis* and the preceding events in *A Caribbean Mystery*. Lacking the support of her English allies, the spinster finds herself in a desperate situation. Once she takes the decisive step to intervene, she realizes that there is nobody to take immediate action, which is necessary. Solving the mystery no longer represents a game or a puzzle. Instead, it becomes a battle between good and evil, and it nearly transcends into a spiritual dimension. In the moments of tension, the readers witness Marple's prayer-like state of mind: "Miss Marple, feeling rather like a humble deputy of the Almighty, almost cried aloud her need in Biblical phrasing. *Who will go for me? Whom shall I send?*" (Christie 2002, 162). Finally, it is the wealthy Mr Rafiel who helps the old lady with her quest after she calls herself Nemesis, a goddess of retribution, expressing her anger towards the deceitful murderer.

In *Nemesis*, she learns about Mr Rafiel's passing and is deeply affected since their alliance against evil was so meaningful. Soon after, she receives a letter written by Rafiel before his death. He asks the elderly lady to embark on a quest to save an innocent life and arranges for her journey along with the suspects of murder. Mr Quin's guidance of Mr Satterthwaite is similar to how Marple

perceives the directions given to her by Rafiel. The influential man even arranges for her the protection of two female bodyguards in disguise, whom Marple calls her "guardian angels" (Christie 1988, 202). The task is never further specified, leaving the old lady in a situation where she first needs to identify the crime and subsequently tries to be the bearer of justice. As noticed by J. C. Bernthal, it is purposeful that the victim's name is revealed to be Verity Hunt, as Miss Marple brings the "scriptural promise of ultimate judgment from a higher source" (Bernthal 2019, 176). Her bravery is tested in the moment of confrontation. She refuses to drink poisoned milk, which is prepared for her by the culprit and served with a façade of heartfelt service. Miss Marple does not crumble in a moment of crisis and calls the two bodyguards to her aid before the murderer manages to attack.

In contrast to her harmless appearance, the inner strength of the elderly woman does not flinch even when directly facing evil. Frequently described as "woolly and fluffy" (Christie 2016, 138), Miss Marple overcomes all obstacles of her age and fulfils her role as the avenger of the unjustly accused. As much as she may seem inconspicuous, her expertise in guarding the untouchability of the truth makes her a formidable opponent. Christie herself admits to not approaching the character ambitiously at first: "Miss Marple insinuated herself so quietly into my life that I hardly noticed her arrival" (Christie 2011a, 435). However, her potential kept on growing until it reached its final development. *Nemesis* thus portrays Miss Marple's journey as the final success of an ageing character who fights not only against the forces of evil but also the prejudice of society and one's own limitations. She represents the ultimate triumph of all undervalued elders utilized in Christie's fiction.

Compared with other detective figures by the same author, Miss Marple's happy ending appears to be everlasting. The rewards for providing the solution are numerous, including the twenty thousand pounds promised by Mr Rafiel. When she shares her plans to "have some fun" (Christie 1988, 221) with the money, she reminds Mr Schuster of a giggling young girl. Thus, Miss Marple is metaphorically given her youth back for a moment. And finally, on behalf of the other elderly characters tirelessly guarding the truth, she earns well-deserved respect. The way she impresses those who previously doubted her might be demonstrated in her last in-person meeting with Mr Rafiel:

> He took her hand.
> '*Ave Caesar, nos morituri te salutamus*,' he said.
> 'I'm afraid,' said Miss Marple, 'I don't know very much Latin.'
> 'But you understand that?'
> 'Yes.' She said no more. She knew quite well what he was telling her. (Christie 2002, 287)

Conclusion

The elderly characters in the selected works above demonstrate that, in order to fight for the truth, one sometimes requires knowledge and skills, which may be acquired solely by years of experience. Despite the constraints inflicted on them by their own ageing body and isolation from younger generations, who either disregard their value or belittle them, the elderly become the last remaining resistance against evil and the key to solving the mystery. Miss Marple's universally applicable patterns of behaviour show that unlike the world, human nature seems unchanged. Mr Satterthwaite, Mrs McGillicuddy and Major Palgrave keep their eyes wide open and thus see what other people cannot. On the other hand, the truth is protected from alterations by the memory of the elephants and Mr Treves, whose presence the murderer does not anticipate. With their memory and the use of experienced observation, the elderly characters, both male and female, each accept the role of the guardian. Considering how unpleasant and potentially risky that is, their resolve is crucial for their portrayal as the protectors. In their own way, they decide not to stay idle. They either get involved in the detection of a crime or intervene in the events to ensure the future punishment of the criminal. Nevertheless, their role in a crime narrative culminates with Miss Marple's transformation into Nemesis. As the goddess of divine retribution, she is the embodiment of the final victory of an elderly character in Christie's detective fiction.

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"Mean and Shabby and Wrinkled": The Experience of Middle Age in American Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction

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Abstract. This article examines the nuance of aging masculinity presented in hard-boiled detective fiction, something that is frequently lost amid sleek Hollywood portrayals of these characters. The detectives of this genre are inevitably middle-aged men and aging—along with vulnerability—is thus a fundamental, if often disavowed, element of the form. Among the early authors of this school, Raymond Chandler proves to be the most reflective on the topic of mortality. This article examines *The Long Goodbye* (1953) as a guiding illustration of hard-boiled insights into aging, along with supporting examples from the genre's history, particularly the works of Dashiell Hammett. The question of hard-boiled realism is of special note to this discussion, as these works ostensibly offer a platform for more "true" representations of male bodies as they age. However, Chandler's hard-boiled realism, typified in the 1944 essay "The Simple Art of Murder", bases authenticity on style and language rather than on verisimilitude. This conflicting realism undoubtedly explains the halting representations of aging in hard-boiled fiction. The detective's experience of age can be disavowed with a well-chosen quip or a well-placed right hook. This essay will read this inherent tension—that is, between articulation and renunciation—with respect to male aging within the hard-boiled ethos.

Keywords: Mid-century American fiction, detective fiction, hard-boiled, masculinity, aging

The masculinity of hard-boiled detective fiction is commonly reduced to flat images of the Hollywood "tough guy"; however, this form is far more nuanced in the original fiction drafted by John Carrol Daly, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler in the first half of the twentieth century. The detectives of this era are inevitably middle-aged men, a detail that is frequently lost in the sleek portrayals of their hyperbolic masculinity. Aging is thus a fundamental, if often

disavowed, element of the form, and vulnerability is a key aspect of these characters. The detectives are not immortal, or even at the top of their game, and the trope of the hard-boiled operative being knocked unconscious is perhaps the greatest figure of this age-won susceptibility. Hard-boiled bodies do indeed bruise, bleed, and break down. Engaging genre- and gender criticism as well as age studies, this essay will examine the ways this fiction opens a popular space for thinking of the aging male body and the experience of middle age for men, reading a variety of works alongside one of the best distillations of hard-boiled aging, which is found in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953).

Aging in Literature

Western literature necessarily struggles with representations of aging, as the hero's journey is most often the tale of spatial traversal or appropriation. Indeed, aging as such appears only intermittently and as disruption, discontinuity, or faint warning from a distant future's ghost. Jacob Jewusiak, reading Dickens, suggests that the great irony of expansive realist novels of the nineteenth century is that these do a better job articulating the "social spaces of modernity" than "representing the temporal continuity of an individual life" (Jewusiak 2013, 209). Dickens calls attention to this limitation through the old men that populate his works. These wan figures reveal the ways in which the gendered values at the core of a man's identity, particularly as these are built upon a man's ability to produce and provide, are unsustainable across a lifetime. As Jewusiak concludes,

> What elderly men allow us to see is a fault line at the heart of Victorian culture, where the white, male, middle-class subject is forced to cede power and inhabit a position of lesser influence in old age. (Jewusiak 2013, 210)

Thus, aging, a universal experience, cannot be represented by the novel form of the time.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette, one of the leading scholars of age studies, examines how we are aged primarily by culture—and not biology—through lived narratives that determine the limits of our abilities and imagination. That we are the stories we tell about ourselves is a well-established insight, and these stories are always embedded, often quietly, with strict expectations regarding

age. Quoting a 1960 Randall Jarrell essay, Gullette emphases: "Our culture is essentially periodical: we believe that all that is deserves to perish and to have something else put in its place" (Gullette 2004, 29). Naturally, this speaks not to actual deaths, but rather to "the furtive power of decline to instill a masochistic belief in human obsolescence" (Gullette 2004, 29). In the era of unending screen time, Viagra, and democratically distributed cosmetic procedures to approximate something akin to youthful appearances, this culturally mediated obsolescence is undeniably happening at younger ages, for both men and women. As was the point of Jewusiak's reading of Dickens, capitalism cannot indefinitely support its promised largesse, neither in symbolic nor productive economies. Men—and likewise women—must be replaced. To these ends, social media today is especially instructive, and there can be no better support of Gullette's claim that our experience of aging is primarily cultural and not biological than twenty-somethings opting for aesthetic surgery to "look young" on camera. Our bodies change with each passing moment, but "getting old", regardless of when that threshold might be defined, is far too often taken as the end of the story.

Gullette cautions that reading aging in an opposite fashion, as a narrative of acquisition through which we "get better" over time, is as pernicious as narratives of decline. Such storylines of gain are prone to gender-, race-, and class privilege that impedes a majority from "gracefully" moving past middle age. Gullette makes the distinction between life storytelling and age autobiographies and offers the latter as a method for critically reimagining narratives of aging. Life storytelling follows the logic of loss and gain, and in literature, youth is typically the gold standard through which these are reckoned. In these stories, the former (past) self is regarded as a distinct object of reflection different from the current self, effectively erasing the experience of time, as the past self is read as discontinuous from the present. Therefore, for Gullette, continuity (of past and present selves) becomes the primary strategy of age autobiography, allowing one to read the enfolding of the "embodied psyche in culture over time" (Gullette 2004: 158). Only in this way might we reflect on our captivity in cultural narratives of aging and endeavor to draft a story that engages change across the lifespan.

Time and Aging in the Classical- to Hard-boiled Detective Fiction

The whodunit formula of early classical detective fiction (e.g., C. August Dupin and Sherlock Holmes) follows a strategy like the life storytelling spoken

of by Gullette, as the past is viewed as a discrete object of reflection—one that must be read and understood as different, or an exception, if a peaceful return to order is to occur. The murdered corpse is initially a bodily memory of a community's failure; however, the format promises to organize this chaos through the detective's brilliance. Some critics have gone so far as to suggest that the classical detectives are embodiments of reason itself, and certainly the reader learns very little about the actual body of Sherlock Holmes other than the fact that he has a "lean" stature and is "over six feet" tall, the obligatory threshold of vital masculinity (Doyle 2001, 16). *A Study in Scarlet* contains perhaps the most famous description of the detective. Holmes is said to have "sharp and piercing" eyes, a "hawk-like" nose suggesting "alertness and decision", and a chin that "marks the man of determination" (Doyle 2001, 16). The metaphor of the detective as reason is literally written on his face.

While aging is largely barred from the Holmes stories, one fascinating exception deserves mention and that is "The Adventure of the Creeping Man" (1923). This is the story of Professor Presbury, who at 61 years old is engaged to a significantly younger woman. Trevor Bennett, the professor's personal secretary, is engaged to Presbury's daughter. The two notice exceptionally odd behavior in the father, as they find him crawling down hallways and climbing the trellis outside his daughter's window late at night. Holmes discovers that Presbury had begun taking supplements given to him by an unscrupulous doctor from Prague, which were derived from Langur monkeys of the Himalayas. The injections were meant to unlock the "secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life"—presumably by boosting testosterone—but these comically result in the odd Langur-like behaviors of the professor (Doyle 2005, 1662). Sylvia Pamboukian has examined the linkages of this story with medical and popular interest in male menopause, along with hormone treatment, in the early 1900s. Victorian masculinity is middle class and pre-menopausal, a time in life that cannot be maintained indefinitely; however, hormone therapy offers a drastic revision to the story of aging, in this case resulting in vitality and sexuality beyond middle age (Pamboukain 2017, 20). In the end, Holmes condemns this experiment and defends traditional limits of manhood and the notion that "aging means that the individual must accept himself or herself as diminished" (Pamboukain 2017, 23). Nevertheless, the change in Presbury, though attributed to an abuse of science, is a literal modernization of ideas and attitudes about the aging male body. Undoubtedly, the more progressive-thinking Doyle is having fun at the

expense of his celebrated protagonist. This is certainly an expansion of the genre, even if it is a comic departure in the Holmes stories.

Unlike the retrospective presentation of time in classical detective works, hard-boiled fiction has always been celebrated for its immediacy, a feature found in the first-person narration that dominates the genre. The gritty portrayal of violence, urban decay, and suburban decadence is hard-boiled's celebrated realism. Chandler's 1944 essay "The Simple Art of Murder" grounds this realism on the speech of "common men", but he reminds that "when it develops to the point of becoming a literary medium it only looks like speech" (Chandler 1950b, 17). Hard-boiled realism is thus an art, and this was Chandler's lofty goal for this low literature. In subsequent revisions to his essay, the author distances himself from the term realism, focusing instead on the genre's striking style and language and its ability to evoke "scene", "fear", and "atmosphere", as Miranda Hickman has identified (Hickman 2003, 247). Permanence was the measure of this new literary value, a difficult task in what was largely the disposable medium of pulp fiction. Chandler's 1950 "Introduction" to the collection *Trouble is My Business* is often overlooked in comparison to the "The Simple Art" piece, but it insightfully expands the author's analysis of the difficulties of literary achievement in formula fiction. This essay includes the line "pulp paper never dreamed of posterity", but this is precisely what Hammett completed and what Chandler aspired to do (Chandler 1950a, vii). The point here is not to devolve into a biographical criticism by citing authors' ambitions; however, the question of male obsolescence is intimately linked to the form, content, and market context of these works, a fact that no doubt accounts for the insights on aging found throughout genre. Representations of time and aging must be counted among the many innovations of hard-boiled's literary art, as these works are in large part a meditation on the experience of (looming) obsolescence in middle age.

Aging Hard-Boiled Masculinity

The hard-boiled focus on aging begins with the middle-aged protagonists of these works. In Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), we are told that Philip Marlowe is 33 years old, and he is 42 in his final installment, *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Hammett's detectives are likewise older men. The Continental Operative is described as overweight and middle-aged, and Sam Spade from *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) is well-worn and in his thirties, as is Carrol John Daly's Race Williams and Mickey

Spillane's Mike Hammer. While life in one's 30s has a much different resonance today, in 1929 the average male life expectancy in America was 55 years (University of California). This number is undoubtedly skewed by healthcare inequities and infant mortality rates of the time, but the hard-boiled dick's world-weariness is clearly rooted in advancing years appropriate to the era. This is a key component of the genre and is maintained by most subsequent authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who feature male detectives. The hard-boiled sleuth has the remains of vitality and is not to be trifled with by any means, yet he is old enough to know his limits, even if he does not live within them.

The hard-boiled investigator is interestingly poised between lost youth and embittered representations of old age, a precariousness that is magnified by the hazard of his everyday experience. He is effectively the opposite of the more cerebral classical detective: He is a man of action, and words are "not much good unless the threat of death is behind them", as Sam Spade tells Caspar Gutman in *The Maltese Falcon* (Hammett 2000, 190). Tzvetan Todorov described the hardboiled protagonist as the "vulnerable detective" and emphasizes that this fiction's "chief feature is that the detective loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, constantly risks his life, in short he is integrated into the universe of characters, instead of being an independent observer" (Todorov 1977, 51). This integration opens the door to experiencing time and aging for the hard-boiled detective precisely through this vulnerability. In Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, for example, the Continental Op- is beaten numerous times and is called "fat, middle-aged, hard-boiled, [and] pig-headed", by the prostitute Dinah Brand (Hammett 2000, 517). This violence is often eroticized and projected onto the femme fatale character. In *The Maltese Falcon*, the detective Sam Spade memorably turns Brigid O'Shaunessy over to the police, even though "all of [him]" wants to run away with her, an act that he knows all too well would result in betrayal and his destruction (Hammett 2000, 223). Greg Forter suggests a fundamental male masochism in Hammett, exemplified by the femme fatale character who serves as an externalization of "the disguised return of an inadmissible pleasure: a pleasure in psychic self-dissolution… that's deeply at odds with our culture's commitment to masculine singularity and power" (Forter 2000, 17). The pleasure taken in this loss of power presents a unique representation of masculinity that stands quite apart from conventional expectations of manhood.

In *The Glass Key* (1931), time is referenced through a conflict of generations represented by the interplay among political henchman-turned-detective, Ned

Beaumont; Paul Madvig, the criminal political boss; and the patriarch, Senator Henry. Paul Madvig represents old-school masculinity of brute force that falters as he tries to gain legitimacy within the Senator's enduring—albeit increasingly threatened—paternalistic realm. As Madvig explains his way of fighting to Ned, "when you got somebody cornered you go in and finish them" (Hammett 1989, 61), but this strategy fails throughout the novel, particularly as Madvig attempts to legitimize his enterprise through his affiliation with the senator. Beaumont chooses to maintain his freedom by refusing such ties, but the result is a curiously eroticized suffering. In a beating that lasts several chapters and includes a suicide attempt by Beaumont to stop the pain, thug Jeff Gardner delights in thrashing Beaumont in and out of unconsciousness. At one point, he says that he wants to try something on Beaumont who is nearly unconscious on the bed: "He leaned over Ned Beaumont, his hands busy on Ned Beaumont's body. Ned Beaumont's body and arms and legs jerked convulsively and three times he groaned. After that he lay still" (Hammett 1989, 77). This orgasmic experience of pain is repeated in various forms throughout the novel. Each time Beaumont comes back for more, prompting Garnder to call him a "God-damned massacrist" (Hammett 1989, 157). In Forter's reading, Beaumont becomes a figure of "masochistic femininity", thus thwarting, in these jarring instances, the reader's expectation of standard hard-boiled characterization, at least in part (Forter 2000, 45). This offers a more progressive presentation of the femme fatale, Janet, in the novel. Indeed, rather than renunciation, Beaumont will run away, in a fashion, with her at the conclusion. The detective takes ownership of his desire, and likewise vulnerability, rather than externalizing and vilifying the woman as its bearer.

This conclusion is undoubtedly correct; however, there are two significant moments that reference time—and likewise aging—amidst the pain experienced by Beaumont. Before his days-long beating begins, Beaumont asks Shad O'Rory how old his dog is, to which the gangster replies, "Just about the limit, seven" (Hammett 1989, 69). Later, when O'Rory has the dog attack Beaumont, the animal moves "sluggishly" and with "cumbersome haste", and just before striking he "star[es] morosely" at Beaumont, in affinity with the defeated man (Hammett 1989, 72-73). The dog's tired hesitation and exhaustion mirror Beaumont's own—both are at their limits and move increasingly toward decrepitude. This is emphasized again later when Garnder says to Beaumont, "Come on, Rip Van Winkle, come to life", trying to revive the latter for further beating (Hammett

1989, 76). While the Rip Van Winkle reference is meant as a thug's bad joke, Beaumont is much like Washington Irving's protagonist who finds himself unsuited for the new America after his slumber and curiously old before his time. This is the experience of the vulnerable middle-aged hard-boiled detective who finds himself suddenly out-of-step and left behind by the passage of time.

Chandler's Simple Art of Aging

Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) offers an especially interesting representation of hard-boiled aging. This was the final completed novel in the series—*Playback*, the final novel published in 1958, was adapted from an earlier screenplay. The story is framed by Marlowe's friendship with Terry Lennox, the kept husband of Sylvia Lennox, daughter to the millionaire Harlan Potter. Though exceptionally meaningful to Marlowe, this friendship is not a lengthy connection and is ultimately betrayed. The two meet regularly for drinks over a brief span of months, until one night Lennox appears at Marlowe's home and asks to be driven to Tijuanna. Marlowe returns from the trip only to discover that Lennox's wife Silvia has been brutally killed, and that he (Marlowe) is now a suspected accessory to the murder. Lennox is later found dead in Mexico of an apparent suicide, and he leaves a written confession to his wife's murder. The plot of the novel is as complicated as any Marlowe story. Lennox staged his own death with the help of gangster friends from the war, and Eileen Wade is the murderer of both Sylvia Lennox and Roger Wade who were having an affair. In her suicide note, she writes: "Time makes everything mean and shabby and wrinkled. The tragedy of life… is not that the beautiful things die young, but that they grow old and mean" (Chandler 2002, 771). She describes Terry, her former husband whom she knew as Paul Marston before the war, as an "empty shell of the man I loved and married" and suggests that he should have died rather than come back. This jilted perspective and its idealization of the bloom of youth is a violent and jaded disavowal of aging, although these murders mark a vicious return of time and frailty.

The question of aging is emphasized further in numerous aspects of the story. Terry Lennox has white hair that is out of place with his slightly more youthful appearance. Due to an injury during the war, his face bears the scars of plastic surgery, making his age indeterminate. Similarly, the character Roger Wade is an aging writer who has run out of ideas and spends his days

in drunken self-loathing. Fittingly, his exhaustion is figured through tired language and deteriorating style. In a manuscript recovered after Wade's murder, Marlowe finds the lines: "Goddam silly simile. Writers. Everything has to be like something else…. I could just vomit thinking about the lousy racket. I probably will" (Chandler 2002, 652). His alcoholism is spoken of as a disease repeatedly, and he is a frequent client at "liquor cure" centers around the city. The bodily effects of this illness are spoken of in detail, and Wade is said to have "bad nerves" (Chandler 2002, 584). Alcoholism in the novel serves as a bodily and psychic translation of past trauma and Wade's current failure as a man.

This linkage of alcoholism and the trauma of aging, or at least growing older, is made more direct as Marlowe attempts to find the missing Wade at a treatment facility run by an unknown "Dr. V". This leads the detective to a private hospital for the elderly run by Dr. Amos Varley. As Marlowe enters the facility, he notices bars on the upper windows. The doctor defensively explains that his business caters to "[l]onely old people, depressed and unhappy old people" and the bars are there to protect against suicide attempts (Chandler 2002, 587). Marlowe has an exceptionally strong reaction to this, telling Varley that his business "smells like death" and accusing him of warehousing wealthy elderly patients as their heirs await their inheritance. As he leaves, the detective quips: "So long, Dr. Varley. When my job makes me feel dirty I'll think of you. It will cheer me up no end" (Chandler 2002, 589). Marlowe's response seems excessive, but the nameless elderly patients are an uncanny reminder of the unsustainability of the upper-class California lifestyle, and the repugnant smell of death is a problem for which the novel offers no solution.

The physical mark of Marlowe's own mortality is referenced later after he is beaten by the character Mendy Menendez. Near the conclusion of the novel, his bruised and throbbing face is traced and touched several times by Linda Loring, as the couple trade spars and seduction. Interestingly, Marlowe speaks of the ephemeral nature of love and the cycle of failed relationships throughout this chapter. This is in response to Loring's proposal of marriage that Marlowe refuses with the excuse that it would not last six months (Chandler 2002, 801). The conversation begins with the two discussing their ages, 42 and 36, with the assumption that it is already too late for them—at least according to Marlowe—and they discuss how each will remember, or forget, the other when their time is done. The pain of Marlowe's hammering bruises that remain "burning hot" (Chandler 2002, 801) punctuate this scene with a somatic debility, just as the

detective is making himself open to a woman like never before in the series.

