

AGING WELL:
SHAPING AGE IDENTITIES IN THE LITERATURE OF THE BRITISH WELFARE STATE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces a literary genealogy of old age and argues that British literature offers both a systematic challenge to the regulatory models of the life course solidified during the twentieth century and emerging from the welfare state, as well as a necessary caveat concerning recent processes that individualize, multiply, but also potentially dismantle social provisions for the elderly in late life. By examining such topics as retirement, intergenerational relations, and narrative ethics, I create a literary-historical archive that resists easy internalization of socio-economic, cultural, and medical-scientific practices and discourses—such as the “alzheimerization” of old age—that seek to manage the “problem” of an aging population, while likewise sharing with the broader field of aging studies the goal of disassociating old age from damaging equations with decline and loss.

Beginning with the postwar decades and extending to early twenty-first century texts, this study examines the creation of aging subjects who must negotiate both individual agency and collective social responsibility. I show how the anxious depictions of labor and late life in the mid-century plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter still inform current debates about retirement, pensions, and social welfare provisions. Other chapters, including one discussing the work of B. S. Johnson, explore how the depiction of subjective dimensions of aging (including anxiety about growing older) can simultaneously register the material, historical imprint of exclusionary age-related policies (such as the failings of institutional care). In later chapters on life writing, the “neuronovel,” and colonial and postcolonial literature, I highlight the changing and often contradictory disciplinary constructs, cultural norms, and social policies that idealize some forms of aging “well,” but which then morally burden individuals with the achievement of such ideals or serve to marginalize other already-vulnerable groups, such as women and migrant communities.

*To my parents
and to Russell*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	
MANAGING AGE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE.....	1
Chapter 1	
CREATING POSTWAR RETIREMENT: SAMUEL BECKETT AND HAROLD PINTER.....	46
Chapter 2	
“THE FUTURE DWELLING-PLACE”: B.S. JOHNSON, ANTI-INSTITUTIONALISM, AND THE SPACE OF OLD AGE.....	87
Chapter 3	
MURIEL SPARK AND THE ETHICAL VIOLENCE OF NARRATING AGE.....	153
Chapter 4	
IAN MCEWAN AND THE ALZHEIMERIZATION OF OLD AGE.....	211
Conclusion	
THE EMPIRE RETIRES: THE PROBLEM OF POSTCOLONIAL AGING.....	246
Works Cited.....	301

INTRODUCTION

MANAGING AGE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

In Thomas Hardy's poem "The Darkling Thrush," a solitary speaker contemplates the darkening and wintry landscape at a particular moment, the end of the nineteenth century, grimly figured in the poem as a "corpse outleant." The "fervourless" speaker eventually finds in art some semblance of hope despite the death-like grimness of time and landscape, specifically, in the song of an old, shabby-looking bird, "An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small, / In blast-beruffled plume." The bird's worn-out shabbiness initially seems an uninspired choice for both the poem, which uses it as symbol of qualified hope and new beginnings at what seems a momentous turning point, as well as for this study, which argues that changing definitions of old age shape twentieth-century British literature in important yet unacknowledged ways. As age emerged as a *social* problem in the twentieth century, so too did it emerge as a *literary* problem, acquiring a new weightiness that disrupts its acknowledged use in literature as metaphor, archetype, or universal truth.

In both the poem and this study, the choice of a somewhat unflattering portrait of aging is deliberate. For Hardy, the bird's unimpressive appearance is precisely what allows it to function as a hopeful symbol; the bird's shabby frame signals its experience and its perseverance despite difficult circumstances, where an unmarked body might be read as simple inexperience and naiveté. For this study, the poem's description of the encounter between an anxious observer and the frail, elderly thrush stages many of the tensions inherent in representing old age and elderly subjects, tensions that stem from social and personal anxieties about growing old and the forces that purport to "manage" those anxieties, tensions that literature is particularly situated to capture and complicate. This project shares with other cultural studies of aging the desire to overcome

what Cynthia Port and Aagje Swinnen call, in the inaugural issue of the journal *Age, Culture, Humanities*, “a damaging binary cultural system that idealizes youth and devalues older age” (1). In particular, it seeks to identify how British literature of the second half of the twentieth century responds to this devaluation, both in its critique of the marginal status of the elderly in society and as it itself “ages” beyond modernism. After all, “The Darkling Thrush” conjures up a new aesthetics in response to the speaker’s lament over a perceived loss of productivity and cultural relevance.