The scar is a token of Marlowe's vulnerability for the remainder of the narrative. Later in the office of Sewell Endicott, Harlan Potter's attorney, Marlowe reflects: "I touched the side of my face gently with my fingertips. It was all healed up and the swelling was gone, but one of the blows must have damaged a nerve. Part of the cheek was still numb. I couldn't let it alone. It would get all right in time" (Chandler 2002, 805). This "nerve" issue links Marlowe with Roger Wade and, in the conclusion to the novel, with Terry Lennox. As the latter discusses his plastic surgery in Mexico after his disappearance and staged suicide, he describes a "nerve graft" on the formerly bad side of his face (Chandler 2002, 813). Lennox presumably no longer suffers from the sensitivity that afflicts Marlowe, but the detective still feels its sting. In Marlowe's final rejection of his former friend, he comments on Lennox's "nice nature" but says that he lacks "ethics and scruples" and is ultimately a "moral defeatist" who believes in nothing (Chandler 2002, 815). In other words, Lennox's kindness is only skin deep. In his defense, Lennox recalls that his British commando unit was captured during the war, resulting in his torture by Nazi doctors. In his reading, this trauma should excuse him from blame and weakness, at least in part, but for Marlowe, this is not the case. Terry's bruised body speaks to bruised ideals, as well as lost youth and vitality. This linkage to the body's somatic pastness is integrated into an ethical dimension in hard-boiled fiction, especially in Chandler. Terry Lennox and Roger Wade are weak precisely because they are defeated and undisciplined, which leaves them incapable of producing a meaningful narrative for the next stage of their lives.

In this confrontation scene between Marlowe and Lennox, these scars largely concern lost ideals; however, when read alongside the detective's rendezvous with Linda Loring, the novel becomes unmistakably focused on the aging process. This is cemented as Linda Loring is dropped off at Marlowe's house by Harlan Potter's African American chauffeur Amos, an unmistakable linkage to Dr. Amos Valery from the exclusive nursing home earlier in the novel. Amos asks Marlowe a question about "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", a poem by T.S. Eliot. "'I grow old... I grow old... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.' What does that mean, Mr. Marlowe?", to which Marlowe answers, "Not a bloody thing. It just sounds good" (Chandler 2002, 796). Amos follows with a query regarding a second line from the poem, "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michael Angelo" (Chandler 2002, 796). Here again,

Marlowe tries to deflect the question by saying that Eliot did not know anything about women.

When Marlowe first meets Amos earlier in the novel, he offers the chauffeur a tip, which the latter refuses. Marlowe then offers him the collected poems of T.S. Eliot, but Amos affirms that he already owns them. In his comments to Marlowe, Amos is playfully suggesting that he knows more precisely what is going on that evening. Marlowe and Linda Loring are likely about to have a tryst, which is out of keeping for Marlowe, much like Eliot's isolated and hesitant narrator. Growing old in the poem refers to time's merciless passage that ensures inaction and endless deliberation can lead only to regret and emptiness in old age. The second line refers to the emptiness of high art and seems to be a direct response to Marlowe's snide offer to buy Amos the poet's collected works. As Jonathan Eburne has indicated, Marlowe frequently makes comments about high art to thugs to assert his dominance through obscure cultural references that could not possibly be understood (Eburne 2003, 368). Yet Marlowe himself has no deeper reading of the poem's meaning when pressed by Amos. The detective has been bested at his own game by the chauffeur, and Amos seems to have a deeper insight into Marlowe than the reverse—Linda Loring explains that Amos is a graduate of Howard University, and he is clearly a better and more avid reader of Eliot.

This criticism of Marlowe by Chandler is telling here in the final novel. The detective is significantly marked as aging, something that is written upon his face in bruises and stretches farther within his body through nerve damage. Marlowe refuses Loring's proposal in this novel but will later accept at the conclusion of *Playback* (1958). This narrative arc might at first be read as a banal version of marriage as a form of "growing up"; however, Marlowe's coupling with Loring is linked with traumatic bodily pain, along with Amos and Eliot's points that high art cannot outrun age and time. In this, Marlowe is given the opportunity to create his own unique narrative of the experience and, finally, to no longer be alone. The point to be taken is that when hard-boiled bodies break, we are confronted with the trauma of aging apart from cultural narrative. Rather than the disavowal of time's passing found in the strategy of "endurance" that promises that we can go on, Marlowe is called upon to script his path forward with the inventiveness of linguistic play, something that is, fortunately, the detective's forte.

The Maturing Hard-Boiled Genre

Early hard-boiled fiction reflected a key moment of change in traditional gender relations, and here it should be remembered that Carroll John Daly's "The False Burton Combs", what is often taken as the first hard-boiled short story, is published in 1922, just two years after the certification of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote. Gender roles were beginning to transform significantly, and hard-boiled fiction is, in many ways, a conservative response to that change. That masculinity of this earlier era should be presented in terms of loss—of power, authority, and vitality—is not surprising, as this is still one of the dominant narratives throughout which age is understood. In Hammett and Chandler, reflections on age are admittedly fleeting, but these disruptions should not be underestimated, particularly given the continued paucity of texts that allow men a space to think about aging apart from a narrative of acquisition and subsequent loss. That these reflections are a crucial component of the hard-boiled narrative is borne out by the fact that subsequent series authors will give fuller development of their detectives across middle age, which often includes the milestones of marriage and parenthood. Growing older results in developing connections with others and a dwindling need for self-reliance. This variety of aging is indebted to changes in masculinity in the 1960s and 70s, as gender roles were further transformed with the increased presence of women in the workforce, which in turn heralded shifts in the division of labor at home. The tradition of featuring middle-aged detectives raises the issue of aging and provides hard-boiled fiction with unending opportunities for exploring experiences across a lifetime.

By way of conclusion, I would like to reflect briefly on Lawrence Osborne's *Only to Sleep: A Philip Marlowe* (2018), a work that follows 72-year-old Philip Marlowe on an investigation. Set in 1988, the mystery itself is a largely straightforward case of insurance fraud that tempts the detective out of retirement, but it is Marlowe's reflections on aging that are the most interesting aspects of this work. With a fantastic ear for Chandlerisms, Osborne presents the ever-contemplative Marlowe carefully recounting the experience of living alone as an old man with a lifetime of memories that still dazzle and distract in their freshness. On the one hand, the representation of aging in the novel is problematic, as Osborne is at times too tempted by the sentimental aspect of Marlowe's character that lends itself to nostalgia—something that was roundly criticized by Chandler

in *The Long Goodbye*. At the beginning of the investigation, Marlowe feels "young for the first time in years" as the newly widowed Delores Zinn flirts with him, although elsewhere he claims to be "out of the combat zone" and done with women (Osborne 2018, 17, 19, 41). Numerous times Marlowe laments that his quips and sharp turns of phrase fail, skills that before marked his power as much as his potential for violence, yet he accepts that his time has come and gone, and he embraces his turn as a cynically witty revenant.

Age is elsewhere presented as a matter of "getting on with the ghosts of the past", as well as making peace with physical impairments that cannot be healed (Osborne 2018, 172). Marlowe speaks of the "rage that comes with impotence" as he jealously views Delores and a new suitor (Osborne 2018, 232). Nearer the conclusion of the novel, after being called handsome by an attractive hotel clerk, he remarks, "For a moment old quicksilver dashed through the veins, but almost as soon as it did it came to a halt again. A sudden wind whipping through a ruin, ruffling the dust" (Osborne 2018, 238). In similar deflation at the novel's end, this dust is recalled as Marlowe sits with Paul Linder, the father of the man whose murder facilitated the insurance fraud. The detective drinks with Linder, and they watch a dust storm come and go near the Salton Sea—out where the father has scattered his son's ashes. Though the son was a nameless casualty, Marlowe had taken it upon himself to try to return him home, but he admits that he was "in the wrong place all along" (Osborne 2018, 253). As they drink, the two men watch a dust twister rise and fall, and Marlowe likens it to something that might have been seen in the heavens by Ezekiel. "Then the dust settled and we sat there for a long time, declining to disturb the moment or to add a single word to what had already been left unsaid" (Osborne 2018, 253). This linkage of infirmity with failed investigations—and the limits of the genre—is admittedly a clever Chandlerian version of the banal notion of "dust in the wind", so long as the detective's silence is taken as rest and reflection rather than resignation. Regardless, a 72-year-old Marlowe working again and making his way through a case while contemplating his past and present offers a unique perspective to the hard-boiled project and the possibilities for writing new stories of aging.

One of the fundamental lessons of hard-boiled fiction is that our bodies are the site of the traumatic excesses of our experience, which remains incongruous with our memory and the world. Narratives of aging are culturally mediated ways of interpreting this incongruity. These are necessary for living, of course, but so too must these narratives be constantly renewed. This renewal has always

been the literary art of detective fiction, and the hard-boiled genre links the beauty and urgency of this circumstance with the vulnerability of the detective who must develop a new narrative in the face of time's unforgiving movement. Broken and bruised hard-boiled bodies do figure aging and the loss that inevitably comes with years. Even today, there are few discourses that open this space for men, making this accomplishment all the more exceptional. But decline is not the final story of aging in the genre. As Hammett, Chandler, and the authors who followed have shown, the hard-boiled genre opens any number of avenues for scripting new narratives of aging men, and more and more frequently these include marriage and parenting. Through innovations such as these, the genre remains a critical popular space for thinking the experience of male aging.

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"When I'm 73 and in Constant Good Tumour": Poetic Responses to Ageing from Jenny Joseph to Fleur Adcock

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Abstract. Modern poetry frequently challenges conventional narratives of ageing as uneventful and conformist through temporalities that undercut familiar archetypes, reject expected performativities, and upend canonical chronotopes, thereby questioning reductive chronological prisms through which ageing is commonly defined. Comical carnivalesque visions by Jenny Joseph ("Warning" (1961)) and Roger McGough ("Let Me Die a Youngman's Death" (1967)) celebrate ageing as a liberation from oppressive social norms, presenting the ageing body as the ultimate counterculture fetish that eludes social control. Wistful vignettes by Ted Hughes ("Old Age Gets Up" (1979)) and Margaret Atwood ("A Visit" (1995)) foreground the difficulties of narrating ageing from an outward perspective, and experiment with nonconformist chronotopes to give ageing a voice. Confessional poems like Fleur Adcock's "Mrs Baldwin" (2013) invite the reader to experience ageing vicariously by creating a collage-like fragment whose circularities align ageist signification with human signification at large. Collectively, these poems underscore the importance of moving beyond reductive lenses on ageing, and highlight the difficulties of narrativizing a process which by its very nature upends conventional modes of representation.

Keywords Jenny Joseph, Roger McGough, Ted Hughes, Margaret Atwood, Fleur Adcock

1. Introduction

In the Western lyrical tradition, ageing is customarily represented through paradigms of decay, characterised by a sapping of strength and a weakening of mental faculties, with few gains offsetting such decline. Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 likens old age to a fire burning "on the ashes of [...] youth" (Shakespeare 2002, 527); Coleridge's "Youth and Age" speaks of a "body that does me grievous wrong" (Coleridge 1975, 439); Thomas Hardy describes the ageing body

as a "fragile frame" that makes one "grieve" the loss of better days (Hardy 1965, 72); and Matthew Arnold speaks of a gradual downward trajectory with "every function less exact / Each nerve moore loosely strung" (Arnold 1995, 409).

Rarely does ageing elicit positive associations, and when that is the case, its benefits seem outweighed by physical and mental ailments. In "The Coming Of Wisdom With Time", William Butler Yeats describes ageing as a "wither[ing] into the truth" (Yeats 1951, 92), humorously questioning the purposefulness of acquiring knowledge in old age. Writers also customarily deny ageing bodies the capacity to experience a sense of fulfilment, as in William Blake's "The Ecchoing Green", where Old John, an embodiment of old age, "laugh[s] away care" in a futile attempt to negate the impending "darkening" of the "Green" symbolising his physical and mental decline (Blake 2008, 14).

Several twentieth and twenty-first century poets have challenged this normative paradigm of ageing as a tragic trajectory, viewing it as a process that has the capacity to be liberating and life-affirming. Jenny Joseph's "Warning" (1961) depicts old age through a carnivalesque lens as a phase that frees one from the social expectations. Similarly, Roger McGough's "Let Me Die a Youngman's Death" (1967) conjures up fantastical scenarios where a speaker's ageing alter ego stars in action movie-like scenes, asserting a lust for life commonly seen as incompatible with old age.

Later poets have challenged archetypal narratives on ageing by validating and dignifying the very process of ageing. Ted Hughes's "Old Age Gets Up" (1979) lovingly describes an older individual struggling to complete simple daily tasks. By collapsing temporal and spatial distinctions between imagination and physical surroundings, the poem conjures up a dream-like state that portrays ageing as profoundly human. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's "A Visit" (1995) sketches out an interaction with a dementia patient by blurring inner and outer worlds in a sea of imagery, thereby humanising the patient. In "Mrs Baldwin" (2013), Fleur Adcock explores ageing through a first-person perspective, using fragmentation and mental shortcuts to capture the speaker's unreliable recall, lending such experiences poignancy and relevance.

What unites these poems is their boldness and readiness to experiment with form. Recognizing altered perceptions of time as a defining characteristic of ageing, the poems play with multiple temporalities to question the authoritative status of a chronocentric perspective which regularly devalues 'old people' as unproductive, staid and alien. To demonstrate how these innovative approaches divert from representations of old age in canonical writing, the discussion shall

firstly examine the representation of old age in Blake's "Ecchoing Green" from the *Songs of Innocence* (1789), followed by a close reading of temporalities in the poems outlined above. The analysis considers a range of techniques through which old age and time are represented, ranging from a modulating of pace through syntactic features (like caesuras) to an eliciting of time through motifs (such as seasonal landscapes) and material objects (like clothing). By examining temporal representations of ageing in these lyrical pieces, the article hopes to draw attention to the ways through which committed artists have tried to dignify an undertheorized process that is fundamental to the human experience.

2. Chronocentrism in William Blake's "The Ecchoing Green" (1789)

Temporalities are a key dimension of any narrative, but attain particular significance in texts that deal with ageing. Spoken and written texts invariably rely on signifiers that are read sequentially, which makes the temporal processing by readers an integral part of any narrative. Playing with syntax can create the illusion of time running at different speeds, which can be used to represent a demographic in a particular way. Syntactic choices such as strategic line endings are often deployed to mimic the degree of liveliness associated with certain age groups, or to attribute varying degrees of agency and emotional fulfilment to a given generation.

Complementing such syntactic choices, poets may also evoke temporalities paradigmatically through diction that encapsulates time. References to seasons, historical periods, or mythical eras all ground a particular line or section in various temporalities, many of which bear rich socio-cultural connotations. Seasons, for example, are typically associated with different stages of life, with autumn symbolising old age. Such culturally marked "time spaces", which Mikhail Bakhtin calls "chronotopes" (Bakhtin 1981, 84), are central not only to the perception of time, but also to the ways in which certain age groups are conceptualised. Canonical texts frequently assert the validity of analogies between natural cycles and human nature, thereby normalising a chronocentric perception that valuates different generations to different degrees.

This matrix of syntactic (mimetic) and paradigmatic (semiotic) representations offers poets a wide range of ways in which ageing may be characterised. A good demonstration of different parameters at play offers Blake's "Ecchoing Green", where the two opening stanzas establish a multi-layered set of temporalities:

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around.
To the bells['] che[e]rful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John, with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play.
And soon they all say,
Such, such were the joys[,]
When we all girls & boys[,]
In our youth-time were seen[,]
On the Ecchoing Green.
(Blake 2008, 13–14)

The bucolic landscape eulogised here teems with markers of spring expressed through archetypal celestial elements ("sun", "the skies"), stereotypical fauna ("skylark", "thrush", "birds of the bush") and artefacts ("merry bells"), ushering in two kinds of responses by the community: the "sports" and "play" of the young, which is observed and celebrated by the old. Many lines emphasise the cyclical nature of this spectacle. Present simple tense ("does arise", "make ... ring" etc.) situates the scene outside historical time, and likens it to a reoccurring seasonal event. The same idea is encapsulated in the term "Ecchoing Green", which connotes a lush landscape reverberating with sounds of constant renewal.

As a counterpoint to the joys of youth, the "old folk" underneath the oak tree (signifying age) do not experience joy but merely witness it, and recall memories of such moments. Old John, whose "white hair" is emblematic for his generation,

is characterised by worries about the imminent future; he "laugh[s] away care" analogous to how "the old folk / ... laugh at [the younger generation's] play", taking comfort in memories of better days. Laughter also feeds into a more explicit acknowledgment of the trials and tribulations of old age, contrasted with the glory of youth. The lines "[a]nd soon they all say, / Such, such were the joys..." signals a collective recognition of a shared burden shouldered by the "old folk". Their retreat into nostalgic reminiscing separates them from the energetic play by the young, whose "joys" they can only experience vicariously or through recall.

Various musical patterns reinforce this generational divide. Repetition in "'[s]uch, such were the joys" emphasises the old folk's nostalgia, while the rhyming of "Ecchoing Green" with "[i]n our youth-time were seen" contrasts physical vigour with passive observation. Blake's visual illustration (Fig. 1) reinforces this divide by showing the older generation seated underneath the tree while the young dance around it in a circle. Two youngsters have even been moved outside the image into the bottom half of the page where they frame the poem, a compositional choice that mimics their vitality. By way of contrast, a seated white-haired male figure (presumably Old John) is seen staring vacantly towards the left, rapt in a nostalgic reverie which is expressed both emotively (through his facial expression) and deictically (as his gaze runs counter to the left-to-right directionality of the written text). Old John, in other words, is looking *past* the youth playing in front of him back in time, searching for a narrative that brings comfort and joy.

The sprawl of the entire page likewise affects the reader's response to age and ageism. Rather than being hastened through the poem, readers are prompted to study ornamental intricacies such as the vines entangling the text, or the scraggly top half of the frame which mimics the squiggly vines of the bottom half. The reader is invited to share the vantage point of the "old folk" seated in the centre and admire the antics of the young encapsulated in a busy layout, suppressing their sorrows through laughter and joyful memories. The worries of old age, the mise-en-page suggests, cannot be undone but mitigated through escapist reveries elicited by younger generations.

Text and image, then, promote a collective 'laughing away' of old age through echoes of spring associated with the young. By defining it as passive and retrospective, the poem questions the relevance and value of old age. By suggesting that ageing individuals cannot experience joy but only recall such experiences, the text also normalises such chronocentrism syntactically (through the text), musically (through elements like repetition) and visually (through a sprawling layout).

Fig. 1. William Blake, "The Ecchoing Green", *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (London 1789, 1794), Yale Center for British Art (B1978.43.1546-1579B)[1].

3. Carnivalesque Visions in Jenny Joseph's "Warning" (1961) and Roger McGough's "Let Me Die a Youngman's Death" (1967)

A very different kind of laughter, much less nostalgic and far more irreverent, is evoked by Jenny Joseph and Roger McGough, whose carnivalesque visions temporarily displace conformist narratives of old age as burdensome,

1 1 The illustration is from the Yale Center of British Art: https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:2485. The image is in the Public Domain.

representing it as a period that liberates the ageing subject from the weight of conformity and social expectations. Jenny Joseph's "Warning" (1961), voted Britain's favourite poems in a BBC poll in the 1990s (Lister 1996), presents the reader with a humorous scenario in which the speaker imagines her ageing self as a cheeky iconoclast taking pleasure in subverting social norms:

> When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
> With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
> And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
> And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
> I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
> And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
> And run my stick along the public railings
> And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
> I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
> And pick flowers in other people's gardens
> And learn to spit.
>
> You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
> And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
> Or only bread and pickle for a week
> And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.
>
> But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
> And pay our rent and not swear in the street
> And set a good example for the children.
> We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.
>
> But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
> So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
> When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.
> (Joseph 1997, 29–30 [not paginated])

The levity with which the speaker rejects conventional dress codes ("wear purple / With a red hat which doesn't go"), financial security ("spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves"), moderation ("make up for the sobriety

of my youth") and common decency ("pick flowers in other people's garden") underscores how thoroughly she delights at the thought of subverting social norms. The speaker also lists more harmless impulsive actions by young children for which they would be reprimanded by parents or elders. "[S]itting down on the pavement", "run[ning] [one's] stick along the public railings", "go[ing] out in ... slippers in the rain" and "gobbl[ing] up samples in shops" constitute minor infractions children are taught to refrain from so as not to be a public nuisance.

The lightness of these misdemeanours, though, underscores the innocence of the speaker's desire, who seeks an off-ramp from a life of monotony and boredom. In the third stanza the persona identifies herself as a middle-class mother constrained by the strictures of conventionality, "pay[ing] [her] rent", "hav[ing] friends to dinner", and "set[ting] a good example for the children". The manner in which these obligations are listed ("But now we must...", "We must ...") suggests a temporary acceptance of these norms, along with a thinly disguised desire to subvert them ("[W]e must ... / ... not swear in the street").

The blandness of this third stanza, achieved through a clustering of end-stopped lines and generic vocabulary ("clothes that keep us dry") that contrasts with the colourfulness of the preceding lines ("shall wear purple / With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me"), presents the speaker as calmly accepting those impositions for the benefit of her children's education, but only temporarily. The final three lines signal a return to the tone of the opening salvo, ushered in by the innocent-sounding "[b]ut maybe I ought to practise a little now?", and sustained by a public "shocked and surprised" at the persona's irreverence. Reverting to the carnivalesque in the end defines it as the narrative's equilibrium which the speaker accepts as her new normal, replacing modes of proper decorum with a vision of irreverence, iconoclasm and individuality.

The rejuvenating effect this rebellion has on the speaker is visually amplified in the illustrated version, where drawings accompanying the opening line "When I am an old woman" shows a blurred ageing face with a dejected look, in contrast to the final four lines, which are accompanied by an energetic, much younger woman whose reflection seeks eye contact with the viewer (Joseph 1997, 2–3, 29–30 [not paginated]). Text and image, then, represent the speaker's carnivalesque as a form of catharsis that is life-affirming because it challenges the way old age is conceptualised, and because it allows for a permeability of social barriers that are usually ruled out in mainstream discourse on old age.

Similar carnivalesque code-switching defines Roger McGough's "Let Me Die A Youngman's Death" (1967), where the speaker imagines himself as starring in a series of action-movie-like vignettes which become increasingly hyperbolic and surreal with each lived decade:

> Let me die a youngman's death
> not a clean and inbetween
> the sheets holywater death
> not a famous-last-words
> peaceful out of breath death
>
> When I'm 73
> and in constant good tumour
> may I be mown down at dawn
> by a bright red sports car
> on my way home
> from an allnight party
>
> Or when I'm 91
> with silver hair
> and sitting in a barber's chair
> may rival gangsters
> with hamfisted tommyguns burst in
> and give me a short back and insides
>
> Or when I'm 104
> and banned from the Cavern
> may my mistress
> catching me in bed with her daughter
> and fearing for her son
> cut me up into little pieces
> and throw away every piece but one
>
> Let me die a youngman's death
> not a free from sin tiptoe in
> candle wax and waning death

not a curtains drawn by angels borne
'what a nice way to go' death
(Henri et al. 1983, 105)

Resembling a fever dream, the poem replaces the sacred for the profane and casts the narrative voice as a swaggering gangster battling rivals and indulging in multiple affairs, heedless of the consequences. The nonchalant *carpe diem* attitude expressed in tone and deed evoke a recklessness typically associated with the young. Silly internal rhymes in the opening stanza ("clean and inbetween", "peaceful out of breath death") set the stage for defiant puns and cool half-rhymes that trivialise terminal illness ("in constant good tumour") and lethal accidents ("mown down at dawn") as spectacles granting eternal fame.

The youthfulness of tone is sustained through ennobling physical properties ("silver hair") and localities associated with urban cool: "a barber's chair" and the "the Cavern [Club]", where the Beatles played nearly 300 times (Anon 2021). Strong sound patterns, as in the onomatopoetic "bursts" of "hamfisted tommyguns", and cool slang ("give me a short back and insides") ground the fantasy in vibrant youth culture, and offer a stark contrast to the biological age signposted in the opening lines of the three middle sections.

The recklessness with which a violent death in the midst of drama and scandal is actively welcomed links this vision to the very essence of the carnivalesque as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin. According to *Rabelais and His World* (1965), cultural expressions of the carnivalesque originated from responses to devastating plague outbreaks during the so-called *Black Death* (1348–50). Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as a code-switching that erodes established hierarchies not only politically and socio-economically but also linguistically. The plague

> grant[s] the right to use other words, to have another approach to life and to the world. Not only have all conventions been dropped, but all laws "both human and divine" are silenced. Life has been lifted out of its routine, the web of conventions has been torn; all the official hierarchic limits have been swept away. The plague has created its own unique atmosphere that grants both outward and inward rights. Even the most respected man may now wear his 'breeches for headgear'. (Bakhtin 1981, 272–273)

In McGough's playful adaptation of the carnivalesque, the Bakhtinian trigger of the pandemic has been replaced with the life stage most closely associated with death and dying: old age. Serving as shorthand for a life period where death might strike at any moment, the ageing subject becomes the perfect embodiment of a *carpe diem* attitude: a fetish whose readiness to self-sacrifice elevates it beyond the carefully guarded lives of younger generations.

Swapping narratives of long-term suffering with the stage drama of a "youngman's death", the poem effectively displaces the reader's worries and concerns about personally experiencing old age. By offering an escapist vision that invigorates and entertains through irreverent jests, the poem affects the reader through catharsis, inviting them to identify with the ageless action hero whose violent ends lends meaning to his life. A carnivalesque tribute par excellence, the poem effectively displaces worries about the future with fantastic scenarios that eclipse such narratives, inviting readers to establish positive associations with old age.

4. Blurred Chronotopes in Ted Hughes's "Old Age Gets Up" (1979), Margaret Atwood's "A Visit" (1995), and Fleur Adcock's "Mrs Baldwin" (2013)

More recently, poets have not only challenged the tendency to patronise and stigmatise old age, but also the periodizations giving rise to notions of old age. Lyrical pieces by Ted Hughes, Margaret Atwood and Fleur Adcock acknowledge the fluidity of ageing, presenting it as a gradual process rather than as a discrete phase that can be defined and categorised in a systematic manner.

Ted Hughes's "Old Age Gets Up", published in *Earth-Numb* (1979), offers a gentle characterisation of an ageing body awakening and rising in a traditional farmhouse setting, arguably informed by Hughes's experience of living on a farm in Devon. The figure of Old Age appears distinctly human, resembling someone struggling to perform simple tasks after awakening from slumber, as their mind gets entangled in surreal dreamscapes. At the same time, Old Age resembles an allegorical modern-day Chronos whose struggle to muster physical strength and mental focus represents the process of ageing, which is commonly imperceptible to the human eye on a day-to-day basis:

Old Age Gets Up

Stirs its ashes and embers, its burnt sticks

An eye powdered over, half-melted and solid again
Ponders
Ideas that collapse
At the first touch of attention

The light at the window, so square and so same
So full-strong as ever, the window-frame
A scaffold in space, for eyes to lean on

Supporting the body, shaped to its old work
Making small movements in grey air
Numbed from the blurred accident
Of having lived, the fatal, real injury
Under the amnesia

Something tries to save itself – searches
For defences – but words evade
Like flies with their own notions

Old age slowly gets dressed
Heavily dosed with death's night
Sits on the bed's edge

Pulls its pieces together
Loosely tucks in its shirt
Pulls the clouds of star-gas together

Leans on the door-frame, breathing heavily
Creaks toward the bathroom
(Hughes 2003, 545–46)

Meandering between physical manifestations of a farmhouse interior and dream-like associations, the poem appears digressive and fragmented, with its formlessness capturing the fluidity of time. Sustained enjambement decelerates the pace and invites readers to feel the slowness with which "Old Age" gets up and "[s]tirs its ashes". The fragmented syntax disorients and makes readers partake in Old Age's confusion. Strategic line breaks as in the assertion that Old Age "Ponders / Ideas that collapse" mimics the tentative bundling of signifiers into fragile patterns of meaning that cannot be retained. Syntactic ambiguity about the temporal sequence of events (does Old Age ponder and then consider ideas that collapse, or ponder collapsing ideas?) make that state of disorientation palpable, rendering ageing accessible to the reader.

This sense of aimlessness is amplified through a blurring of spatial and temporal settings. Several lines root the poem in early morning routines in a domestic space, as Old Age – still "[h]eavily dosed with death's night" – "[l]oosely tucks in its shirt" and "breathing heavily / Creaks toward the bathroom". Other lines question such a reading, notably the assertion that "[t]he light at the window [is] so square and so same / So full-strong as ever", which raises the possibility that the action is taking place during midday, and that Old Age's perception of time is rather skewed. Some spatial settings are similarly ambiguous. References to a "window-frame" and a "door-frame" reference a familiar domestic setting, yet also resemble portals to otherworldly chronotopes, constituting "scaffold[s] in space" that offer glimpses of "clouds of star-gas".

That sense of disorientation is partially explained by the reference to "amnesia" in the middle of the poem, which suggests that Old Age is a patient struggling with sense perception and cognition. The unreliability of sensory and cognitive faculties also erodes a sense of Self. Feeling "[n]umbed from the blurred accident / Of having lived", the voice becomes detached from the physical body, and assumes an outside perspective questioning their degree of agency. Only after countless digressions does Old Age regain the ability to "[s]i[t] on the bed's edge", "tuc[k] in its shirt", and "[c]rea[k] toward the bathroom". The slow transition from a dream-like universe to a realistic setting is effectively captured through the image of Old Age's "lean[ing] on the door-frame", signalling a lingering at the threshold separating interior and exterior worlds. The same sense of lingering is conveyed through the metaphor of Old Age "pull[ing] its pieces together", which expresses a conscious effort to counteract a fragmentation of the Self as well as an attempt to regain physical control of the body.

The realism of the final two lines showing Old Age lurch to the bathroom re-establishes a sense of normalcy similar to the ways in which Jenny Joseph interrupts her wild daydreaming by reminding herself that "now we must have clothes that keep us dry / And pay our rent and not swear in the street". However, here the shift from a largely fantastic, internalised world to a realistic setting does not expose oppressive social norms but highlights the difficulties of articulating the process of ageing through language. This ineffability is effectively captured in the lines "Something tries to save itself – searches – but words evade", which likens Old Age to a dementia patient struggling to retain language. As a nameless individual who has lost their sense of identity, Old Age has become a "[s]omething", an entity that embodies the elusive nature of ageing itself. Defying stable signification, Old Age struggles to "[p]ull its pieces together", and offers mere discourse rather than a coherent story. Ageing, the poem suggests, is too fluid and complex a process to be described in a linear, structured manner. The same point is mimicked through a frame that opens with a fragment – the title doubles as the first line – and closes on an incomplete clause, thus mimicking the elusiveness of the process which Old Age embodies.

Margaret Atwood's "A Visit" (1995) offers a similar view on old age through the speaker's visit to an amnesia patient who can still engage in verbal communication yet regularly lapses into an inner world beyond reach for the visitor:

> Gone are the days
> when you could walk on water.
> When you could walk.
>
> The days are gone.
> Only one day remains,
> the one you're in.
>
> The memory is no friend.
> It can only tell you
> what you no longer have:
>
> a left hand you can use,
> two feet that walk.
> All the brain's gadgets.

Hello, hello.
The one hand that still works
grips, won't let go.

That is not a train.
There is no cricket.
Let's not panic.

Let's talk about axes,
which kinds are good,
the many names of wood.

This is how to build
a house, a boat, a tent.
No use; the toolbox

refuses to reveal its verbs;
the rasp, the plane, the awl,
revert to sullen metal.

Do you recognize anything? I said.
Anything familiar?
Yes, you said. The bed.

Better to watch the stream
that flows across the floor
and is made of sunlight,

the forest made of shadows;
better to watch the fireplace
which is now a beach.
(Atwood 1995, 76)

The weakening of the patient's physical and mental faculties is captured syntactically and semantically through a gradual progression from ordinary conversational language to basic, fragmented speech, followed by impressionistic

vignettes that convey the patient's interior world. The gradual eroding of linguistic competence is effectively mimicked in the opening lines that reduce metaphorical, complex ideas ("Gone are the days / when you could walk on water") to simple and concrete observations ("When you could walk"). A similar reduction occurs with temporal distinctions, as different days collapse into one ("The days are gone. / Only one remains"), invalidating the concept of a 'day', and questioning the meaningfulness of an existence where experiences can only be lived but not recalled.

The mid-section of the poem, starting with "Hello, hello", explores the patient's cognition through a lopsided dialogue, in which the speaker attempts to facilitate a conversation that gradually grinds to a halt. Increasingly simplistic syntax in lines such as "That is not a train. / There is no cricket [on TV]" characterises the patient through absence, signalling the eroding of a shared language. The patient's isolation is further expressed through mixed metaphors such as a "toolbox" that "refuses to reveal its verbs", showing how physical items increasingly become objects decoupled from signification.

The loss of a common language, emphasised in "Do you recognize anything? ... / Yes, ... The bed", feeds into a final section where the speaker accepts the patient's gradual retreat into an inner world that they cannot share through language: "Better to watch the stream / that flows across the floor / ... / better to watch the fireplace / which is now a beach". Phrased as a set of incomplete comparisons (better to watch the fireplace than to do what?) these lines recognize the breakdown of communication, and the inability to fathom the patient's imaginings. The blurring of incompatible spatialities (ward/stream, fireplace/beach) moves the narrative beyond recognisable chronotopes and highlights the idiosyncrasy of their signification.

By exploring ageing through transformative language that progresses from coherent to increasingly incomprehensible, the poem tests the reliability of language and its usefulness for describing ageing in a meaningful way. Instead of an omniscient persona like in Blake's "Ecchoing Green", who describes Old John authoritatively and attributes him archetypal qualities, the speaker in Atwood's poem seems more tentative and communicates through lines that might not only capture the perception of the ageing subject but likewise of the speaker ("The days are gone", "The memory is no friend"). This blurring of distinctions between subject (speaker) and object (patient), outward perception and inward journey erodes conventional parameters of old age, which is not viewed

as a stable category but as part of a process which may be approximated through metaphorical language, yet ultimately remains elusive to the outside observer.

This blurring of subject and object is further developed in Fleur Adcock's "Mrs Baldwin", where the speaker shifts from a humorous external characterisation of old age to a poignant description of ageing as lived experience, thus showing how stereotypes of old age and the process of ageing are interlinked:

> And then there's the one about the old woman
> who very apologetically asks the way
> to Church Lane, adding 'I ought to know:
> I've lived there since the war'. So you go with her.
>
> This comes with variations, usually leading
> (via a list of demented ancestors)
> to calculations of how much time you've got
> before you're asking the way to your own house.
>
> But it's not so often that you find the one
> about how, whenever you hear of someone
> diagnosed with cancer, you have to hide
> that muffled pang that clutched you, at fifteen,
> when you saw Pauline Edwards holding hands
> with the boy from the Social Club you'd always
> fancied.
> (Adcock 2013, 26)

The poem's three-partite structure explores the speaker's gradual acceptance of ageing through distinct phases, from dismissing ageing as a comical and strange phenomenon affecting other people to fearing how it might affect the speaker herself to finally acknowledging how it shapes her own life. The opening joke "about the old woman" asking for directions concludes not with laughter but with the unexpected addendum "So you go with her", suggesting understanding and care rather than belittlement and detachment.

These connotations of loyalty and understanding are strengthened in the following section, where the same interaction is represented as routine ("This comes with variations"), making the speaker wonder about "how much time

you've go / before you're asking the way to your own house". At this stage the old woman and the speaker have become doubles: ageing individuals in need of support. The speaker's generic phrasing when wondering "how much time *you've* got" (rather than "*I've* got") blurs that distinction, and invites the speaker to recognise themselves as individuals prone to the same process of ageing at some point in their lives.

The final section ties an emotional bond between fearing an age-related condition (cancer) on the one hand and painful emotive hurt on the other. Like in the preceding poems by Hughes and Atwood, Adcock's speaker blurs chronotopes as the narrative shifts from humorous anecdote ("not so often that you find the one / about...") to personal confession ("to hide that muffled pang"). The temporal framework likewise transitions from a timeless present associated with repeatedly hearing the same anecdote to a deeply personal memory rooted in the past ("at fifteen / when you saw Pauline Edwards holding hands / with the boy ... you'd always / fancied") whose repeated recall aligns the speaker with the old woman introduced at the outset.

As in the previous poems, the blurring of storyworlds and temporalities becomes shorthand for ageing, which is once again defined as a shift in cognition and the ability to recall. Much like the old woman in the opening joke who blurs distinctions between an objectively verifiable external world and her memories, the speaker connects a narrative she hears (of cancer) with a poignant memory of unrequited love, suggesting that she struggles to separate the two against her will. By pairing the physical sensation of pain triggered by the narrative with the preceding stories on ageing, the poem includes the speaker among ageing subjects, acknowledging a shared participation in the process. By personifying ageing through a highly sensitive individual remembering mental hurt many decades later, the poem also validates ageing as a process that is an integral part of the human condition. By being able to identify with the speaker, the reader is encouraged not as a stereotypical condition to be resisted at all costs, but as a trajectory that has significance and meaning.

5. Conclusion

As the previous discussion has shown, modern poets have repeatedly challenged archetypal notions of old age as a phase to be feared or repressed, promoting the idea of ageing as a process that is to be acknowledged by each and every

individual. The carnivalesque visions by Jenny Joseph and Roger McGough entangle old age with childhood pranks and counterculture, presenting the ageing body as the archetypal fetish that eludes social control. Ted Hughes, Margaret Atwood and Fleur Adcock challenge widespread chronotopes from the inside by attempting to construct and imagine the voices of increasingly voiceless ageing subjects. By blurring external and internal worlds, the reader gains insight into the perception of the ageing object, and is invited to view themself as equally subject to the process of ageing.

A key vehicle these poets use to articulate their vision is the mixing of chronotopes and temporalities. The ageing subject is not so much a passive figure observing the young (like in Blake's "Ecchoing Green") than an agent experiencing life through their consciousness and imagination. Even in an uncommunicative state (beyond the reach of the observer), the ageing subject is humanised and dignified, offering the reader a point of identification. This re-coding of ageing is accompanied by a gentle humour that unites speaker, characters and the reader, creating a common emotive bond that fills the gap left by a lack of coherent signification. The recipe for seeking meaning in age, in the words of Roger McGough, is to be "73 and in constant good tumour". As a mode that plays on ambiguity, humour emerges as a particularly successful means to describe emotional responses to ageing, a process which due to its complexity largely eludes human perception and representation.

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Aging as an Epistemology of Sustainability: Reimagined Designs in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

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Abstract: This essay highlights how Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) proposes aging as either consciousness or disengagement with sustainability. The narrative presents a revisitation of the historical development of America starting with the Great Depression in the 1890s, then the racial discrimination and the drought of the 1930s, leading to the National Environmental Act in 1970. This period refers to America's aging that is marked with environmental damage, drastic decline of outputs, farm closures, stringent racial exclusion, and infectious diseases. *Paradise* contextualizes the nation's depressive aging to visualize its translation in the American identity's perception of somatic and mental aging and re-imagine an alternative philosophy of aging as awareness of continuities. As such, aging is presented in the narrative as a new recognition of the body in light of two opposing epistemologies of living. In particular, *Paradise* foregrounds one's choice of either a subversive sustainable aging that activates human/non-human, natural, and communal connection or inherent non-sustainable aging that degenerates into a pathology of genetic and racial rift, environmental damage, and mortality. The symptomatic presence of such varied epistemologies of aging is extended into architectural aging and narratological aging. *Paradise* presents Ruby and the Convent as two exemplary communal designs that reflect the struggle of negotiating aging within the existing historical, social, and economic contexts. As such, the narrative reveals how unsustainable aging constructs a design of genetic isolation, detrimental memory, and reductive chronology. On the other hand, *Paradise* presents sustainable aging as the perception of a biophilic design that displays tendency of connectivity and renewal through its architectural features of regenerative biomimicry and biodiversity, circadian re-memory, and openness.

Keywords: Aging, sustainability, connectivity, mortality, rememory, architecture

This article addresses cases of aging that display either consciousness or disengagement with sustainability, as presented in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998).

The narrative reimagines the historical development of America starting with the Great Depression in the 1890s, then the racial discrimination and the drought of the 1930s, leading to the National Environmental Act in 1970. This period refers to America's aging that is marked with environmental damage, drastic decline of outputs, farm closures, stringent racial exclusion, and infectious diseases. *Paradise* contextualizes the nation's depressive aging to visualize its translation in the American identity's consequent struggle of negotiating aging within such historical, social, and economic developments. In particular, *Paradise* presents Ruby and the Convent as two foundational communities that showcase one's choice of either subversive sustainable aging that activates human/non-human, natural, and communal connection or inherent non-sustainable aging that degenerates into a pathology of genetic and racial rift, environmental damage, and mortality.

However, *Paradise* extends the localized translation of aging to counter the 1890 grand narrative on the American nation's depressive history. *Paradise* contributes cases of aging that transcend the recognition of the body, remap geography, and rewrite history. In particular, *Paradise* reveals how the aging communities of Ruby and the Convent imagine closed/open architectural geographies that create neo-grand/counter narratives. As such, Ruby's unsustainable aging constructs a design of genetic isolation, detrimental memory, and reductive chronology. On the other hand, the Convent's sustainable aging perceives a biophilic design that displays the tendency of connectivity and renewal through its architectural features of regenerative biomimicry and biodiversity, circadian re-memory, and openness.

Recalling the grand narrative of America's depressive history, *Paradise* imagines a town that struggles with the ramifications of the big depression. In 1890, the prophetical figure of Zechariah Morgan and a group of ex-slaves who comprise nine complete "eight-rock" families travel, at God's command, after a series of race-based denials from public life and job opportunities initiated by various pioneer communities, black as well as white, in Louisiana and Mississippi to Oklahoma. Then the crisis of their Disallowing from Fairly, Oklahoma, provokes their frustration in the promise of life, development and growth. Fairly's predicament urges them to establish Haven (1891), a far-away place in Oklahoma, as a separate "place they could call home" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 12), and a foundation for their regenerative faith in equal life and progress.

Zechariah embraces a vision of "aging as growing", for his newly established community projects sustainability that is founded on affiliative allegiances. The danger of filial and racial allegiances that breed tribal faction and degeneration has

always haunted Zechariah: "scattering would have frightened him. The breakup of the group or tribe or consortium of families" (Morrison 1998b, 192). Zechariah envisions a community bound by ties, not of kinship or race, but of belief in freedom, equality, regeneration, and nonviolence. So, the Old Fathers have entertained a connection-based rather than a genetic definition of blackness. In other words, the blackness of Zechariah's original community is a marker of its sustainable growth and rebirth rather than of racial purity, deterioration, or closure as his community exhibits genetic diversity and openness. For instance, the name of one of the founding fathers of Haven reflects genetic hybridity and continuity. In her research of Ruby's history, Patricia Best Cato comments on the typically "Blackhorse feature of stick-straight hair" that runs in the old Blackhorse family (Morrison 1998b, 198). In this regard, critic Justine Tally argues that it is clear that "'racial purity' among the first families of Ruby is questionable anyway" (Tally 1999, 24). The Old Fathers' acceptance of outsiders and women of different colours further emphasizes their observation of open and healthy aging. Zechariah's growing community embraced "the orphans, males and females aged twelve to sixteen, who spotted the travellers and asked to join", and they "simply snatched up" two toddlers "because the circumstances in which the children were found wouldn't let them do otherwise" (Morrison 1998b, 189). In spite of the shame of "seeing one's pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter" (Morrison 1998b, 95), Zechariah's community refuses to age into a depressive and pathological version through racially reductive allegiances. Instead, this group "reacts against the danger of being obliterated by the rest of society by creating a solidly knit community characterized by the unity of its members in a common cause: the quest for a place where they feel safe" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 12).

The exodus of Zechariah and the rejected ex-slaves involved a concern with the reclamation of a sacred spatial architecture that becomes symptomatic of their regenerative and sustainable aging. In Black history, the space of the kitchen has connoted danger as it symbolizes the power of the white system that has inflicted various forms of torture, humiliation, and ensuing mortality on slaves, such as the rape of black women and a consequent castration of black manhood.[1] To transcend this fatal history, the Old Fathers aspire to reclaim a kitchen that asserts primordial origin and perennial rebirth. The Old Fathers focus on their pride that

1 See Betty Chroninger's *From Strange Fruit to Fruitful Kitchens: The Space of the Kitchen in Toni Morrison's Novels* that historically examines the African American presence in the white kitchen.

> none of their women had ever worked in a white man's kitchen or nursed a white child. Although field labor was harder and carried no status, they believed the rape of women who worked in white kitchens was if not a certainty a distinct possibility—neither of which they could bear to contemplate. So they exchanged that danger for the relative safety of brutal work. It was that thinking that made a community 'kitchen' so agreeable. (Morrison 1998b, 99)

As such, the black kitchen should become the relocated and regenerative alternative to the mortal white kitchen. For Zechariah's community, the black kitchen acquires the distinctive shape of an Oven, a large and solid design of brick and iron that is used to nourish the community and remind its members of their achievement. Zechariah's objective behind building the Oven is to realize sustainability and immortality: "having been routed from office by whites [… Zechariah] wanted to make a permanent feature in that open land so different from Louisiana" (Morrison 1998b, 99). So, the architecture of the Oven simulates Haven's independent vision of continual growth that is distinct from the destructive growth of other established white and black communities.

Zechariah's sustainable aging is extended into his design of biomimicry. Zechariah's choice of his sacred space of Haven coincides with a domestic space. He follows the instructions and footsteps of a mythical "walking man" (Morrison 1998b, 97-98). This mythical figure carries a satchel like a schoolteacher. The language he teaches entertains no distinction between divine and domestic. The divinely chosen place is associated with a domestic symbol, an intact guinea fowl:

> Through a parting in the grass, [Rector] saw the walking man standing, looking around. Then the man squatted, opened his satchel and began rummaging in it…. There in the trap, *bait and pull string undisturbed* [emphasis mine], was a guinea fowl. Male, with plumage to beat the band. Exchanging looks, they left it there and moved to the spot where they believed the walker had spread the items from his satchel. Not a thing in sight. Only a depression in the grass. Big Papa leaned down to touch it. Pressing his hand into the flattened grass, he closed his eyes. (Morrison 1998b, 98)

The depression on grass reenacts a prostration for prayer that reflects Zechariah's doctrine of connectivity and biophilia. The acquisition of Zechariah's future sacred space involves non-violence, insistence on connectivity, and biodiversity. The land "belonged to a family of State Indians, and it took a year and four months of negotiation, of labor for land, to finally have it free and clear" (Morrison 1998b, 99). Tally argues that this negotiation further emphasizes the Old Fathers' respect for cultural plurality and their resentment of racism:

> Zechariah and his followers work to become rightful owners of their new town; given nothing after the era of Reconstruction, denied even the most menial work in retribution after their participation in Reconstruction politics, they nonetheless respect the rights of the Native Americans and negotiate a peaceful transfer of land. (Tally 1999, 22)

Zechariah's structural design of the sacred space also translates the spatial osmosis that reflects openness and awareness of human, natural, and cultural connections.

The structure of the space of the Oven exhibits volatility and hostility to biological differences and gender hierarchies. The Oven represents a public space that shapes Ruby's social gatherings and practices. Zechariah's architecture of this public space reveals fluidity. The Oven embraces a mutable space that nullifies any physical distance between private life and public life and consequently obliterates gender boundaries. The Oven is both a shared hearth and a site of community baptisms:

> Maybe they ought to go back to the way they did things….. When everybody was too busy building, stocking, harvesting to quarrel or think up devilment. The way it was before Mount Calvary was completed. When baptisms were held in sweet water…. Slowly, then, hand in hand, heads on supporting shoulders, the blessed and saved waded to the banks and made their way to the Oven. To dry, embrace, congratulate one another. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

In this concern, Linda Krumholz highlights the fluidity of the Oven's structure by arguing that the Oven's shape communicates clear associations with both women and men:

> Morrison makes the Oven symbolize both male and female, womb and phallus. The Oven is both object and subject, passive and active, womb and mouth, head and heart; it is 'round as a head, deep as desire', with the sacred and disputed words on the 'Oven's iron lip', 'at the base of the Oven's mouth'. (Krumholz 2002, 6-7)

These domestic/private/divine/and public attributes of the Oven connote the design of regenerative biomimicry that distinguishes the sustainability of a community that grows and ages collectively.

However, the Haven community starts to age reductively and degenerate into stringent racial exclusion and ensuing displacement and relocation. A drift symbolically ruptures Zechariah's growing community and splits the space between two men. Before launching his "aging" journey, Zechariah (originally named Coffee) precipitates a veil between him and his twin Tea. This incident of veiling is caused by Tea's choice of reducing his sustainable growth and aging to biological denial and mental regression (recession into a child-like status). Tea violates the Black code of defiance and becomes a shameful and profane symbol of accommodation to the white order and colour:

> When [Coffee] and his twin [Tea] were walking near a saloon, some whitemen, amused by the double faces, encouraged the brothers to dance. Since the encouragement took the form of a pistol, Tea, quite reasonably, accommodated the whites, even though he was a grown man, older than they were. (Morrison 1998b, 302)

This racial or filial obsession leads to the disallowal of Tea from the divine community that Coffee/Zechariah establishes later. A bullet bars Tea from Zechariah's journey to the private and divine town:

> Coffee took the bullet in his foot instead. From that moment they weren't brothers anymore. Coffee began to plan a new life elsewhere. He contacted other men, other former legislators who had the same misfortune as his—Juvenal DuPres and Drum Blackhorse. They were the three who formed the nucleus of the Old Fathers. Needless to say, Coffee didn't ask Tea to join them on their journey to Oklahoma. (Morrison 1998b, 302)

Tea's exclusion is the first sign of the breakdown of a community that shifts to reductive aging, race-based alliances and "lethal discourses of exclusion" (Morrison 1993), which perform genocide of the ancestral language of cultural solidarity.[2] Such incident of biological denial leads to depressive aging translated in moral decay and economic depression (Morrison 1998b, 302).

The Haven community witnesses Disallowing Part Two that bars its members from the possibility of human life and growth. National and international politics interfere and change the town's economic development. Haven starts to decay, and its inhabitants migrate to more prosperous places. After World War II, Black soldiers "who had been ready to give their lives for their country see their heroic stature demeaned by the violence against them" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 13-14). During their migration, Ruby Morgan falls ill and dies "on the waiting room bench" after white hospitals refuse to treat her and while a "nurse [is trying] to find a [vet] to examine her" (Morrison 1998b, 113). Ruby Morgan is considered by Ruby's patriarchs as the originator of continuity, for bearing K.D. Morgan, "the sole 'son' the [Morgan] family would ever have" (Morrison 1998b, 143) and the only male heir. All of these factors constitute the hypocrisy of "Disallowing Part Two" (Morrison 1998b, 194) that leads to Haven's degeneration into an extreme politics of reductive protection:

> Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose—behind any standing tree, behind the door of any house, humble or grand[…]But lessons had been learned and relearned in the last three generations about how to protect a town. (Morrison 1998b, 16)

Facing economic and moral change and seeking decontamination from humiliation (Morrison 1998b, 16), the New Fathers promote an intergenerational transmission of their racial discourse and re-assert the timelessness of the historical model of Coffee's detrimental memory: "They carried the rejection of 1890 like a bullet in the brain" (Morrison 1998b, 109). As such, the woman's dead body

2 See Kamwangamalu's "Social Change and Language Shift: South Africa" that examines the impact of language shift on the formation of identity, 225-42.

becomes a symbolic representation of Ruby's community. Naming the town after the diseased Ruby Morgan signifies the mortality of the community. Ruby's community adopts reductive protection from change that necessitates the protection of the bodies of its women. Consequently, Ruby men impose spatial exclusion of Ruby women, which degenerates into genetic pathology. The New Fathers redesign Ruby's geographical borders to create an isolated community from the violence indigenous in other cities of the 1970s. Ruby is a place where women feel totally safe and protected:

> Unique and isolated, [it] was a town justifiably pleased with itself. It neither had nor needed a jail … a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight … because nothing at the edge thought she was prey. (Morrison 1998b, 8-9)

Instilling such depressive borders, men in Ruby become ever cautious against intruders who might destabilize the tranquillity of their hard-won community.

Consequently, Ruby's new design violates biomimicry through a historical breach in the sacred/public/and private space along gender lines. With the establishment of Ruby, the domestic and divine symbol of community, the Oven, gradually loses its culinary value and degenerates into a shrine that isolates women. The detrimental memory of Ruby demolishes the architecture of the Oven: "The ex-soldiers broke up the Oven and loaded it into two trucks" (Morrison 1998b, 16). Breaking and transplanting the Oven demolishes Zechariah's hybrid architecture of the Oven. The relocation of the Oven symbolizes an uprooting from the founding soil for communal value: "There was no need to wonder if moving the Oven had been a mistake; whether it needed its original soil as foundation for the respect and wholesome utility that was its due" (Morrison 1998b, 112). By altering the location and structure of the Oven, Ruby men emphasize its value as a material construction susceptible to fracture rather than an intangible marker of sustainability. Ruby women suffer segregation from the communal kitchen. They become alienated and confined to multiple quarters presented in the narrative as kitchens (Morrison 1998b, 100), private gardens (Morrison 1998b, 89), and bedrooms (Morrison 1998b, 187). This removal ascribes a definite architecture to the Oven and underrates its culinary value of subsistence:

> Minus the baptisms the Oven had no real value. What was needed back in Haven's early days had never been needed in Ruby. The trucks they came in brought cookstoves as well. The meat they ate clucked in the yard, or fell on its knees under a hammer, or squealed through a slice in its throat. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

In other words, the Oven is transformed into a spatial reflection of Ruby's reductive metamorphosis.

The racial disallowal of Ruby men scars their memory. Such trauma transforms their aging into a generationally sustained pathology of limited memory and disconnection that develops into mental, physiological, and genetic impotence. The historical disallowal of their women by black and white communities "stripp[ed]" Ruby men of "masculine power, reducing them to a shameful impotence, which they refuse consciously to acknowledge […and] shatter[ed] their already fragile and embattled sense of manhood" (Read 2005, 529). The shameful "repercussions of this patriarchally inflicted wound" (Weinstein 1996, 106) of disallowal becomes Ruby men's only reductive memory. Ruby's elders perform a "castration ritual" (Croutier 1989, 129) on the new generations by constantly reminding them of their past of disallowal through the story of the Oven's inscription. They even change the biblical narration of birth into an aging narrative through constantly referring to their disallowal in the annual staging of the school's Christmas play (Morrison 1998b, 86, 195, 210). Thus, the new generations of Ruby men are also transformed into "congenital eunuchs". Another symptom of Ruby men's timeless castration pertains to their fear of the female's sexual energy and their perception of women as obstacles to their male power and the racial purity or "chastity" of their 8-rock blood. For example, during the Second Grand Tour, the young twins Steward and Deacon Morgan felt threatened and almost castrated by the sexual agency implied in the scene of the nineteen women. As Marni Gauthier observes,

> the sexual energy of the scene … elides the vision and rules of female chastity that the brothers enforce in Ruby, and simultaneously contains the seeds of the 8-rock fear of miscegenation that can only occur when Ruby citizens couple outside the coal-black bloodlines innate to Morgan males. (Gauthier 2005, 402)

The suggested scene of adultery between the nineteen women and the photographer signifies the epitome of threatened manhood for Ruby men.

Ultimately, insomnia and sleep disorder evolve as another symptom of Ruby's pathological aging and impotence. Steward and Deacon carry "the rejection of 1890 like a bullet in the brain" (Morrison 1998b, 109) that rids them of sound sleep. They stay up and are restless most of their nights, processing thoughts of their fathers' earlier castration:

> Steward leashed the dogs and unlatched the horse barn. His preference was to mount around four a.m. and ride Night till sunrise …. Saddled on Night, he rediscovered every time the fresh wonder of knowing that no one's own land you could never be lost the way Big Papa and Big Daddy and all seventy-nine were leaving Fairly, Oklahoma. On foot and completely lost, they were …. It was the shame of seeing one's pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. (Morrison 1998b, 95)

Likewise, Deacon's insomniac and "most powerful" memory is of the Second Grand Tour that recalls his castration by the miscegenation and sexual energy in the scene of the nineteen women (Morrison 1998b, 107, 109-10).

The impotence and insomnia of the aging twin leaders ultimately degenerate into an irritating and even violent form of interference. For instance, Deacon exercises frequent shooting and walking around the sacred site of the Oven. This double activity reflects his paranoia and restlessness:

> The morning after the meeting at Calvary, pleased with his bird quota and fired, not tired, from no sleep, he decided to check out the Oven before opening up the bank. (Morrison 1998b, 110)

Reverend Misner even associates Deacon's checking of the Oven with hunting: "Hard to figure, but I don't like the way Deek's face looks when he's checking the Oven. He does it every day God sends now. More like hunting than checking" (Morrison 1998b, 117). Steward's hunting activity also becomes a violent form of interference. Steward is used to "riding his own land with free wind blowing Night's mane, the thought of that level of helplessness [makes] him

want to shoot somebody" (Morrison 1998b, 96). The most hideous translation of Ruby men's vengeful interference culminates in the twins' "leadership" (Morrison 1998b, 275) of a plan to "hunt" the Convent women (Morrison 1998b, 5).

The aging narrative of castration translated in the Oven, the architecture of disallowal, predicts a childbearing disability and reductive physical aging. The birth or prosperity of children becomes difficulty, impossibility, or rarity:

> The women nodded when the men took the Oven apart, packed, moved and reassembled it. But privately they resented the truck space given over to it—rather than a few more sacks of seed, rather than shoats or even a child's crib … a good thing, she thought, as far as it went, but it went too far. A utility became a shrine. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

For instance, Soane Morgan lost her male children, Easter and Scout, during the war (Morrison 1998b, 100-01). Dovey Morgan could not bear any child due to multiple miscarriages (Morrison 1998b, 96). Arnette Fleetwood aborted the fetus she conceived out of wedlock (Morrison 1998b, 179-80, 250). Sweetie Fleetwood delivered malformed children and watched them for six years, culminating in the death of her daughter, Save-Marie (Morrison 1998b, 57, 124-25, 295).

Ruby's signs of detrimental aging that features a reductive memory generate an aging narrative that only associates women with the profane. For them, the outsider woman only recalls the anomaly that trespasses the male domain of power and threatens this privilege, for she creates disorder either as an "outsider temptress" or a "potential loose insider" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 16). The outsider woman is a toxic reminder of the undesired racial difference within the community:

> The generations had to be racially untampered with but free of adultery too. 'God bless the pure and holy' …. Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. (Morrison 1998b, 217)

So, the impure (not 8-rock), unholy (fornicator), or coloured woman is rejected. Ironically, Ruby women's protection and acceptance is restrictively interpreted as pure black skin colour and obedience. On the other hand, the "racially

impure" conundrum shows how Ruby's affiliative aging degenerates into and reproduces the genetic filiation of the condemned system of slavery.[3]

In *Paradise*, Ruby's detrimental memory becomes the theme of its collective architecture of genetic isolation featured in similar patterns of closures, such as curtailing women's participation and communication in social affairs. The pathology of Ruby's aging is also diagnosed by their dementia that takes the form of delusional and amnesiac curtailment of women's participation in social affairs and ethical formations. One example is the reconciliation between Arnette and K.D., which is supposed to instil "the ideals of participatory democracy and nonviolence" (Cornier 2002, 650). Participatory democracy usually requires "extensive and active engagement of citizens in the self-governing process […and] in all matters that affect them in their common lives" (Barber 1995, 921). However, the exclusive exchange in the Fleetwood house exemplifies how social affairs are managed by amnesia in Ruby. Men negotiate these affairs without their women and their supposed growth "attempt remains seriously flawed in its exclusion of women" (Morrison 1998b, 650). Contrary to the ideal of tolerance, both Arnette and her mother are absent from the meeting of "those concerned", and K.D. is present with "his uncle Deek and Stewart, Reverend Misner, Arnette's father and brother" (Morrison 1998b, 54). Also, the "black and red fist" debate marks another pathology of communal violence and generational discontinuity and eminent mortality. The new fist on the back wall of the Oven marks a violent rift and challenge to the Old Fathers' inherited inscription and the New Fathers' reading of this inscription. Ruby women try to wash but could not remove the fist painting: "it produced a nagging, hateful pain that Kate's and Anna's scrubbing could not erase" (Morrison 1998b, 102). This "washing" incident reveals that Ruby women are not full participants in this generational debate, and even their healthy and meditative role for generational continuity and sustainability is curtailed and forgotten. Instead, Ruby women are demonized as they secretly mediate their healthy interpretations of the Oven's debate in their separate quarters. Dovey Morgan secretly observes that Ruby men

> were in a battle over words attached to the lip of the Oven. An argument fueled in part … by what nobody talked about: young people in trouble or acting up behind every door. (Morrison 1998b, 83)

3 See Edward Said's discussion on the overlap between filiation and affiliation in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 20-30.

Soane Morgan clandestinely investigates the fist battle and comments that "there were no whites (moral or malevolent) around to agitate or incense them, make them ugly-up the Oven and defy the adults" (Morrison 1998b, 102). Patricia separately records and analyses Ruby's history in her private quarters, the bedroom and the kitchen (Morrison 1998b, 185-217). Lone DuPres, the midwife who represents the evolution of the community, becomes a clandestine intruder on the racially exclusive space that effaces her memory (Morrison 1998b, 269-80). In Ruby, the amnesia of women's interpretations is predicted as a side effect of the Oven's relocation from the environment of biodiversity. The link between environmental damage and detrimental memory recalls the curse of scattering that haunted Zechariah's visions:

> The one who saw scrolls of curses and women in baskets … the one who saw the result of disobedience. The punishment for not showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations, and pleasant land made desolate. All of that would fit nicely for Zechariah Morgan: the curse, the women stuffed into a basket with a lid of lead and hidden away in a house. (Morrison 1998b, 192)

Symbolically, the community's pathological aging is visible in its memory impairment and amnesia of the past.

Another side effect of Ruby's pathological aging is mental recession and regression. Ruby elitists' exegesis of Zechariah's conundrum "Beware the Furrows of His Brow" is a major example of their mental recession. The men of Ruby are willing to defend the written text of the Oven based on the oral testimony of Miss Esther's "finger" memory as a five-year-old (Morrison 1998b, 83). Representing the elitist New Fathers, Steward exclaims:

> Esther never made a mistake of that nature in her life. She knew all there was to know about Haven and Ruby too. She visited us before we had a road. She named this town, dammit. (Morrison 1998b, 86-87)

The problem of the New Fathers' interpretation is its attribution to an immature transmitter who does not have "good memory" (Mernissi 1987, 35), one of the criteria for validating the transmitter of any narrative. As a five-year-old child, the credence of Esther's memory cannot be determined. Her childhood memory

represents a stage of linguistic babble that has not reached final formulation. So, Miss Esther does not belong to the entourage of validated sources.

The declining Ruby presents presbyopia, the age-related physiological degeneration that blurs the reading of the Oven's text and projects constant pathological aging. Zechariah is the one who protects the sacred space of the Oven and opens it to the followers through the combination of his inscription: "Furrow of His Brow". Anatomically and dermatologically speaking, the brow furrows refer to the forehead's frown lines that usually become more visible with forehead aging. Applying the anatomical significations of the brow's furrows to the generational controversy over the cryptic inscription of the Oven leads to the same conclusion: your reading of aging. However, all suggested readings by the representatives of Ruby's generations reflect an impaired vision as they divert from the core and tangible reference. One reading of this inscription is "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 86). The second reading is "Be the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 87). The third reading is "We are the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 298). Comparing these interpretations to the behaviour of these conflicting generations implies their failure to read and apply the signs correctly. Ruby's young generations are not updating the motto by enforcing "we" or "be". Rather, they are taking the agency to reinforce the rift. Their interpretation is also another "misreading of the warning. They also re-adopt the same rhetoric [of the New Fathers] by finding fault with the present and moving themselves into (limited action)" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 20). Focusing on the first part of the conundrum "be/we/beware" does not induce any change or difference. They all ignore the part that reflects the meaning and approach to aging: "Furrow of His Brow". So, Ruby's generations collectively age and decline in their racially exclusive space.

The presbyopia of Ruby men ultimately "misreads" the neighbouring Convent women as unruly agency. In Ruby men's politics of racial intolerance, the Convent women are racially impure and pollute the divine 8-rock blood in the first place. This hypothesis of female profanity explains why Ruby men consider Convent women as an obscene and perverted group of coven's "witches" and "sluts" who wrecked the peace of Ruby's kingdom (Morrison 1998b, 276). The Convent women are dangerous because they have trespassed physically, genetically, and ideologically on the frontiers of Ruby's divine/public and private spaces. These outsider temptresses anarchize Ruby's patriarchal system through committing adultery and adulteration (as in the affairs of Consolata and Deacon

and Gigi and K.D.), befriending Ruby women (Lone, Soane, and Bellie Delia), and allegedly aborting their babies (as in Soane and Arnette's cases). This adulterous and criminal locus of the Convent deflates the myth of Ruby's abysmal and unbridgeable borders and exposes their age-related fragility and vulnerability. Ruby's nine men resort to chronic violence to preserve their fading power and control on Ruby. They set the dawn of a July day as the deadline for the Convent women's lives (Morrison 1998b, 3).

Ruby men's pathological aging that presents presbyopia, memory loss, and hallucination becomes collective as it extends to the community's women. For instance, Sweetie Fleetwood seemingly perpetuates Ruby men's stereotypes of the Convent women by stigmatizing them, calling them "demons", and later claiming that they "snatched" and made her go there (Morrison 1998b, 130). Also, Sweetie conveys her aging symptoms of dementia and hallucination about the Convent women. For example, Reverend Cary justifies the plans for the hideous attack on the Convent women based on Sweetie's report:

> Sweetie said they tried their best to poison her. I heard that too. Got caught in a snowstorm out that way and took shelter with them … she heard noises coming from somewhere in that house. Sounded to her like little babies crying. (Morrison 1998b, 275)

Similarly, Arnette Fleetwood attacks the Convent women and blames them for the death of the baby that she herself injured through attempts to force a miscarriage (Morrison 1998b, 250, 179-80).

Ruby's unsustainable aging ends with its evolution as it bars "ongoing accommodation" (Guinier 1998, 252) and degenerates into coercive mortality. The obsession and obligation of keeping Ruby safe from outside intrusions urges its leading nine men to turn their anger and vent their frustration on the women of the Convent (Tally 1999, 65). Illusive power and violence interlace for the Ruby patriarchs. Legitimized by their mythical disallowal, Ruby men resort to violence and the plotting of murder to rid the Convent of its women. The Convent residents become disruptive agents for Ruby's male power, as Reverend Cary exclaims: "You think they got powers? I *know* they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger" (Morrison 1998b, 276-77). Reversing to genetic infanticide, Ruby men converge to and assimilate the racial violence in the white order. Reverend Misner concludes that Ruby men

> think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them. And when the maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause. (Morrison 1998b, 306)

By first attacking the Convent women in the kitchen, Ruby men replicate what they have originally condemned: the disallowing of life.

To counteract Ruby elitists' age regression, the narrator recovers the forgotten testimonies that were symptomatic of pathological intolerance. Lone becomes the alternative transmitter of narratives and acts like a reporter for the external narrator. She is the outsider who does not conform to Ruby's degenerative exclusion and suspicion of outsiders, because she does not belong genetically and morally. She is one of the two snatched up toddlers (Morrison 1998b, 189) and the rejected midwife who celebrates connections and ultimately knows the cause of Ruby's reductive aging (Morrison 1998b, 195). Also, she is a witness because "for more than twenty years Lone had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost" (Morrison 1998b, 270). Above all, Lone not only witnesses Ruby's establishment but also overhears the nine men's hideous plan of attack on the Convent. Lone's report displays credibility and integrity. Lone presents intact memory symptomatic of her sustainable aging.

> Yet she did know something more profound than Morgan memory or Pat Best's history book. She knew what neither memory nor history can say or record: the 'trick' of life and its 'reason'. (Morrison 1998b, 272)

Lone becomes not only a midwife and transmitter of Ruby's narrative, but also a composer. She could change the course of reductive narration:

> He wanted her to hear the men gathered at the Oven to decide and figure out how to run the Convent women off, and if He wanted her to witness that, He must also want her *to do something about it* [emphasis mine]. (Morrison 1998b, 274)

Thus, the narrator's fictional site exercises sustainable aging that reclaims Haven's intact memory and inclusive osmosis by remembering women's effaced interpretations in Ruby's aging narrative.

Architecturally speaking, the oral tales in *Paradise* are presented as counter narratives to Ruby's aging narrative. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", Morrison observes that her novels' "indeterminate ending … follows from the untrustworthy beginning" (Morrison 1990, 31). This correlation applies to *Paradise* as the narrator discontinues the pathological aging of Ruby's narrative, through suspension, multiplicity, and open-endedness and transforms Ruby's narrative into an elusive, circadian, and indeterminate property of the community. The multiplicity of voices and the reclamation of the repressed female voices, such as Lone's, activate mental exercise in reading the reductive narrative of the attack that even Reverend Misner fails to decipher:

> Pat gave him the two editions of the official story: One, that nine men had gone to talk to and persuade the Convent women to leave or mend their ways; there had been a fight; the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air. And two (the Fleetwood-Jury version), that five men had gone to evict the women; that four others—the authors—had gone to restrain or stop them; these four were attacked by the women but had succeeded in driving them out, and they took off in their Cadillac; but unfortunately, some of the five had lost their heads and killed the old woman …. Richard didn't believe either of the stories rapidly becoming gospel, and spoke to Simon Cary and Senior Pulliam, who clarified other parts of the tale. But because neither had decided on the meaning of the ending and, therefore, had not been able to formulate a credible, sermonziable account of it, they could not assuage Richard's satisfaction. It was Lone who provided him with the livid details that several people were quick to discredit, because Lone, they said, was not reliable. (Morrison 1998b, 296-97)

In *Paradise*, Ruby's women defy their collective pathological aging by activating circadian memory of sustainability and imagination of renewal. Ruby men have marginalized and excluded their women from the Oven and confined them to closely-guarded spaces. Dovey's garden lacks any signs of biodiversity, such

as lively butterflies. However, Dovey's imaginative conversation with the walking man activates an architecture of biomimicry and connectivity that makes her realize her sustainable aging:

> 'I saw some butterflies a while back. Up there'. Dovey pointed. 'Orangy red, they were. Just as bright. Never saw that color before. Like what we used to call coral when I was a girl. Pumpkin color, but stronger'. … She never saw the persimmon wings again …. Thing was, when he came, she talked nonsense. Things she didn't know were on her mind. Pleasures, worries, things unrelated to the world's serious issues. Yet he listened intently to whatever she said. (Morrison 1998b, 91, 92)

The "kitchen of the biggest house in Ruby" (Morrison 1998b, 100), Soane's kitchen, represents another confinement. In this place, Soane processes her repressed biophilic thoughts and dreams about connectivity and regeneration. Thus, she feels affinity with hunted birds: "Look out, quail. Deek's gunning for you. And when he comes back he'll throw a sackful of you on my clean floor and say something like: 'This ought to take care of supper'. Proud. Like he's giving me a present. Like you were plucked, cleaned and cooked" (Morrison 1998b, 100). The scene where Soane is standing at the clothesline and struggling with the wind to pin sheets also reflects her shift into connectivity:

> Soane had looked up to see a lady in the yard smiling …. When the lady waved, Soane returned the stranger's greeting as best she could with a mouthful of clothespins—a nod she hoped was polite. The lady turned and moved on. Soane noticed two things: the basket was empty but the lady carried it with two hands as though it were full, which, as she knew now, was a sign of what was to come—an emptiness that would weigh her down, an absence too heavy to carry. And she knew who sent the lady to tell her so. (Morrison 1998b, 102)

Hindered by unfastened sheets and a "mouthful of clothespins", Soane cannot talk or wave back to the mystic lady's gesture. This scene is symbolic of Soane's revival of complete memory and realization of her restrictive domesticity.

She identifies the paradox of the basket's burdensome emptiness with her life as a Ruby woman. She also discerns the repressive domesticity in her embroidery, as it becomes a wordless expression of emptiness and signifies containment. Soane works "thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for free, producing more lace than could ever be practical" (Morrison 1998b, 53). The lace that Soane weaves signifies emptiness through the openwork pattern that characterizes its fabric. Soane's lace also conforms to Ruby women's restriction via marriage as she uses it for veiling brides, such as Dovey and Arnette, and drawing the seams for wedding gowns (Morrison 1998b, 81, 148-49). Soane now ages to recall that her methodical sewing of lace lacks any imaginative subversion of pathological development.

Unlike Ruby's architecture, the Convent features openness and biodiversity. The Convent does not have definite frontiers. In Ruby, a woman's passing into the outside world intensifies stigmatization, as in Billie Delia's case (Morrison 1998b, 203). Instead, the Convent is the "the one place [its residents] were free to leave" and each of the Convent women asks to

> linger a few days but never actually leav[es]. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while—but only a while. (Morrison 1998b, 262, 222)

And unlike the exclusive and "racial house" (Morrison 1998a, 4) of Ruby, the Convent is an inclusive and "open house" (Krumholz 2002, 23) where "race-blind" (Whitton 1999) women convene. And these women "miraculously speak no racial discourse of each other *at all*" (Wilt 2001, 282).[4]

The residents of the Convent realize and design their architectural theme of sustainable aging. Originally, the Convent women have been afflicted with the pathology of impaired memory. Each of the other long-term residents—Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas—comes upon the Convent in the process of fleeing a haunting aspect of her past. The Convent women's internal fear as highlighted in Consolata's (or Connie's) answer to Mavis's question: "'You all ain't scared

4 In her interview with Paul Gray, Morrison explains how her narrative intentionally undermines any certainty of these women's color: "I did that on purpose …. I wanted the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way …. Race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It's real information, but it tells you next to nothing" (par. 21).

out here by yourselves? Don't seem like there's nothing for miles outside'. Connie laughed. 'Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside'" (Morrison 1998b, 39). However, they start to realize regeneration through what Nancy Chodorow calls the healthy and crucial relation of "primary intimacy and merging" (Chodorow 1978, 79) that "ensures the production of feminine personalities founded on relation and connection, with flexible rather than rigid ego boundaries" (Chodorow 1974, 58). Simulating the open structure of the Convent, the women share their memories:

> This is how loud dreaming began. How the stories rose in that place. Half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles. And it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning. In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer's tale. (Morrison 1998b, 264)

This conversation simulates what Morrison calls, rememory that brings about "uncontrolled remembering and reliving of emotionally painful experiences" (Bouson 2000, 135) and past traumas. The Convent women's ritual of rememory exposes the possibility of their transformation through confronting, recreating, sharing the traumas of their past, and making connections between their stories. This collective articulation of their traumas teaches the Convent women to recognize and love the unity or connection between them:

> In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do. (Morrison 1998b, 264)

After this ritual, the Convent women reach a significant stage of aging and initiation into sobriety that is discernable in their sudden "little change" into "sociable and connecting" women (Morrison 1998b, 265). This sudden change reflects their progressive and sustainable aging that counters the reductive age of Ruby: "unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted" (Morrison 1998b, 266).

To conclude, *Paradise* proposes aging as an architect of varied geographies and narratives. Aging in *Paradise* invites us to rethink everything associated with the body as it is extended into a blueprint of habitats and environments that narrativize either rupture or continuity. In other words, aging in Morrison's narrative transcends histories and contexts to imagine the "New Aging [that] will inspire you and your loved ones to live smarter today so you can live better tomorrow" (Hollwich 2016).

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Constructing Centenarianism in Neenah Ellis' *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians*

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Abstract. This paper investigates how centenarianism as a new age category in its connection to successful aging is established in the guidebook on aging and the interview collection titled *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians* by Neenah Ellis. While guidebooks sell the image of successful aging as individual achievement and thus reinforce a neoliberal understanding of successful aging, Ellis' narratives renegotiate the concept. She collects stories of centenarians which define the success in aging through personal encounters, purpose, and meaning rather than an active body. Thereby, they question normative assumptions of old age as a binary of progress and decline (cf. Gullette). With a focus on the way a new age category of centenarianism is established through narrative and storytelling, the paper traces how Ellis' narratives grapple with the construction of centenarianism at the intersection of the biological, social, and cultural, asking which factors determine how age is established as a multi-facetted construct.

Keywords: Centenarians, successful aging, positive aging, life writing, age as construct

Introduction

As life expectancy continuously rises in Western societies, the number of individuals who reach the age of 100 increases respectively. At the same time, their number is scarce enough for their occurrence to be considered somewhat of a phenomenon. Accordingly, we live at a moment in time where we can witness the establishment of a new age category: centenarianism. While a life span of 100 years has historically been imagined as ideal and for instance been depicted in popular medieval and early modern images of the stairs of life (Cole 2006, 5-6), only in recent years this ideal is actually frequently achieved. This new category is not only studied by biomedical researchers in order to seek out the

secrets to extraordinary longevity, it is also the subject of numerous narratives, grappling with the idea of living to and at 100. Besides fictional accounts, there are countless newspaper articles, guidebooks, and (auto)biographies[1] all dedicated to capturing the centenarian experience. Within these narratives, centenarians are often regarded as "paragons of positive aging" (Robine and Vaupel 1997, x). If centenarians are considered paragons of positive aging, the discourse surrounding them is likely to add to a successful aging paradigm. The concept of successful aging was introduced by John Rowe and Robert Kahn in their study of the same title. They differentiate between successful aging and "usual aging", which they define as being "on the borderline of disease" (Rowe and Kahn 1998, 53). This successful aging paradigm has been widely criticized by for its focus on the aging body and its neoliberal implications. Debbie Rudman, for instance elaborates that

> Western nations have raised concerns regarding how such discourses [on successful aging] have intersected with neoliberal rationality such that responsibilities for the management of bodily, financial and social risks of aging have increasingly been shifted from states and other institutions to individuals. (Rudman 2015, 11)

The discourse surrounding successful aging thus focuses on functionality, imagining those who cease to function as a 'proper' member of society as a failure. The responsibility for success, within this imaginary, lies with the individual. 'Usual aging' in turn, means a loss of function in a very practical sense of the aging body.

At the same time Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues that "we are aged by culture" in her monograph of the same title (2004). According to Gullette, age is given meaning through cultural implications and interactions rather than a mere process of biology. It is this cultural construction that, according to Kathleen Woodward, leads to an "ideology of American youth culture, where youth is valued at virtually all costs over age and where age is largely deemed a matter for comedy or sentimental compassion" (Woodward 2006, 164). Valuing youth

1 I use the notation '(auto)biography' because most centenarian narratives are forms of collaborative life writing, including a co-author or ghost writer interviewing a centenarian and writing down their life's story (cf. Velten 2022, 51).

over old age, accordingly, becomes learned behavior through an individual's socialization within a given social and cultural framework. Successful aging thus can be considered to be both a cultural imaginary of a promoted ideal, as well as a call to action to meet this ideal. This complexity of successful aging as a cultural imaginary has not yet been frequently discussed. While the concept is criticized, the mechanisms of its production are often overlooked. Centenarian narratives may serve as an entry point to understand how successful aging is communicated through narratives as both an imaginary and a call to action as well as how the cultural is influenced by the biological and social aspects of aging.[2] How do the biological (the undeniable fact that the human body changes through time), the social (the role an individual takes up or is expected to take up in a given society), and the cultural (the images, ideologies, and ideas about the aging process an individual is confronted with) interact in order to determine what age means to an individual and to a society?

In order to address this question in general and the concept of successful aging in particular, looking at centenarians is fruitful for three reasons. First, as the category of centenarianism is currently in the process of being defined, a discussion of centenarians promises insights into the mechanisms of the way age categories are constructed. That is, looking at the way centenarians are described and imagined through narratives sheds light on the question of how the biological, social, and cultural interact in the formation of centenarianism. Second, centenarians are regarded as role models and, therefore, escape the predominant ideologies of the United States that favors youth over anything. Centenarians show that there is a way to age that makes aging acceptable, even valued. Centenarian narratives thus have the chance to offer perspectives that break with what Gullette calls a binary between "progress" and "decline" (Gullette 2004, 7). Third, success is inherent to centenarian narratives, as the individuals who live to 100 are considered successful by the number of years they have lived already. As the concept is particularly visible within these narratives, it suggests itself to read them according to the mechanisms behind it.

This paper sets out to trace the way successful aging is reassessed alongside centenarianism through narratives. Therefore, I will first briefly look at centenarianism and how it is framed in aging guidebooks, identifying common themes

2 This idea is based on the line of argument in the grant proposal for the DFG Collaborative Research Center 1482 "Studies in Human Categorization" at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany.

and structures within them. I will then look at a collection of interviews with centenarians conducted by journalist Neenah Ellis, published as the book *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians.* I will read one example from the collection against the category of centenarianism as it is promoted by guidebooks and identify how various narratives discuss aging as either successful or not. Ultimately, I will discuss throughout this paper how looking at successful aging and centenarianism redefines and broadens the term, while not completely escaping the criticism attached to it.

Centenarianism and the Guidebook Industry

Gullette claims that the human life-course is divided into "life-course imaginaries" (Gullette 2003, 103). Accordingly, any life stage is imagined in a certain way, providing images of how to act or not to act at a given moment in life. As these imaginaries are culturally constructed, they are influenced by cultural products we encounter. This chapter will serve as an introduction into the way centenarianism is imagined through media representations and how successful aging is negotiated within these representations. I will briefly touch on a highly successful genre of centenarian narratives to provide an overview of construction of centenarianism: guidebooks on how to live to 100.

The abundance of guidebooks to healthy living that are connected to centenarians goes back to a successful aging paradigm. Because centenarians are 'paragons of positive aging,' they are presumed to be healthy and active into extraordinary old age. In other words, presuming that, as Silke van Dyk elaborates, old age is divided into an "independent and capable Third Age and a deep old Fourth Age that is characterized by sickness, frailty and dependency" (van Dyk 2016, 109), centenarians have managed to live a life that prevented them from entering the forth age of disease and decline. They are, accordingly, extraordinarily successful at aging well. This idea is taken up by the guidebook industry, connecting advise on healthy living directly to centenarians. Titles such as *Healthy at 100: How You Can – At Any Age – Dramatically Increase Your Life Span and Your Health Span* (Robbins, 2007) or *Celebrate 100: Centenarian Secrets to Success in Business and Life* (Franklin and Adler, 2013) suggest that living to the age of 100 is a special achievement and claim that this achievement is due to hard work rather than chance. The focal points of the guidebooks, according to the titles vary. While *Healthy at 100* promises aid in achieving a 'successful'

biological aging process, *Celebrate 100* approaches life in general and professionalism in particular. The model centenarian, in terms of these guidebooks is thus not only physically healthy but financially successful. In other words, centenarians are physically and financially able to fend for themselves and are not in need of a healthcare, or a social system supporting them. If everyone lives like a centenarian, in turn, we can all make it to extraordinary old age without physical signs of aging and without any financial troubles. *Healthy at 100* clearly speaks to the biological aspects of aging that seem to be avoided at any rate. Only healthy aging, according to these guidebooks—and according to Rowe and Kahn—is successful aging.

Celebrate 100, however, suggests that in addition to biological aspects of aging, social factors also determine what is considered to be 'successful'. The book explicitly mentions economic success in life and thereby broadens the definition of 'success' as something that can only be achieved with financial independence. This then implicitly speaks to a fear of financial decline and poverty in old age in two ways. On the one hand, financially independent centenarians give peace of mind to middle agers: if there is no poverty in old age, there is no need to financially support the elderly, which counters a fear of a silver tsunami (Chivers 2021, 3). On the other hand, promising financial stability into old age may counter fear of aging itself: poverty often means social isolation (Samuel, et al. 2017). The imaginary of poverty as connected to old age may thus spark a fear of being poor and therefore isolated in later life. The guidebooks at hand counter these imaginaries by presenting centenarians as financially stable, indicating that learning from their example, nobody has to be poor in old age. The successful aging paradigm thus works on fears of the cultural imaginary of decline in old age, thereby implicitly reinforcing it. At the same time, it presents an alternative imaginary to the decline forces. This alternative is only achievable, according to the suggestion of the genre, if one follows the advice given by centenarians.

Guidebooks on centenarianism and aging thus present centenarians as role models in aging in a biological and a social sense.[3] By focusing on health and finance, they address fears of isolation and immobility, often connected to old age. Consequently, they play on the fears and stereotypes of old age to present centenarianism as an exceptional form of aging. This representation, while aiming

3 While this paper only touches upon two examples of guidebooks, similar mechanisms are visible in an abundance of publicans on centenarians and living to 100.

at taking away the fear of aging, can also be regarded as highly problematic: by establishing centenarians as role models, they indicate that everybody can achieve what they did, in turn imagining everyone who does not as a failure.

Centenarianism and Life Narrative: Successful Aging in *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians*

While guidebooks feature a large number of centenarians and add to a cultural imaginary of centenarianism as physically and socially active, they do not necessarily touch upon the everyday life as a centenarian, nor do they feature the complexities of individuals and their personal struggles. This lack of individual, personal stories is filled by an increasing number of life narratives about and by centenarians. These life narratives come in different media forms, ranging from documentaries, book chapters, interviews, or full length (auto)biographies. Looking at the genre of centenarian life narratives seems fruitful because, as Alfred Hornung points out, life writing "may mediate between individual positions and choices taken in life, in the sense of the critical concept of relational selves" (Hornung 2010, xii). If narratives of life can function as a mediator between different positions, I argue that they can also function as a mediator between different life stages, and become a platform for the negotiation of the construction of age at the intersection of the biological, social, and cultural. In this paper, I would like to look at a series of interviews conducted by radio host Neenah Ellis, which had originally been intended for radio broadcast and then published as a collection of stories with the title *If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians*. For this book, Neenah Ellis interviews 15 centenarians, initially to get a first-hand account of the historical events of the 20th century. However, she quickly realizes that there is more to centenarians than their past, that they in fact have a present and a future which in itself seems to be a revelation when it comes to narratives about old age. Ellis uses recorded interviews as a basis for narrating someone's life (Ellis 2004, 7-9). The title of the collection suggests that, although providing a more nuanced depiction of the individual, the book exists in the tradition of guidebooks on successful aging. Ellis promises her readers unspecified lessons of some sort. Interestingly, however, her title does not indicate a guide on how to live to 100; instead, it appears as if she inquires about living well at 100. The title then puts a slightly different emphasis on the questions of successful aging. Instead of simply asking how to get there,

Ellis wants to know how to make life meaningful and worth living once we have arrived. This approach already reveals an image of aging that is torn between the extremes of successful aging and decline because it indicates that rendering a life worth living may be more difficult at extraordinary old age. At the same time, she puts centenarians on a pedestal, imaging them as role models who should be able to give advice. Discussing this particular book suggests itself because in contrast to many other narratives by and about centenarians it does not mainly focus on how to achieve centenarianism but on how individuals live at 100. Moreover, it serves as a valid entry point to the discussion of centenarian narratives, because it presents a variety of stories, while adhering to the characteristics of the genre in its overall framework.

In her book publication, Ellis does not solely publish the interview transcripts from her radio show but narrates her encounters with different centenarians. This narration allows for the chance to learn how the interaction with the extraordinarily old person alters the perspectives about old age in a middle-aged person. On the other hand, this poses a problem for narrative structure: what the audience gets to read is not simply a centenarian's story but a middle-aged person's interpretation of this story. At the same time, "[t]he possible loss of narrative authority may be compensated by the fact that the life story of a centenarian would otherwise not have been written in the first place" (Banerjee and Velten 2020, 2). Consequently, the reader has to rely on the accuracy of Neenah Ellis' recollections and interview transcripts and remain aware that it is her perspective that influences the story and the setting. That is, we have to be aware of what may have been omitted from the transcripts or interpreted through Ellis' own perspective. The centenarians thus become what Thomas Couser calls a "vulnerable subject" in his book of the same title (2003), a person whose life is written about by others and who do not have the chance to approve the text that is written about them. As many of the centenarians presented had passed away before the book was published, they were unable to approve the message provided. This is a problem that is prevalent throughout many narratives of centenarianism. Most stories have been co-written or co-produced, which makes it necessary to entangle the various voices that contributed to them and also to trust that the co-authors are aware of their ethical obligations to their subjects and their audiences (cf. Velten 2022; Banerjee and Velten 2020). Moreover, middle aged co-authors come with their own assumptions about aging, which they may not be able to separate from

the person they are writing about. Despite the pitfalls there are with these kinds of collaborative forms of life narrative, they can help us understand what it means to age to individuals and their surroundings and thus make the inner negotiation of an age identity available to a public audience.

Neenah Ellis mediates between several centenarians and their stories within her narrative. At the same time, she mediates her own perceptions and learned ageisms through the people she encounters. It has to be mentioned that her own somewhat ageist assumptions about successful aging are tracible throughout the entire book. By reflecting on new revelations and her own thought process, however, it appears that, at times, she is aware of her own stereotypes, while in other instances appearing to be rather oblivious on the matter. The centenarians presented have very different approaches to life and value a diverse number of abilities or structures above others. That is, while some ponder their physical abilities, others are happy about a full life with friends and family. And then there are those who do not feel that they are successful at aging at all. Anna Wilmot (103), for instance, takes out her boat every morning, despite her worsening arthritis. She lives alone but is content with her situation, as she has friends close by and enjoys reading in the quiet (Ellis 2004, 59-62). Abraham Goldstein (101) is a working university professor who enjoys interacting with students and colleagues (Ellis 2004, 65). Roy Larken Stamper (103), on the other hand, is looking for a companion and feels lonely, despite his son and grandson living in close proximity (Ellis 2004, 161). Marion Cowen (101) is physically unable to get up from his bed and is dependent on numerous care takers, a situation that appears to evoke a feeling of shame in him—according to Ellis' interpretation (Ellis 2004, 205). All these encounters lead Ellis to confront her own assumptions and fears with regard to aging, as she is looking for meaning in later life for herself and her audience (Ellis 2004, 47). At the same time, the diversity of the encounters presented show that centenarianism is a very diverse category with individual experiences when it comes to different aspects of aging and that defining success is always up to the individual. In what follows, I will discuss one narrative within the book closer with regard to its portrayal of the social, cultural, and biological aspects of aging and their implications about success: the example of Ruth Ellis.[4]

4 Coincidentally, the centenarian Ruth Ellis and the author of the book share the same last name. In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to both either by their full or their first names.

Ruth Ellis is not only a centenarian but also known to be the oldest African American lesbian activist in the early 2000s. Her story is presented in three parts throughout the book. No other centenarian is allowed as much room to tell their story. In Ruth's case, the biological, social, and cultural aspects are narrated alongside each other, varying in importance for the overall perception of centenarianism in particular and age in general. This goes along the lines of Stefan Hirschauer's argument that categories of human differentiation mutually influence each other. He elaborates that "some differentiations get in each other's way, others meet without consequences, some reinforce each other, others neutralize each other" (Hirschauer 2014, 185, my translation).[5] In Ruth's case, I argue, it becomes visible how different aspects of age mutually influence and reinforce each other, depending on the situation the centenarian finds herself in. This in turn also indicates that the understanding of successful aging varies in different situations.

The biological aspects of Ruth's aging process become apparent through the narrative almost immediately: The initial description of her physicality does not focus on the declining body, rather, it emphasizes on her moving well "with good coordination." Moreover "[h]er hearing is excellent and her eyesight is, too" (Ellis 2004, 117). With regard to these external features of the aging body, her narrative thus reinforces a successful aging paradigm in a biological sense. In terms of her outward appearance Neenah describes Ruth as "maybe five feet tall, thin, neat, and handsome" (Ellis 2004, 116). What is most striking is that Ruth is described as handsome, which is not expected from especially female elderly (Sontag 1972, 31). By making her handsome in the imagination of her readers, Neenah already attributes a certain youth to Ruth. Bearing in mind that an outward image is the first impression of a person, it has a tremendous power of how an individual is perceived by others. In a café, for instance, Ruth tells the waitress how old she is, to which she replies "No! You can't be! Well, honey, you look just great" (Ellis 2004, 142). Her extraordinary old age, thus, does not appear to be visible. The statement of the waitress also reinforces the notion that looking old and looking great do not go together in public imaginary. The younger a person looks, the more successful they are thus considered at aging. This then shows how successful

5 The original German text reads as such: "[m]anche Differenzierungen kommen sich in die Quere, andere begegnen sich folgenlos, manche verstärken sich gegenseitig, andere neutralisieren sich" (185).

aging is often defined by superficial measures that are assigned to an individual from the outside. In this instance, Ruth has no defining power over the waitress's assumption of her success at aging. The waitress, in turn, identifies Ruth's aging as successful by merely one parameter, not knowing what her life actually looks like. Outward appearance thus does not imply anything about the meaningful life; yet, as the first impression, it is often given a great power of determination.

This first impression is somewhat contested once Neenah spends more time with Ruth. Sometimes, especially at night, when Ruth is safe in her own apartment, signs of her medical issues become visible:

> I can hear Ruth groaning in pain and I'm struck by the unlikeliness of the moment. I am sleeping in the living room of a hundred year old person I met this morning. She seemed so lively during the day, but tonight I'm worried she might die. (Ellis 2004, 125)

Because Ruth was 'lively' during the day, Neenah did not register that she is travelling with an extremely old person. It is only through the display of pain that she remembers that Ruth is old and that, according to cultural images of old age, death is in close proximity. Heike Hartung and Rüdiger Kunow elaborate that old age is often imagined as "'a waiting room' in which people bide their time until they die" (Hartung and Kunow 2011, 18). This idea of the waiting room, clearly connected to a doctor's office and associated to illness, presents itself to Neenah at night at home when Ruth is in her private sphere. It is intensified through the description of medication Ruth takes:

> On the kitchen counter I notice Ruth's medications: Vioxx for her arthritis, a potassium supplement, a big box of Geritol, which is just vitamins with lots or iron, and a blood-pressure medicine. (Ellis 2004, 125)

This focus on medication evokes the notion of old age as a disease. The centenarian presented, in other words, did not live to 100 healthily and, going strictly by Rowe and Kahn's definition, has not aged successfully.

This contrast between the depiction of Ruth's age in a public and a private sphere indicates that the centenarian feels the need to act according to the successful aging imaginary largely presented in the genre of guidebooks: in order

to be a role model, she needs to act a certain way and has to restrict the reality of her aging body to her home. She keeps going even though she knows that the speed at which she moves is not good for her. Accordingly, her condition has "gotten worse in the past year, she says, since she turned one hundred and started doing all this travelling" (Ellis 2004, 126). As decline is largely linked to the body, it might well be that Ruth feels the pressure to keep moving faster than she usually would to convey the image of progress to the outside world. In terms of the construct of age, the example of Ruth Ellis thus shows how significant the body seems to be for the determination of what is old.

Consequently, the depiction of Ruth's biological aging is rather arbitrary: although she has medical issues, she is described as mobile and independent, thus simultaneously reinforcing and disrupting a successful aging paradigm. Interestingly, her biological age is performed differently depending on the situation she finds herself in, indicating a need to perform in a way that adheres to the cultural imaginary of successful aging in public. The way Neenah describes her at night, however, evokes imaginaries of decline and the interconnectedness of old age and death. The way Neenah narrativizes her experience clearly shows that she has been aged by a culture that reinforces this connection, making it seem a natural association for her.

While the biology of aging influences Ruth differently in different settings, the social aspects intermingle with the biological ones, forming an even more complex image of age as a construct. In terms of social aging James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium explain that "an individual's life course is made up of the roles he or she may occupy over time" (Holstein and Gubrium 2007, 339). These roles may include student, professor, plumber, teacher, mother, grandmother, retiree etc. and define a persons' status in society. The role we occupy, in other words, influences the perception of our social age since most of these roles are socially bound to a certain age group and in turn connected to certain behavioral catalogues. However, Ruth's life story turns the expected roles on their head. She states that "'I didn't have any friends. I went to school by myself'" (Ellis 2004, 126) and continues with

> 'I didn't get a very good education. If I was to go back to school, I'd have to start from the beginning. That's why I like to be around these young people so much. Maybe I can learn something from them'. (Ellis 2004, 127)

These statements show that Ruth did not act in a way a student or an adolescent person is expected to act. She did not learn a lot and she did not mingle with her peers and surround herself with fun and laughter of the young. Although she occupied the social role of a student, she did not adhere to the expected social features assigned to this role. Rather, she felt lonely as a student and only in old age she feels accepted and part of a community. When speaking about the loneliness in her younger years, she states that she "'wasn't really aware of [her] life until [she] was eighty'" and describes being a senior citizen as "'the happiest time of her life so far'" (Ellis 2004, 139). She thus starts to take up the role as a happy person with a lot of friends when, according to the cultural imaginary of life course roles, isolation and decline are supposed to be at its core.

Further, Ruth takes up the role as an activist and thereby openly criticizes the society she lives in. She travels the country to talk to university students about her triple oppression of being a woman, black, and homosexual, which becomes more severe as soon as ageism is added to the mix. In that sense, Ruth speaks out for four activist causes at once. Again, she works against the cultural image of the stereotypical 'activist' who is thought to be a lot younger. Her ongoing fight for the rights of women, African Americans, the LGBTQ* community, and the elderly is what makes her appear so lively in Neenah's eyes. She states that when talking to student Ruth "looks ageless to me, almost young" (Ellis 2004, 122). Ruth's behavior thus influences the way other people see her in terms of her age. Neenah depicts her younger than she is because she engages in activities that would be expected from a younger person.

Even though she is described as being in a wheelchair while giving a lecture, the notion of being young is not overwritten. When asked to get Ruth's wheelchair, Neenah writes that, "I find it hard to believe she'll need it" (Ellis 2004, 117).[6] In Ruth's public life, her actions trump her body and she thus manages to fight cultural images of old age as a mere waiting room for death and redefines it as a space that can be used to achieve something. Her social role as activist counters the biological aspects of her age, because her actions are stereotypically expected from much younger people.

6 This scene also calls for an analysis of aging in terms of disability. The wheelchair only becomes a signifier for the aged body because in cultural imaginary old age and disability are inextricably linked (cf. Chivers 2011). A detailed reading of Ruth Ellis narrative in terms of the nexus between disability studies and aging would unfortunately go beyond the scope of this paper.

Neenah's interpretation of Ruth as 'ageless' or 'almost young' again points to the deeply routed understandings of aging and certain roles an individual takes up throughout life. Because Neenah expects political activism to exist only outside of the life stage of old age, she regards Ruth as ageless or young while engaging in activist activities. The social role Ruth plays takes center stage, and it is because she engages in activism that, at this very moment, she is considered a successful ager. Interestingly, this success is connected with her being regarded as ageless. Aging successfully is hence depicted as not aging at all in public imaginary. This notion of success counters earlier images of her presumably dying at night by shifting the focus away from her body. She is imagined as a strong woman who stands up for herself and others through her occupation and social role. This then shows her working towards a better future, an aspect that according to Ricca Edmondson is crucial to generate meaning in later life (Edmondson 2015, 112). In that sense, Neenah Ellis does not solely define success through physical or social parameters but also through meaning.

The last factor in terms of the construction of age depicted in the Ruth Ellis segment of *If I Live to be 100* is chronological age itself. Ruth claims that people "'just want to know [her] 'cause [she is] a hundred'" (Ellis 2004, 143). She claims that she has been travelling to give talks a lot since her 100th birthday. Conversely, she only has been invited to do so since she has reached that threshold. The special occasion of reaching a three-digit life span thus makes Ruth and all other centenarians special. This then suggests that successful aging, in terms of centenarians, is very much tied to the number 100. This is why even centenarians like Marion Cowen are considered to have aged successfully, despite them not adhering to a successful aging imaginary. The imaginary of centenarianism itself becomes stronger than the imaginary of successful aging. On the one hand, this offers an entry point to renegotiate the successful aging paradigm and turn towards meaning and individuality. On the other hand, the cultural imaginary of centenarianism may only be possible because merely those centenarians who are able to tell their story are represented. That is, dementia is completely left out of the picture. Marlene Goldman argues that dementia in general and Alzheimer's in particular have become the gothic narrative of aging, establishing a horror story of old age (Goldman 2017, 4). The absence of narratives of dementia thus reinforces the positive imaginary of centenarians, as it allows for a cultural imaginary of extraordinary old age without the fear of memory loss. Consequently, centenarianism and successful aging are inextricably linked in public imaginary, sparking the expectation of success as soon as the age of 100 occurs.

The last of three chapters about Ruth in the book deals with her death. According to her friends, "[o]nce she got out of the hospital, Ruth had quit eating, eager to 'make her transition,' as she called it" (Ellis 2004, 211). Shortly after her release from the hospital, Ruth dies at her home. Death is treated as the natural conclusion of the narrative and does not sound like a bad ending. On the contrary, it is portrayed as though Ruth died when she wanted to—on her own terms. The narrative here works to deconstruct the taboo topic of death as a threat looming around each corner in old age and rather depicting it as a part of life. Taking the negative connotations away from death hence also works against the negative connotations of old age as a threshold to it. Ruth Ellis' late years are everything but a waiting room for death. Rather, this last segment shows that she has not only been successful at living but also at dying.

Conclusion

Reading the successful aging paradigm alongside centenarianism has shown how the paradigm works on fears of the cultural imaginary of decline in old age. Guidebooks, as well as Neenah Ellis' collection of interviews both present centenarianism in connection to successful aging and therefore imagine extraordinary old age away from negative images. Both types of narrative can be accused of reinforcing a successful aging paradigm but add to it by contrasting the social and biological and present their own cultural imaginary of centenarianism. That is only possible, however, because centenarians are marked as successful simply measured by the number of years they have lived.

While the guidebook industry's emphasis on successful aging can be simply accused of reinforcing neoliberal aspects of individual responsibility and thereby implicitly sparking fear of decline in old age, Neenah Ellis personal stories give a more nuanced impression of centenarianism and its connection to successful aging. Through the discussion of the interplay of different aspects of age, it becomes possible to regard old age as a multifaceted stage in life that is neither merely the road toward death, nor a success story but a spectrum of possibilities and meanings. Crucially, Ellis' narrative shows how the imagery of an age category highly depends on the setting and the perspective of the onlooker. The way age is presented is thus rather fluid and individual. While she still portrays centenarians as 'successful' at aging, due to the sheer number of years they have lived, she challenges Rowe and Kahn's idea of successful aging as the absence

of physical impairment and disease. On the other hand, Ellis' narrative largely consists of her interpretation of the centenarians' lives. Ultimately, what the reader is presented with is not the centenarians' takes on what entails success in life in general and successful aging in particular but rather Ellis' imaginary. This imaginary in turn is largely influenced by her own expectations and internalized cultural imaginaries of what old age is.

Nonetheless, the narratives discussed in this paper show that representations centenarians can expand the notion of what is successful in aging. It is not simply the body, but also social factors and the number of years lived that work together to determine success. The longer a person has lived, the more physical impairment or social isolation seems to be 'allowed' for there still to be success in the cultural imaginary. This is mostly achieved through the aspect of meaning in later life. Seeing life models of people who lead happy and meaningful lives despite their bodies and everyday encounters being influenced by the aging process may thus also lead to deconstruct fears of aging and break with the imagined binaries of aging as mere progress and decline.

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The Other within Me: The Existential Ambiguity of Old Age in *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* by Elizabeth Taylor and *Elizabeth Is Missing* by Emma Healey

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Abstract: This article seeks to analyse *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* (1971) by Elizabeth Taylor and the award-winning *Elizabeth Is Missing* (2014) by Emma Healey with reference to the existential-phenomenological accounts of old age and aging elaborated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Coming of Age* and Jean Améry in *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation*. It is argued that both novels bring to prominence what may be described in Beauvoir's terms as the lived experience of existential ambiguity, which haunts the elderly female protagonists as their inner sense of self comes increasingly into conflict with both their physical changes and the identity thrust upon them by others. Taylor's Mrs Palfrey, along with the other elderly residents of the Claremont Hotel in London, and Healey's dementia-ridden Maud are caught in a struggle to resist the social stigma of old age, which puts constraints on their freedom of self-determination, while simultaneously growing estranged from themselves and external reality. In examining this ambiguity, the article accords particular attention to its manifestations in the characters' interpersonal relationships, altered way of being-in-the-world and experience of the body.

Keywords: Old age, existential, ambiguity, Taylor, Healey, Beauvoir, Améry

Introduction

"Society looks upon old age as a kind of shameful secret that it is unseemly to mention," opines Simone de Beauvoir (1972, 1) in *The Coming of Age* (1970) with a view to examining this neglected subject from both a socio-historical and an existential-phenomenological perspective. A similar impulse for demystifying "the lived experience of being old" (Miller 2001, 129) appears to drive two novels that will be studied in this article: *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* (1971)

by Elizabeth Taylor and *Elizabeth Is Missing* by Emma Healey (2014). The former, instantiating "the emergence in the early 1970s of a body of new fiction which self-consciously interrogated the processes of aging" (Wallace 2011, 393), portrays the aged community of the Claremont Hotel in London, focusing on a friendly bond between the eponymous heroine and Ludovic Myers, a young aspiring writer whom she encounters accidently after slipping on the street. The latter, which plays with the conventions of detective fiction, traces the efforts of Maud, its dementia-ridden eighty-two-year-old narrator, to discover what has become of her elderly friend Elizabeth.

Published in two different centuries, more than forty years apart, and differing markedly in terms of plot, the two novels have been selected due to their central concern with the existential dimension of old age as a situation that is unassimilable into the elderly person's own self-definition and self-perception. Each of them foregrounds the "identification crisis" (Beauvoir 1972, 291) with which the protagonist struggles as her sense of self falters under the impact of ever more prominent physical changes and the restrictive identity thrust upon the aged by their environments. They both show that, despite the passage of time, old age remains imagined in terms of disruption in existential self-understanding, crucially shaped by social circumstances. In what follows, it will be argued that this disruption can be elucidated with reference to the concept of existential ambiguity defined by Beauvoir in her *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) in terms of tension between being "a sovereign and unique subject" and "an object for others" (Beauvoir 1968, 7). This understanding of ambiguity guides much of *The Coming of Age,* which has recently received renewed interest from scholars, as evidenced by the publications by Chris Gilleard (2022), Silvia Stoller (2014) or Kathleen Woodward (2018), who recognise its importance for old age studies even when disagreeing with some of Beauvoir's claims. This work will provide the theoretical underpinning for this article, supplemented by *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation* by Jean Améry (1968), who "[echoed], or rather [anticipated], many of the themes developed by de Beauvoir" (Gilleard 2022, 286). The following section will explore both these accounts to lay the groundwork for the analysis of the novels, which will demonstrate that Mrs Palfrey and Maud, as well as other elderly characters, are caught in conflict between their own self-definition and their social position. In examining this ambiguity of being both subject and object, the article will accord particular attention to its manifestations in the characters' interpersonal relationships, altered way of being-in-the-world and experience of the body.

Old Age in the Accounts of Simone De Beauvoir and Jean Améry

Beauvoir and Améry alike understand old age as a social construct. The latter philosopher problematises it in terms of "social age," arguing that one is labelled as elderly always through "the look of the others" (Améry 1994, 55). The former similarly posits that it is one's social environment that makes one aware of being old (Beauvoir 1972, 288), adding that this awareness is typically approached with incredulity since old age is always imagined as a condition that "only affects other people" (Beauvoir 1972, 5). The moment of confronting oneself as old thus marks a profound identity crisis. First, old age involves social degradation to the position of an "outcast" (Beauvoir 1972, 2) stripped of any influence on the outside world. Second, it triggers self-alienation as the elderly person is torn "between inner and outer perceptions" (Martin 2011, 131), often feeling hardly any internal change while being recognised by others as old (Beauvoir 1972, 284, 292). It is this incongruity that throws them into confusion about their own identity: "his inner being [that of the elderly person] does not accept the label that has been stuck to him – he no longer knows who he is" (Beauvoir 1972, 292). Améry similarly sees "a conflict within us between the image that we have of ourselves and the image that others have of us" as inherent in the process of aging (Sternad 2021, 317). When depicting an elderly woman gazing at herself in the mirror, he describes how her reflection presents a stark contrast to her own self-concept, making her a "stranger to herself" (Améry 1994, 31). "In aging," Améry concludes, "we become alienated from ourselves, doubled and inscrutable" (Améry 1994, 50).

The alienating discrepancy between the two perspectives instils ambiguity in the process of aging. For Améry, at the same time as growing painfully self-estranged, the elderly person develops "an increased sense of self" (Améry 1994, 32). For Beauvoir, in turn, old age casts a stark light upon the inherently ambiguous nature of the human condition: that of being a subject for oneself and an object for others (Heinämaa 2014, 172; Miller 2001, 138). The philosopher memorably asserts that "[w]ithin me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself" (Beauvoir 1972, 420), thus encapsulating the predicament of aging, which drives a "split" between the personal vantage point of the aged person and the objectifying look of others (Miller 2001, 138, 146). Most significantly, Beauvoir precludes a possibility of full identification with the latter perspective (Beauvoir 1972, 290, 291, 294). Granted, sooner or later, the objective

situation revealed from outside is accepted, but the sense of dissonance persists; the elderly person thus oscillates between the two positions, "never managing to hold them both firmly together" (Beauvoir 1972, 290).

Furthermore, Beauvoir and Améry characterise old age also in terms of "a radically transformed state of being" (Sandford 2006, 102) or, to use the Heideggerian term, an altered manner of being-in-the-world. They call attention to how the elderly grasp the external world as a perilous habitat frustrating their slightest efforts so that their daily life becomes constant struggle and toil. The aging person, notes Beauvoir, "is endangered in the outside world" (Beauvoir 1972, 464), encountering obstacles all around that pose a threat to their security and comfort (Beauvoir 1972, 304). Both she and Améry conceptualise the aging subject/world relationship in terms of antagonism, the former when writing about "inimicality in things" (Beauvoir 1972, 304) and the latter when stating that "the world … becomes their adversary" (Améry 1994, 37). The predominant state of mind in aging is thus "insecurity" in the face of one's own incapacity to keep the surrounding environment under control (Beauvoir 1972, 464).

The sense of not-being-at-home in the world can be largely attributed to the deterioration of the body, which ceases to be "our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects" (Beauvoir 2011, 46). No longer a vehicle of agency, it hampers one's plans (Beauvoir 1972, 315), transforming from "an instrument" into "a hindrance" (Beauvoir 1972, 317). While "all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time" (Beauvoir 2011, 443), thus a mixture of capacity for perpetual self-making and materiality amenable to external influences, the body in old age brings the latter dimension to the fore. Clearly anticipating Beauvoir's perspective, Améry also foregrounds this problematic role of the aging body, which manifests itself with an unprecedented force while being mostly unmanageable (Améry 1994, 40). As it "becomes more and more mass and less and less energy" (Améry 1994, 92), it loses much of its power to serve human purposes, setting ever new limits and making ever more demands (Améry 1994, 35). As aptly phrased by Christopher Hamilton, in Améry's account, it acts as "something that *one does not have* but which *has one*" (Hamilton 2016, 307; emphasis in original).

It is yet not only in physical terms that one grows detached from the world but also in cognitive and intellectual ones (Améry 1994, 90, 92). In this context, Améry refers to the process of "cultural aging" (Améry 1994, 110, 111, 119), involving an inhibited ability to comprehend the surrounding reality with its

altered values, attitudes, and ways of being (Améry 1994, 84, 78, 102). The elderly not only lack the flexibility to respond to cultural novelties with alacrity (Améry 1994, 92) but are also likely to develop hostility towards the prevalent *Zeitgeist*, (Améry 1994, 78). This view is shared by Beauvoir, who notes that the aged, bereft of "the time and the means for adapting themselves to new circumstances," tend to cling to bygone practices and beliefs (Beauvoir 1972, 418). In physical decline and behind the times, they are usually trapped in existential "inertia" (Beauvoir 1972, 271) and "boredom" (Beauvoir 1972, 459), with the awareness of having nothing significant to offer to the world becoming ever more acute (Beauvoir 1972, 464). The elderly, Améry observes, bear the stigma of "creatures without potential," defined solely by their past and with no prospects for future success (Améry 1994, 55).

To summarise, Beauvoir and Améry theorise old age in terms of an identity crisis embedded in a social context. The objective reality of aging as perceived by others usually conflicts with one's inner perception, thus engendering self-estrangement and a sense of existential ambiguity. At the same time, old age involves a shift in the experience of the world, which reveals itself as a threatening space that the elderly person can no longer shape through their creative activity. These observations will be drawn upon in the following sections to examine how *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* and *Elizabeth Is Missing* depict, each in its own way, the socially and existentially precarious position of their aged characters.

Old Age in *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*

"Every metamorphosis has something frightening about it," Beauvoir asserts (1972, 5), and, indeed, the opening of *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* evokes a sense of disquietude as the eponymous heroine is on the cusp on what may be read as her symbolic passage into old age proper: "alarmed at the threat of her own depression," the narrator recounts, Mrs Palfrey "tried to banish terror from her heart" (Taylor 2011, 1). Her way to the Claremont Hotel, due to become her abode for widowhood, is only a prelude to the impression of entrapment that strikes her the moment she enters her room: "she thought that prisoners must feel as she did now, the first time they are left in their cell" (Taylor 2011, 2). Soon it becomes apparent that just as prisoners, so too the elderly residents of the Claremont are consigned to social margins (Tyler 1993, 177). The inferior status of the hotel itself as a site far away from people's interests is signalled by the

very fact that Mrs Palfrey's driver has never heard of it (Taylor 2011, 1). Towards the end of the novel, it is articulated in explicit terms by the hotel manager, who blames his clients for diminishing the prestige of the place: "He was getting a little tired of these old people, … cluttering up the place and boring everybody" (Taylor 2011, 181). For Mr Wilkins, old age is "hateful" and thus intended to be "driven out" (Beauvoir 1972, 43), an approach he shares with the relatives of Taylor's aged characters, who visit the latter only out of duty (Taylor 2011, 19) or, as do Mrs Palfrey's daughter and grandson for much of the plot, show hardly any interest in their life.

Paul Bailey states that the Claremont residents fail to "[acknowledge] that they have been cast aside" (Bailey 2011), but it appears that the awareness of "losing [their] place in society, [their] dignity and almost [their] reality" (Beauvoir 1972, 266) is not entirely foreign to them. Mrs Post painfully remembers the hours of "sitting there waiting for someone to turn up" (Taylor 2011, 122). Mrs Arbuthnot is clearly apprehensive of "being a nuisance to other people" (Taylor 2011, 43). Mr Osmond knows only too well that the woman is bound to be treated with heartless indifference after moving to a nursing home: "They will let her die there: as she deteriorates, they will not be bothered to get her out of bed" (Taylor 2011, 99). It is also he who intimates that society robs the elderly of their personal identity as individual subjects: "When one's old, … no one calls you by your Christian name" (Taylor 2011, 142). It should be noted here that "[a] greatly diminished sense of self-identity" is what plagues all the elderly residents (Tyler 1993, 158), including Mrs Palfrey herself:

> When she was young, she had had an image of herself to present to her new husband, whom she admired; then to herself, thirdly to the natives (I am an Englishwoman). Now, no one reflected the image of herself, and it seemed diminished: it had lost two thirds of its erstwhile value (no husband, no natives). (Taylor 2011, 3)

Having been stripped of her social roles, the heroine has "no longer anything by which [s]he can identify himself" (Beauvoir 1972, 493). She is lingering in a void, without any point of reference to validate her own sense of self.

Much as the Claremont residents are mindful of their own declining status, they refuse to embrace old age as part of their self-conception. Their resistance to identification as old can be discerned in how they "deny solidarity" (Améry

1994, 69) to each other. Taylor's elderly characters "[compete] for prestige" (Tyler 1993, 156), organising their microcosm according to a hierarchy where the younger and fitter one is, the more esteem one enjoys, as does Mrs de Salis, who "might have felt set apart from the others by her youthfulness (she was only sixty)" (Taylor 2011, 104). Furthermore, they avoid their mutual company, as if for fear of becoming imbricated in the reality of aging: "At the Claremont, days were lived separately. One sat at separate tables and went on separate walks" (Taylor 2011, 22). Mrs Palfrey herself bemoans being "helplessly exposed – to the idiosyncrasies of other old people" (Taylor 2011, 177), apparently succumbing to the "[temptation] to say 'I belong to a different category'" (Beauvoir 1972, 294). She does so even more fervently in her relationship with Ludo. On the one hand, this relationship rescues her out of the desolation to which she is exposed due to neglect from her own family. On the other, it may be interpreted as an instance of the tendency to "cling to [young people] in an absurd longing" that Améry attributes to the elderly (1994, 69). Her urge to "be completely in his hands" (Taylor 2011, 25) expresses her longing to remain part of the world of the young. Ludo embodies "a new ingredient in her life" (Taylor 2011, 34) that assuages the tedium and humiliation of aging. Not only does she climb up the social ladder of the Claremont (Taylor 2011, 37), but she also finds renewed enthusiasm in her life. By forming a strong attachment to the man, she "feel[s] … less bound to the rules of old age" (Tyler 1993, 176).

Taylor's aged characters thus veer between the recognition of their own vulnerable position in the social structure and dissociation from the stigma of old age. This fundamental ambiguity of being both an object upon whom others confer meaning and a self-constituting subject comes into focus also in Ludo's perception of Mrs Palfrey. For all his courtesy and supportiveness, the man views the heroine with a distinct note of condescension. Beauvoir contends that "[e]ven if they [the elderly] are treated properly they are still looked upon as objects, not as subjects" (Beauvoir 1972, 479), and Ludo appears to be a good case in point. In a letter to his girlfriend, the man admits that his acquaintance with Mrs Palfrey offers him an opportunity to gather material for his novel about old age, thus demonstrating his instrumental treatment of the heroine: "fortune cast an old lady down my area, just when I needed her" (Taylor 2011, 45). Throughout the plot, he is repeatedly shown gazing at Mrs Palfrey, seeking to glean an insight into the reality of old age, which simultaneously inspires his interest and defies his understanding: "he registered the strange, tired petal-softness

of her skin, stored *that* away for future usefulness. And the old smell, which was too complex to describe yet" (Taylor 2011, 34; emphasis in original). For Ludo, the woman represents "a rather fine examples of the species" (Taylor 2011, 45), thus a mere object to be dissected, as illustrated by his notebook: "veins on leg colour of grapes … smell of lavender water (ugh!) … big spots on back of shiny hands and more veins – horizontal wrinkles across hands" (Taylor 2011, 28). He reduces her to the immanence of her aging body, erasing her unique subjectivity to subsume it under the collective category of the aged.

The subject/object tension also underlies the contrast between the social marginalisation of the aged characters and their adamant resistance to take it for granted. "[T]he ability to save face" acquires primary importance at the Claremont (Tyler 1993, 168), as witnessed most obviously by Mrs Palfrey's lying to the other residents about the reasons why her grandson does not visit her and persuading Ludo to pose as Desmond (Taylor 2011, 18). This keeping up appearances is not so much hypocrisy as "the refusal to … become the insect, the inert object to which the adult world wishes to reduce the aged" (Beauvoir 1972, 486). Mrs Palfrey is acting out of desire to "maintain a dignified autonomous personal identity" (Tyler 1993, 142) rather than slipping into the objectifying definition thrust upon her from the outside. She consistently "[makes] a stand to establish her personality" (Taylor 2011, 17), displaying her own capacity of self-constitution. It is not only social objectification that she strives to oppose but also the deterioration of her own body and mind. Apart from learning poems by heart and taking walks to keep good health (Taylor 2011, 100), Mrs Palfrey follows a set of self-imposed rules of conduct: "Be independent; never give way to melancholy; never touch capital" (Taylor 2011, 9). By doing so, she makes a point of confirming her own status as a self-determining agent with a firm "grasp upon [herself]" (Beauvoir 1972, 315).

Nevertheless, regardless of how determined Mrs Palfrey and the other Claremont residents are to retain an unwavering sense of subjectivity, old age takes its toll on their experience of being-in-the-world. Beauvoir observes that "it is enough for them [the elderly] to know that they are defenceless to be filled with anxiety" (Beauvoir 1972, 464); indeed, even with the strict face-saving rules, Mrs Palfrey can hardly prevent herself from "[feeling] flurried and anxious" (Taylor 2011, 31). For the heroine, "living can no longer be taken for granted" (Beauvoir 1972, 304), requiring, as it does, constant self-surveillance and struggle: "She realised that she never walked now without knowing what she was

doing and concentrating upon it" (Taylor 2011, 69). Aging disrupts her usual absorption in the world, which presents itself a site that she is unable to navigate freely in pursuit of her own projects: "The disaster of being old was in not feeling safe to venture anywhere, of seeing freedom put out of reach" (Taylor 2011, 69). It thus brings the agony of sliding towards an impoverished existence of becoming "an expression of a negation" (Améry 1994, 68): "It was hard work being old. … every day for the old means some little thing lost" (Taylor 2011, 172).

The sense of paralysis and infirmity unveils itself to the characters most poignantly through their corporeality. When Taylor describes how Mrs Palfrey "[falls] with the sickening crash of a heavy, elderly person" (Taylor 2011, 24), she turns the spotlight on the heroine's body "as progressive decrease in energy and increase in substance" (Améry 1994, 40), a mass incapable of serving as her anchor in the world. It is yet the experience of Mrs Arbuthnot that brings the problem to the most striking expression. The novel spares no details in recounting how her aging body "heaps its burdens upon [her]" (Améry 1994, 42): "Her rigid limbs were torture to her, and every attempt at finding a more comfortable way of lying hurt" (Taylor 2011, 41). When she becomes incontinent, it also exposes her to the humiliation of being a plaything of forces beyond her control as she "wake[s] up and find[s] the bed saturated, and herself stiff and helpless" (Taylor 2011). More than that, it literally "cuts [her] off from world" (Améry 1994, 35), forcing her to leave the hotel to wait for death in a nursing-home.

Socially marginalised and physically weak, Taylor's aged characters fall prey also to overwhelming ennui, as does Mrs Burton, who "tapped her bright finger-nails against her teeth, from boredom" (Taylor 2011, 49), whiling their time away on monotonously repetitive activities without any specific goal. Tormented by the vacuity of "just sitting and resting" (Taylor 2011, 24), Mrs Palfrey craves for meaningful projects, envying Mr Osmond his commitment to writing letters of complaint to the *Daily Telegraph*: "He is taking action, he is expressing himself" (Taylor 2011, 62). To stifle "that terrible curse, boredom" (Beauvoir 1972, 541), the heroine contents herself even with such trivial missions as going to the library to borrow a book for Mrs Arbuthnot, relying on them for a sense of purpose in life (Taylor 2011, 23). Most of the time, however, she remains ensnared in the position of a passive spectator rather than an active participant in the surrounding reality; while she is musing about the upcoming spring, "the young [hasten] past her with Saturday night ahead of them, and all that that

entailed" (Taylor 2011, 70), their worlds clearly set apart.

4. Old Age in *Elizabeth is Missing*

Katsura Sako observes that *Elizabeth Is Missing* gives supreme importance to the shaping power of the "social and interpersonal spaces" on the experience of its dementia-ridden protagonist (Sako 2016, 317). Indeed, similar to *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*, Healey's novel puts in sharp focus how old age is inextricably embedded in social scripts that clash with the aged person's inner sense of self. Surprisingly perceptive despite her ailment, Maud Horsham exhibits a lucid understanding of this socially constructed nature of old age:

> I only really need glasses for reading, but they make you wear them all the time once you reach a certain age. It's part of the uniform. How would they know you were an old duffer otherwise? They want you to have the right props so they can tell you apart from people who have the decency to be under seventy. False teeth, hearing aid, glasses. I've been given them all. (Healey 2014, 34-35)

The passage invites two comments that are crucially pertinent for the discussion to follow. First, it shows that the heroine feels expected to "conform to the image that society has formed of [her]" (Beauvoir 1972, 219), simultaneously highlighting that this image involves a superficial objectification of the elderly as the Other. Second, it evidences her dissociation from the identity of an aged person. For the heroine, it represents a "mask or a role that [she has] to accept or assume because of [her] social dependences" (Heinämaa 2014, 172) while not internalising it into her self-perception. Even if Maud is alert to the changes in her condition, she does not grasp them as signs of aging: "'I think I'm ill.' 'That's what you said last time, but there's nothing wrong with you. You're just not young any more" (Healey 2014, 31). Revealed to her from outside, old age is never fully acknowledged by her "inner being" (Beauvoir 1972, 432), which stresses her difference from other elderly persons:

> 'I'm not like my friend Elizabeth. She can barely leave the house. Her sight's poor and she's unsteady on her feet. Whereas I –' 'Whereas you are in great shape for your age. I know.' (Healey 2014, 32)

The woman also displays hardly any solidarity with her coevals, perceiving them sometimes as grotesque and ridiculous, as is the case with "these old women with flecked dentures and sooty eyelids and rouge smeared over their faces, their eyebrows drawn on too high," who are the living image of what she does not want to become (Healey 2014, 12).

While it may be true that the novel "[rejects] … the discourse of dementia as the loss of self" (Sako 2016, 25), it certainly shows how the dissonance discussed above destabilises the boundaries of Maud's selfhood. "Once upon a time in a deep, dark forest, there lived an old, old woman named Maud" (Healey 2014, 3), she says to herself from a position of critical detachment, as if referring to a third person – the Other within herself that is old, to paraphrase Beauvoir. The most acute sense of self-alienation always arises when Maud is catching sight of herself in the mirror, a motif that recurs throughout the novel (Healey 2014, 12, 53, 75-76, 202, 233), evoking associations with the elderly woman from Améry's study:

> My reflection always gives me a shock. I never really believed I would age, and certainly not like this. The skin around my eyes and the bridge of my nose has wrinkled in a very unexpected way. It makes me look quite lizard-like. (Healey 2014, 12)

The quoted passage clearly bespeaks the heroine's bewilderment at the reality of old age. Thoroughly "unforeseen" (Beauvoir 1972, 12), when confronted face-to-face, it produces an uncanny sensation, for Maud has always yielded to her "absurd inner voice [whispering] that *that* will never happen to [her]" (Beauvoir 1972, 5). Although she recognises this mirror reflection as herself, it continues to perplex her, eluding "the obvious clarity of the inward feeling" (Beauvoir 1972, 290). Later in the same place, Maud admits to having difficulties memorising her old face; when she is thinking about herself, it is images of a girl, young or middle-aged woman that spring to her mind (Healey 2014, 12). The moment of looking at herself, in turn, gives visibility to the "discrepancy between the young self she has brought along with her through the years and the self of the aging woman in the mirror" (Améry 1994, 31). The latter, unsightly as it appears, is never fully embraced as her true self.

Maud's confrontations with her own mirror reflection also poignantly

express the ambiguity of aging. Not only do they combine self-estrangement with heightened self-consciousness, but they also cast her in the double role of subject and object, as can be seen both in the previously quoted passage and in the following one:

> And then I saw it. A face looking back at me from deep in the room. I slapped a hand to the glass, shouting, before I realized what it was. My own reflection in a dressing-table mirror … (Healey 2014, 53)

On the one hand, Maud acts as an active subject-perceiver who controls the outside world with her gaze; on the other hand, she is positioned as a passive object of perception and scrutiny. This specular image represents her outer self □ the self that is well-known to others but thoroughly alien to herself.

The ambiguity of being both subject and object makes itself even more painfully felt in Maud's interpersonal interactions. Stigmatised by dementia, the heroine suffers from a sense of being deprived of agency and autonomy by other people, most prominently her daughter:

> You're moving into my house.' 'So it's your rules, is it? And I have to do as you say? I don't think I want to live with you if it's going to be like this.' (Healey 2014, 201)

Much as Helen's conduct is dictated by the willingness to protect her mother, it is experienced by the latter as an encroachment upon her freedom to be a possessor her own life. "I'm surprised they let me decide for myself if I'm hungry" (Healey 2014, 132), the heroine remarks ironically at one point, demonstrating that her awareness of being reduced by society to an object without any voice of her own, no longer capable of steering the course of her life in the most trivial matters, collides with her deeply cherished sense of sovereign subjectivity. Although dementia corrodes her ability to manage her environment, this sense does not subside and incites her to oppose "the marginalization she encounters" (Sako 2016, 23) while investigating the alleged disappearance of Elizabeth. Maud is keenly alive to the condescending attitude with which society, be it police officers or her own daughter, disregards her fears and interests: "She [Helen] won't listen, won't take me seriously, imagines that I want to live in the past" (Healey 2014, 19). Far from obediently surrendering to the social pressure,

the heroine expresses her "frustrated rage" (Sako 2016, 23) at this infantilising treatment: "How dare they dismiss me, these people who are supposed to care about Elizabeth?" (Healey 2014, 82). "I'm not mad," she declares defiantly, "[a]nd I'm sick of being treated as if I am" (Healey 2014, 20), remaining steadfastly convinced about the validity of her own viewpoint. Most importantly, as underlined by Spencer Meeks, she "proves herself far from incapable" (Meeks 2020, 90). While Elizabeth has not gone missing but is staying at hospital, the heroine's efforts finally make it possible to solve the disappearance of her sister Sukey, who was murdered and buried in Elizabeth's garden years ago.

Nevertheless, as was the case with Mrs Palfrey, Maud's resolve to retain self-determining subjectivity is undermined by the transformations of old age, exacerbated by her dementia, which inhibits her active engagement with the world. With her diminished cognitive capacities, the heroine is susceptible to the boredom of watching TV, eating and waiting for her family (Healey 2014, 6). Having difficulty focusing and understanding, she can neither read books (Healey 2014, 6) nor take active part in meaningful social interactions (Healey 2014, 113). Furthermore, the external environment becomes increasingly complex and inhospitable, thwarting her everyday efforts. As her body is growing weaker and no longer amenable to serve her needs □ emerging as a disturbing reminder of her own senescence □ the world reveals itself a tortuous maze that she is too vulnerable to negotiate:

> I'll never find my way with the roads in a jumble like this. … I can't have walked very far, but my legs are heavy and my back's sore. I feel like an old woman. (Healey 2014, 154)

This altered way of being-in-the-world, haunted by a penetrating sense of disorientation, comes to the surface in such basic daily activities as doing the shopping. Maud meaningfully compares her way to the shop to meandering through a war-torn city, with most of the familiar landmarks having been destroyed, thus giving a striking articulation of how perplexed and imperiled she feels in the outer space (Healey 2011, 7). This space, including the shop itself, "is filled with traps" and "bristles with threats" (Beauvoir 1972, 304). First, clearly affected by what Améry would diagnose as cultural aging, the heroine is at a loss to "[find her] way in an unknown array of signs" (Améry 1994. 81): "I used to love shopping. But the shops are so different now ... So many odd colours. Who is it wears these bright

orange things?" (Healey 2014, 35). Not only does the shop bewilder her by confounding her expectations but it also creates the impression of hostility: "The loaded shelves frown down at me as I circle them, and the blue-and-white linoleum stares up, dirty and cracked" (Healey 2014, 8). Everything appears to be in excess, bombarding her with sensory stimuli that she cannot process and posing challenges that she cannot meet: "I feel as if my balance is going. … I start to think I'll be trapped here for ever" (Healey 2014, 41).

Throughout the course of the novel, the "painful feeling of insecurity" (Beauvoir 1972, 46) comes to pervade the heroine's existence to an ever greater extent as Maud's advancing dementia erodes her mental faculties. The heroine is repeatedly shown suddenly losing her way, her surroundings striking her as forbiddingly strange and inscrutable (Healey 2014, 3, 153, 219, 228), or being unable to recognise perfectly familiar places, such as her own house (Healey 2014, 219), or even her family members (Healey 2014, 194). Apart from growing defamiliarized and dislocated from the external world, Maud also becomes a stranger to herself, incapable of controlling and making sense of her own conduct: "suddenly I can't think what I'm doing here, what it is I'm looking for. For a moment I'm too frightened to move, not knowing what I might do next" (Healey 2014, 69). Even more excruciatingly, she is losing such basic skills as using fork and knife, a humiliating experience that diminishes her sense of autonomous selfhood: "A little piece of me is gone" (Healey 2014, 66). The heroine thus lives in a state of anxiety, confronting herself as "a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (Beauvoir 1962, 7), powerless to exercise her subjectivity.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

The article has analysed Taylor's *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* and Healey's *Elizabeth Is Missing* through the perspective of the existential-phenomenological insights provided by Beauvoir and Améry, seeking to demonstrate that both novels accord centrality to the experience of existential ambiguity, where the heroines' self-conception clashes both with their social position and the physical reality of aging. Much as their situations differ – while Mrs Palfrey is in a relatively good state of health but has been abandoned by her family, Maud suffers from dementia but is supported by her relatives – both elderly heroines discover themselves as vulnerable objects susceptible to factors beyond their control. While the heroines do not lose their sense of self, the experience of aging brings

to light its instability and non-homogeneity. Although they struggle to demonstrate their own capacity of self-determination to the world, this struggle is undermined by the physical changes inherent in the process of aging. Plagued by the decline of their body and mind, they find themselves insecure in external reality, no longer capable of meeting the challenges that it presents. Published in two different centuries, both novels are thus similar in turning the spotlight on the precarious situation of the elderly, who not only are invariably misunderstood and treated with condescension by society, but also are themselves at a loss to negotiate their own identity, being caught in between conflicting positions. The novels make a point of portraying old age as a time of existential re-orientation, where the heroines' habitual mode of being-in-the-world and self-understanding is disturbed and destabilised as they are confronting the Other within themselves.

Still, the analysis of the novels invites further research, possibly also with reference to other theoretical perspectives. First and foremost, it would be worthwhile to examine how the position of the elderly heroines is affected by their gender, a question that has not been discussed in this article for want of space. After all, Beauvoir stresses that "[o]ld age does not have the same meaning nor the same consequences for men and for women" (Beauvoir 1972, 84) and, indeed, both novels intimate that aging puts an additional strain on women, haunting them with the threat of becoming ridiculous and repulsive.[1] Furthermore, it would be expedient to delve deeper into the portrayal of old age as a social phenomenon. It has been asserted at various points that both novels represent old age and aging as firmly embedded within a social context and conditioned by it. This aspect could be elucidated further using, for instance,

1 In *Elizabeth is Missing*, this may be seen, for instance, when Maud, as quoted earlier in the article, describes old women as grotesque and clearly deprived of physical attractiveness: "You see these old women with flecked dentures and sooty eyelids and rouge smeared over their faces, their eyebrows drawn on too high. I'd rather die than be one of them" (Healey 2014, 12). As for *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont*, it is significant to note that Ludo's interest in the elderly is limited to old women. He treats them as a separate species, animal-like and inspiring revulsion: "I needed her, for it took my fancy to write about elderly women. I used to watch them in the boarding-house when I was in Rep in Woodbury, sitting like toads in dark corners, dropping off or dozing, or burrowing down the sides of armchairs for knitting-needles" (Taylor 2011, 45). Towards the end of the novel, it is also intimated that old age deprives women of their femininity: "Opposite Mrs Palfrey, an old lady sat out of bed, in her dressing-gown. Only because of her being in *this* ward, did Ludo know that she was not a man: nearly bald she was, no suggestion of her sex about her, even the dressing-gown was grey and corded" (Taylor 2011, 188; emphasis in original).

Christine Overall's idea that old age is a thoroughly social construct, also in its "biological substratum," being "created, reinforced, and sustained, …, through human relations and practices" (Overall 2006, 126). As far as Mrs Palfrey's and Maud's uneasy wavering between resisting and being in thrall to social restrictions is concerned, interesting insights could be gained also by referencing Shelley Tremain's revision of the concept of disability from a Foucauldian point of view, as "a historically specific aggregate that comprises, constitutes, and is constituted by and through a complex and complicated set of discourses, technologies, identities, and practices" produced through various spheres of social activity (Tremain 2017, 22).

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31st Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English: Communicative 3Ms: Modes, Mediums, Modalities (30th June - 2nd July 2023, Olsztyn)

For three days, at the conclusion of the academic year, from the 30th of June to the 2nd of July, the University of Warmia and Mazury hosted researchers from all over Poland who participated in the annual 31st Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English. The theme of the 2023 conference was broadly understood communication and its various modes, mediums, and modalities, hence the eponymous 3Ms. Scholars from the fields of language, translation, culture, literature, media, and methodology of FLT were invited to share their ideas on communicative and textual practices that exploit metaphor, allegory, symbol; verbal and non-verbal communication and representation; mono-modal and multi-modal texts: films, graphic narratives, computer games and their ways of communication; translation and interpreting as different mediums of intercultural and interlingual communication; environmental and/or urban modalities; multi-modalities in literature; genre hybridity and its modalities; readers, viewers, fandoms and how they engage with texts; modalities of classroom communication as well as varied mediums and teaching dynamics. Such a range of possible topics generated scholarly presentations that primarily focused on particular case studies yet opened ground for more generalized and theoretically-oriented discussions that looked both into the past and future of linguistics, literary studies, and media studies.

The conference was officially opened by dr hab. Aneta Jachimowicz, prof. UWM, vice-dean of the Faculty of Humanities, who welcomed the participants and invited guests to Olsztyn. Then PASE President dr hab. Jacek Fabiszak, prof. UAM, followed and in his opening address stressed the importance of integrating scholars representing various fields that PASE has been striving in for over the last decades. He also offered his strong support for Ukraine in the turbulent times of war, expressing the sentiments felt by all those who object to that brutal attack of Russia on our neighbouring country. No one, no professional group, can remain indifferent to the atrocities that are occurring there, and now,

right next to us. The least we can do is to openly support (in various ways) those in need, and this resonated in Jacek Fabiszak's speech. ESSE President, Prof. Andreas H. Jucker continued the welcoming ceremony and, in his address, he sketched the approaches to modes and modalities in linguistics and perfectly prepared the ground for subsequent discussions. Untypically for academic conferences, what followed the opening ceremony was not a plenary lecture, but a theatre performance. That was, however, carefully planned, as it chimed in with the theme of the conference since it included different communicative modes and mediums: dancing, shadow-theatre, and speech. The performance was an adaptation of *Beowulf* directed by Trevor Hill from the Institute of Literary Studies, UWM, in cooperation with the Palace of Youth in Olsztyn. With shadow as the universal language of communication, the major visual element were the puppets, creating the illusion of moving images that were complemented by all-dimensional (and moving in reality) dancers from the Palace of Youth. The story was both visually presented and verbalized, with students of the English Departments forming the chorus that read selected fragments of *Beowulf* adapted to modern English, making yet another connection with the main theme of the conference – translation. The performance was more than mere entertainment. It was a practical introduction to the conference and served as an invitation for scholarly debates.

The first plenary lecture was delivered by Elżbieta Muskat-Tabakowska, a person who needs no introduction. In her excellent speech "Some Unknown Forerunners of Cognitive Linguistics", she expertly demonstrated that the theory of language as developed by Ronald Langacker, George Lakoff, and Gilles Fauconnier did not emerge in a vacuum but shares many affinities with the ideas formulated by early 20th-century representatives of perceptual psychology, theory of vision, phenomenology, and general semantics. She argued that the reassessment of earlier views on complex relations between perception, cognition and language may enrich the contemporary theory of Cognitive Linguistics. Among those forerunners, she enumerated Roman Ingarden, the Polish philosopher whose ideas are presently frequently linked with Cognitive Linguistics as surfaced in the first presentation in parallel sections. Henryk Kardela (UMCS Lublin) meticulously analyzed Rudyard Kipling's poem "IF" with the application of the tools of Cognitive Grammar, in particular Langacker's conception of grouping. In so doing, he reformulated in terms of the cognitive framework one of the basic assumptions of Ingarden's theory of the literary work of art, i.e.,

that during the reading process the reader fills in the places of indeterminacy. The transdisciplinary approach, combining Ingarden's gestalt-based understanding of the literary work as multi-stratal with the modern cognitive framework, opens new ways to the analysis of literature and uncovers new meanings in the well-known works. A performative presentation of his paper devoted to two stagings of *The Canterbury Tales* offered by Trevor Hill (UWM Olsztyn) diverted from cognitivism and explored the differing styles and modes of communication employed by the Scottish theatre group Best Kept Secret and by Teatr Wiejski "Węgajty". While Węgajty's style is based on a rural and medieval aesthetic, including medieval songs and a performance style strongly influenced by such theatre practitioners as Jerzy Grotowski and Gardzienice theatre, including a philosophical approach to creation and rehearsal of the work, Best Kept Secret had a more "chaotic" style of comic performance based loosely on commedia dell'arte and masked theatre, featuring both actors and puppets. Since Trevor Hill also considered some audience reactions and responses, his theatre-like presentation of the passages from Chaucer's masterpiece highly engaged the conference participants. What followed was another close-reading of a poetical work. Dorota Gładkowska (UWM Olsztyn) revealed thematic and structural links between two elegies by John Donne "The Comparison" and "The Anagram" and argued that these poems should be considered together as a poetic diptych. By exposing how Donne drew on grotesquery that can be seen in the work of 15th and 16th-century portraitists and genre painters, such as Bartolomeo Passarotti and Quentin Massys, she demonstrated how the poet exploited the features and functions of different channels of communication, both literary and non-literary forms associated with the visual arts, popular entertainment and folk wisdom. The presentation evidenced that the communicative potential of the poems can be better explored with the application of interdisciplinary tools, in particular by examining references to other arts.

If that section devoted to poetry exposed the interpretative potential of various approaches to the analysis of literary works, the parallel section explored multimodality of different modes of communication. Monika Cichmińska (UWM Olsztyn) selected three quality TV series (*Succession*, *The Leftovers* and *Person of Interest*) to discuss multimodal metaphors. Distinguishing between micrometaphors and megametaphors, after Peter Stockwell, metaphors with a local focus and embedded metaphors, after Charles Forceville, as well as audiovisual key metaphors and sub-metaphors, after Kathrin Fahlenbrach, her case

study revealed that the frequency with which a multimodal metaphor appears in a TV series does not need to mean that it is part of the structuring element in a narrative. Anna Drogosz (UWM Olsztyn) approached multimodality from the perspective of a multimodal discourse represented by shooting instructions in which information is coded via language, gestures, bodily enactments, graphics, and the artefact (the gun). By selecting one aspect of shooting (trigger pull) she argued that in a discourse intended to convey information about physical activities gestures constitute an inherent part of the message. This perfectly chimed in with the analysis carried out by Tomasz Dyrmo (UAM Poznań) who focused on how gestures interact with language and how these two modes construct a message. His case study was devoted to the conceptualisation of coming out in gesture and speech and revealed that it can be metaphorically conceptualised via metaphoric gestures such as IDENTITY IS AN OBJECT, COMING OUT IS SHOWING AN OBJECT and COMING OUT IS A PROCESS. The three papers both complemented each other and showed the uses of multimodality in different communication modes.

The afternoon sections were thematically versatile. While in the "Environment/Materialism" section presentations examined a variety of literary texts, the parallel section "Semiotics of visual modalities" grouped papers devoted to topics ranging from language learning to presidential campaigns. The first section was opened by Agnieszka Pantuchowicz (SWPS Warsaw) who interpreted Alice Oswald's poem "Dart" as a lesson of listening to a river, but also as an idea of changing the modes of perceiving reality from linguistic and visual presences to fluid and bodily encounters with the world. The notion of water was reimagined as embodiment that leads to accepting human vulnerability. In the following paper, Paulina Sawicka (UAM Poznań) referred to human vulnerability by discussing Thomas Alexander Browne's novel *Robbery Under Arms* (1888) that illustrates the uniqueness of the Australian ecology in the historical and cultural context of convicts and colonists whose representation is marked by the specificity of the hostile land. She explored the novel's ecopoetics with the application of Timothy Morton's notion of ambient poetics that looks at the ecological quality of a literary work from two perspectives: fictional – with the images of the man-nature interdependence, and literal – the form of the novel, its production, distribution, and consumption. The next presentation focused on a completely different genre, that of a feminist anti-utopia. Ewa Wiśniewska (independent scholar) demonstrated how Sheri S. Tepper's novel *The Gate*

to Women's Country (1988) transgresses borders between binary oppositions involving the male and female realms. By retelling the myth of Iphigenia (Euripides), Tepper seeks to destabilise classical patriarchal worldviews but also to effect a change in human attitude towards the natural world. Hence the novel can be viewed as an ecotopia in which a posthuman feminist is grappling with the ideas of transhumanism. The section closed with Marcin Tereszewski's (University of Wrocław) interpretation of three short stories written by J.G. Ballard and Ray Bradbury. With Thing Theory developed by Bill Brown as the basis for analyses, he investigated the narrative form of the short stories, especially the subject/object relationship, agency, and the notion of "thingness", to reveal a common theme that connects these works: the confrontation with the external world as it exists outside the definitions imposed on it by human subjects.

The parallel afternoon section began with Barbara Chmielewska's (UWM Olsztyn) presentation of Hunter S. Thompson's account of the presidential campaign between Richard Nixon and George McGovern. She juxtaposed the two styles of writing: New Journalism and the Gonzo Style as evident in *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* and dissected the unique language and metaphors used by Thompson in his journal articles collected in the book. The representatives of the University of Warsaw who subsequently presented their papers took up dissimilar topics. Reinhold Utri addressed several issues related to effective learning, such as age and gender or online versus lessons conducted on site. Nevertheless, Utri also referred to the theme of the conference and discussed the frequency with which material representing different mediums, i.e. video, audio (music) and online content (exercises, films) should be used to increase effectiveness. Undoubtedly, the variety of material and its forms of presentation is beneficial in foreign langue learning, yet as in any sphere of life, moderation is necessary for effectiveness. The concluding paper of this section was Przemysław Uściński's discussion of the cultural and ideological implications of the uses of the picturesque and painterly qualities in cinema. As he stressed in his presentation, with its blending of the natural and the artificial the picturesque has been, from its origins in the 18th century, liked with cross-generic relations and transmedial aesthetic.

The second day of the conference opened untypically with two parallel sections rather than a plenary lecture. One was devoted to teaching modes, the other to life-writing. In the first one, Mirosław Pawlak (UAM Poznań) presented his large-scale research project devoted to the positive emotions of enjoyment

and curiosity and the negative emotions of anxiety and boredom in the Polish secondary school context, as well as their links to two crucial variables in successful L2 learning: engagement and motivation. At this stage of the project, he discussed its methodology, but the results may greatly contribute to emotion-related second language acquisition research. Another research study was presented by Anna Sańczyk-Cruz (University in Białystok) who argued for the need to strengthen intercultural education in Polish universities. She summarized the results of the qualitative study aimed to explore how critical reflection on the activities during an intercultural course and students' interactions and experiences fostered the development of their intercultural competence. The findings revealed a positive change in participants' beliefs and attitudes after completing the course, hence such courses should be included in the curriculum to increase students' intercultural awareness. The section closed with the analysis of a higher education elective course focused on developing creativity, which combined a performative element and a content and language integrated learning strategy. Martin Blaszk (University of Gdańsk) argued for the advantages of the tenets of dialogic teaching that emphasises the exploration of ideas rather than attempts to find "one right answer" to a particular problem, as well as for the introduction of exercises that are visually or kinaesthetically based that facilitate not only dialogic interaction, but also creativity. Thus, various teaching modes greatly contribute to the success of such courses.

The section on life-writing opened with a paper delivered by Wojciech Drąg (University of Wrocław) who examined the instances of contemporary experimental life-writing that renounce narrative structure and favour that of the archive. In particular, he singled out autobiographical works that draw on the structure of the encyclopaedia, the glossary, the index and the bibliography, including Roland Barthes's *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975), Amy Krouse Rosenthal's *Encyclopedia of an Ordinary Life* (2005), Joan Wickersham's *The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death in Order* (2008) and Rick Moody's "Primary Sources" (1992). Such fragmentary, arbitrary, achronological and antinarrative forms for the construction of the autobiographical subject offer a completely different reading experience from the more traditional autobiographies. Although of a different nature, fragmentariness and apparent selective randomness are also characteristic of Joseph Conrad's non-fictional works, in particular *A Personal Record*, the topic of Sylwia Janina Wojciechowska's (Jesuit University Ignatianum in Kraków) paper. She discussed Conrad's autobiographical narratives

with the application of Jean Françoise Lyotard's understanding of nostalgia, focusing on memories and recollections as shaped by reflective nostalgia. This mode of nostalgia is directly related to irony, and the mentioned fragmentariness, typical of modernist writing. In the concluding presentation, Bożena Kucała (Jagiellonian University in Kraków) turned into a fictional representation of life-writing in John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004), in which the protagonist's amateur research into his family history leads to the discovery of manuscripts authored by his Victorian great-grandmother. The novel differs from typical neo-Victorian fiction in mixing the textual and the spectral, thus combining the two modes of communication rather than keeping them separate.

The next set of parallel sections grouped papers on linguistics and adaptations. In the linguistics section, Agnieszka Solska (University of Silesia in Katowice) explored the production of multimodal puns that involves two types of creativity: E-creativity, i.e. going outside the language system, seemingly breaking its rules and expanding it to new realms and F-creativity, i.e. exploiting rules fixed within a system, in this case the language system. Perfectly fitting the theme of the conference, the paper demonstrated that multimodal punning requires transcending the boundaries of language, yet in order to be meaningful it needs to exploit, not violate principles that govern human cognition and comprehension. Bartosz Ptasznik (UWM Olsztyn) examined the usefulness of example sentences provided in dictionaries for language production and, in particular, translation. As the result of the digitalization of dictionaries, entries offer more examples and the lexicographic and pedagogical implications of such abundance merit attention. The key question is whether language learners actually benefit from information from multiple corpus examples. Adrianna Wacewicz-Chorosz (University of Gdańsk) narrowed down her research to one particular type of words, zoonyms, and discussed in detail the etymology and processes involved in the displacement of animal names due to their perception as taboo. Her meticulous discussion of the words 'bear', 'lynx' and 'wolf' indicated how the Proto-Indo-European words were supplanted with euphemisms in various languages.

In the adaptation section, Jacek Fabiszak (UAM Poznań) examined Joel Coen's *Macbeth* (2021), first, however, stressing the hybrid nature of Coen Brothers' productions in general. In this particular adaptation of the classic, the director introduces a peculiar aesthetics, not only reminiscent of early attempts to present Shakespeare's plays on screen with the film being black and

white, but also heavily relying on theatrical aesthetics. The overt theatricality of the film is indicative of its modal hybridity and significantly impacts on its interpretation. Unlike Jacek Fabiszak who dissected one adaptation, Krzysztof Fordoński (University of Warsaw) presented an overview adaptations of E. M. Forster's novels and short stories. Additionally, he dealt with a different type of adaptation: the opera. He discussed six operas composed and staged from 1992 to 2019, including their composers and librettists, stage history, and reception on the basis of press reviews. Not only did he scrutinize the qualities of Forster's writing that make his fiction easily adaptable to the operatic form, but also entertained the conference participants with fragments of the recorded performances. This was continued by Ewa Kujawska-Lis (UWM Olsztyn) who also showed clips from the opera, though much less entertaining as her research was based on Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", hardly a text that evokes laughter. She presented Tarik O'Regan's one-act chamber opera "Heart of Darkness" (originally premiered in the UK in 2011) in the version staged in the USA in 2015 in Opera Parallèle, in which Frèdèric O. Boulay, projection designer, and David Murakami, media designer, created a multimedia performance. In this staging, the opera form was extended to directly engage the audience who became participants of the narrative, which added another layer of meaning to this adaptation by universalizing the experience colonization and destruction of nature to embrace what is happening in contemporary times.

The afternoon sections were more focused on literature per se, but also tackled the most modern modalities. In the web-oriented session, Bartosz Lutostański (University of Warsaw) discussed the results of his analysis of the media content of one of the most popular and influential Instagram profiles: Make Life Harder. Exploring such profiles gives much insight into how content is presented and how it may impact on social and political events in Poland, thus how a digital medium (Instagram) may affect non-digital reality. A group of young researchers from Poznań (UAM), Nikola Zduńczyk, Marta Rogulska and Daniesl Sokulski, explored Welsh-language fanfiction to discover motivation for its creation and reading. The aim of the study was to identify the possible role of such fanfiction in language revitalisation as regards minority languages. The results indicated that indeed the decision to be part of the fandom was strongly connected to cultural identity and confirmed the potential significance of fandom in language revitalisation. Dagmara Solska (University of Gdańsk) also delved into the web but focused on its different aspect and content. She investigated

the serious global health-related issue of suicide and argued that the availability of suicide prevention materials in cyberspace becomes vital to ensure comprehensive, multilingual support that can be provided through localization. By referring to the concept of localization, in which end-users engage in interactive digital texts, she demonstrated that localizing suicidal ideation-related content is entrenched in the multimodality of hypertexts.

The parallel section devoted to storytelling began with Anna Kwiatkowska's (UWM Olsztyn) analysis of two short stories authored by Katherine Mansfield: "At 'Lehmann's'" (1910) and "The Little Governess" (1915) that demonstrated how the writer employed the technique of close-up, taken from the cinema, to influence the presentation of a character. Close-up, as a type of shot, and framing related to it, were adapted by Mansfield to the verbal medium of literature and allowed her to construct descriptive scenes that zoom in on specific features of characters. Elżbieta Perkowska-Gawlik (UMCS Lublin) addressed the issue of narratorial unreliability as evidenced in the account offered by Philip Ashley, the narrator and character in Daphne du Maurier's novel *My Cousin Rachel* (1951). Paradoxically, the storyworlds initiated by the unreliable narrator and constructed by the reader unveil a consistent and possibly trustworthy account of the novel's major conflict. In her presentation, she referred not only to the composition of the text, but also cognitive studies, thus yet again showcasing interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary research. In the concluding paper of this section, Marek Pawlicki (University of Silesia in Katowice) scrutinized continuously changing narrative perspectives in Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise* (2021). Similar to the first paper in this section, also this one referred to the cinema, creating a perfect frame: the third-person narration of the discussed novel was deemed cinematic both in its swift movement between the scenes and in its constant alteration between the general and the specific, the collective and the individual.

The afternoon sessions continued with literature, but also referred to other mediums of communication. In the "Spectacular visualities" section, Tomasz Fisiak (University of Łódź) examined two music videos by Eurythmics, "Beethoven (I Love to Listen To)" (1987) and "I Need a Man" (1988), both directed by Sophie Muller. He identified Gothic intertexts (literary and visual) in the portrayal of a Gothic female tyrant, especially in favour of the (female) victim-(male) tyrant dichotomy. He also demonstrated how these music videos rework Gothic patterns and conventions. The following paper also addressed the Gothic, but

in a different medium. Sławomir Studniarz (UWM Olsztyn) scrutinized a number of American films in an attempt to find their common denominator and a set of criteria to allow these productions to be included under the label of American Gothic cinema. Although he focused on the characteristic Gothic motifs and thematic areas, he additionally pointed to the fact that many such films offer a universal statement about the contemporary reality or, more specifically, about American society. Departing from the Gothic and visual-based mediums, Anna Górniak (University of Gdańsk) compared professional and amateur translations of selected poems by Wisława Szymborska. In particular, she focused on the most challenging aspects of the Nobel Prize Laureate's poetry: metaphors, alliteration, wordplay and neologisms, as well as linguistic wit. This released slightly the Gothic tension of the previous papers.

In the parallel section, the papers introduced the conference participants to a host of different literary texts that were thematically linked by genres and gender. Barbara Klonowska (The John Paul II catholic University of Lublin) dissected the fiction authored by Sarah Waters and showcased how contemporary British historical romances employ and build on the hybrid potential of the genre to express non-orthodox, open and liberating ideas concerning both the past and the present. Thus, she argued that although magic realism is one of the most frequently quoted examples of a hybrid genre, such hybridity, or genre contamination, can be equally evident in romances and its sub-genre of the historical romance. Magic realism was subsequently discussed by Wojciech Gruszkiewicz (University of Gdańsk) who identified its strategies in Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* (2023). These included the realist and supernatural codes, but also intertextuality. As he argued, the novel's hybridity stems from it being mythopoeia on the one hand (through the allegorical and paramythical nature of the main protagonist) and metahistory on the other (by functioning within historical sources). Additionally, the opposing groups of secondary characters and their hybrid features were pointed out. Much attention was placed on the ideological aspects of the novel, i.e. its feminism. In the following paper, Patrycja Podgajna (UMCS Lublin) also referred to gender, though in a completely different genre and context. She discussed Ros Anderson's debut novel *The Hierarchies* (2020) that creates a world in which synthetic humanoid female robots threaten the position of "Bio-women" (flesh-and-blood women) by providing companionship to their "Husbands" and satisfying their sexual desires. As in the previous paper, the opposition of character groups was explored: here the artificially constructed

'customized' bodies of female humanoid robots serve as a tool of liberation for Born women, but at the same time create new modes of inequality and exclusion. In their co-prepared presentation, Anna Kędra-Kardela and Andrzej S. Kowalczyk (UMCS Lublin) looked into the genre of short stories and took James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) as their study material. With the application of the cognitive approach to iconicity, they investigated iconicity in both individual stories and the volume as a whole. This was yet another paper that demonstrated the possibilities of arriving at novel interpretations via discovering the work's compositional and semantic properties when approaching texts from an interdisciplinary (or rather transdisciplinary) angle.

The long day was crowned with conference dinner held in a restaurant situated at a lakeshore, one of the hallmarks of the campus of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The site provided yet another link with the conference theme: urban modality. If we define "urban modality" as the way our city exists in its entirety and is evident in in the relationship between man and environment, the self-sufficient campus can be studied both as part of the city of Olsztyn and as a unity on its own, perfectly combing the natural environment with the urban context. Yet, after the many presentations the participants preferred to enjoy the lake vistas and if they entered into discussions, these were friendly chats rather than the scholarly disseminations. The final day of the conference was opened by Małgorzata Fabiszak (UAM Poznań) who delivered the second plenary lecture. She expertly compared two approaches to communication: one offered by Charles Forceville in *Visual and Multimodal Communication* (2020) and the other by Jordan Zlatev in his Motivation and Sedimentation Model (Blomberg and Zlatev in 2021; Devylder and Zlatev 2020) and analyzed language, gesture, images, memorials, and three-dimensional art. These analyses were focused on three perspectives: that of text producers, recipients and analysts. In a highly engaging, interactive, and, occasionally, disturbing lecture (given the visual material presented), she demonstrated that the interpretation of the text depends on these perspectives and it is paramount to specify in research which perspective is adopted.

The final set of parallel sections offered fascinating journeys through places, images, and words. In the panel devoted to TV series, Elżbieta Rokosz (University of Rzeszów) uncovered intertextual relationships between Julian Fellowes' *The Gilded Age* (2022), the HBO production, and the works of Henry James as well as Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875). Apart from the more

obvious links with the creator's previous production, *Downton Abbey*, the series copiously borrows from both actual historical events and fiction, thus creating a highly engaging intertextual landscape and it can be argued that different layers of meaning are discovered by viewers depending on their expertise on literature. If the previous paper did not point to the multimodality of the TV series, the following one delivered by Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska (UWM Olsztyn) focused specifically on the multimodal communication in this medium and analyzed combinations of sonic and visual means in Alex Garland's science-fiction mini-series *Devs* (2020). She demonstrated how alchemical and religious symbolism in the series is displayed via various semiotic systems and communication channels: the auditory text, moving images, sound effects, and music. The section concluded with Dominika Kotuła's (UWM Olsztyn) discussion of generic hybridization in Donald Glover's TV series *Atlanta* (2016). As she argued, the reality of the Black minority in the United States is presented narratively via experimentation with different film genres. Though typically classified as black comedy, the series relies on the horror genre to present a subversive narrative on identities and social relations.

The second section revolved around reading and cognition and the presenters offered different modes of "reading". Piotr Kallas (University of Gdańsk), referring to the conceptual metaphor LONDON IS A BOOK, showed the cityscape of London through a variety of "London fictions" ranging from works by Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh, Iain Sinclair and Monica Ali to MLE Hypertexts. The city emerged anew before the audience via the presented images and texts. The links between images and language were also at the core of Izabela Curyłło-Klag's (Jagiellonian University in Kraków) paper. She discussed a fantasy story "Beyond this Limit" (1934) written by Naomi Mitchison and illustrated by Wyndham Lewis. In this collaborative effort, various forms of creative expression were integrated as the two artists inspired each other's imaginative processes and the text and illustrations were developed simultaneously. If the story contains enigmatic elements that both perplex and captivate the reader, as argued by the presenter, the images that she showed were equally perplexing and challenging to interpret. Finally, Hubert Arentewicz (UWM Olsztyn) evidenced how different images are created for readers in the process of translation. He exemplified these discrepancies on the basis of the English translation by Antonia Lloyed-Jones of Zygmunt Miłoszewski's *Gniew* (2014). As the novel is set in Olsztyn, the presentation of various shifts introduced by the translator

for the sake of (apparently) better understanding by non-Polish readers was followed by a heated discussion on the different modes of reading the novel by the residents of Olsztyn and by other readers, Polish or foreign. This was a perfect conclusion to the conference during which the participants discovered things they were unaware of: unknown texts, theories and local phenomena, like *warmiński szajs*.

The conference, though not "the Copernican Revolution" (though organized in the city in which Copernicus began to write his breakthrough work and in the year that commemorated the 550th anniversary of the astronomer's birth) in terms of offering new paradigms in understanding the communicative 3Ms, was definitely successful in discussing a plethora of texts of culture from various perspectives and a variety of communicative phenomena. What strongly resonated during many of the presentations was the need for transdisciplinary approaches to research in humanities as the collaboration of researchers representing different disciplines yields fascinating results: such cooperation allows for new and, often, unexpected interpretations of texts and a better understanding of human cognition and communication. The success of the conference can be seen in friendly, but heated, discussions during the sessions that continued well afterwards, over coffee. The fact that only two sessions were held parallelly allowed the participants to listen to more papers given by researchers representing various disciplines (linguistics, literary studies, cultural studies). As the participants intermingled, their interactions generated many questions that would perhaps not have been posed otherwise. The conference proved that in humanities researchers should not limit themselves to their own bubbles but need to be open to those ideas and approaches offered by other disciplines and that PASE provides a perfect platform for such a cross-fertilization of ideas.

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Lorenz A. Hindrichsen is a cultural critic working on intersectionality from the medieval to the modern period, pandemic literature, trauma theory, ecocriticism, and the graphic novel. Lorenz studied at Zurich and Aberdeen University, writing his MA thesis on social codes in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and his doctoral dissertation on representations of ethnicity and race in Shakespeare and Renaissance art (*The Leopard, the Leper and the Lecher: The Code of the Spotted in Colonial Discourse, c.1550-1625*). He has published book chapters with Routledge, Springer Nature and Cambridge Scholars, and edited a study edition of Nella Larsen's *Passing* with Reclam. Lorenz teaches English and Theory of Knowledge at Copenhagen International School.

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Joy E. Morrow is a PhD student at Southern Methodist University. Her area of emphasis is the British novel in the long 19th century, its subsequent legacies, and the evolving of the cultural cache of these novels and the authors. Her research focus is on representations of gender and social orders in both primary texts from this period and adaptations of these texts. She has written over representations of gender in the shows *Downton Abbey* and *Bridgerton* as well as an examination of character interpretations Alice and the Queen of Hearts across decades of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* film adaptations.

Anna Orzechowska completed her Ph.D. in literature at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw, in 2021. Her doctoral dissertation analyses the representation of women's experience in the oeuvre of Marilyn Duckworth in the light of existentialist philosophy. Her papers have been published in *Anglica. An International Journal of English Studie*s, *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, *Polish Journal of English Studies* and *CROSSROADS. A Journal of English Studies*. Her research interests include contemporary women's literature, particularly New Zealand women's literature, feminist studies and ethical studies. She currently holds the position of adjunct professor in the Academy of Finance and Business Vistula in Warsaw.

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Marie Voždová is a Czech PhD student of English and American Literature at Palacký University's English and American Studies department. The main focus of her research is the Golden Age of detective fiction from the perspective of narratology, particularly the categories of the narrator and focalization. Her papers connected to the topic include "Narrative Levels in The Documents in the Case (1930) by Dorothy L. Sayers and Robert Eustace" (2021) and "Golden Age of British Detective Fiction as a Cultural Phenomenon" (2022). Furthermore, she is concerned with analysing intertextuality in detective novels of the era in the context of British and world literature.

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