A key part of dismantling that damaging binary and recognizing the value in late life involves recognizing aging as a continual *process* rather than as a static existential state, one which requires a constant negotiation between personal narratives of a changing self over time with socially normalized models of aging (which themselves change over time). The life course is a useful concept that mediates between these two poles, as, per Melissa A. Hardy and Linda Waite’s definition, it “represents the dynamic counterpart to the set of roles/positions that people occupy at any point in time” (8). An individual’s life course, i.e., his or her transitions within social roles, such as education, employment, retirement, marriage, etc., is also regulated by historically specific forces. Sociologists suggest an overall historical pattern wherein the life course was “institutionalized” beginning with modern processes of industrialization and expansion of the bureaucracy; the result was “an increasing reliance on age as a criterion of social organization” (Dannefer and Miklowski 36). This dissertation focuses on the postwar welfare state, including the universalization of retirement, as a key example of such an “institutionalization of the life course.” Furthermore, evidence suggests that this institutionalization may be fragmenting; there is a possibility, Dale Dannefer and Casey Miklowski suggest, that “the destabilizing effects of economic globalization and postmodern

cultural trends are creating a counter-tendency of deinstitutionalization within [these] same late modern societies” (37). This project suggests that the escalating contemporary/late twentieth-century mandate to age “well” is part of the process of this process of fragmentation and individualization. Thus, I show how the literature of this period must negotiate aging as a subjective experience and as one structured by external social and material cultural forces/institutions. All this occurs within a historically changing age landscape, particularly in regards to the welfare state and the concept of social “welfare” more broadly, which I discuss in this study through the tropes of retirement, recognition, and care. Analyzing this dialectic also requires that we go beyond merely reversing or correcting crudely negative stereotypes of old age, instead recognizing how the social anxieties about an aging population that fuel such stereotypes map onto personal anxieties about aging: the fears of being a “burden,” dependence, physical frailty, social ostracism or isolation, and loss of economic prowess and productivity.¹

The devaluation of the “old” in preference for the “young” that so profoundly underscores ageist attitudes also extends to literature and shapes the trajectories of twentieth-century British literature, beginning with modernism. Cynthia Port, for instance, understands Ezra Pound’s famous declaration to “make it new” as a “tacit imperative to ‘keep it young’” (142). She demonstrates how the valuing of youth (one strongly gendered as masculine) was a notable feature among the avant-garde and modernists; in this, the modernists reflected a wider “cult of youth” (whether real or perceived) in popular discourse of the first few decades of twentieth century, especially in the inter-war period in Britain. The war was itself one popular explanation given for the increased visibility of youth culture, in that blame for the war was attributed to the out-dated traditional values of an older generation, both of which the young now

¹ Despite their relevance to old age, neither fear of death nor mortality is a main focus for this study, as these aforementioned harmful and marginalized stigmas are imposed not on the dead or the dying, but on those who society deems old, or in the process of aging into old age.

rejected (Port 141). In reality, the anxiety about (and subsequent cultural devaluation of) aging was in fact a much more complex sociological, economic, and epistemological phenomenon, as Port acknowledges and which later sections of this introduction explore in detail. Furthermore, modernism's insistence on extreme rupture with the past is in itself illusory. Modernity and tradition exist in a binary relation; by staking its claim on the new, Susan Stanford Friedman explains, modernism actually succeeded in retroactively creating the "tradition" from which it rebelled (503).

Eventually, modernists began to feel and register ambivalence about this constant prominence of youth (Port 143). Much of this ambivalence appears thematically, often with a biographical or semi-biographical valence. The work (and biography) of William Butler Yeats is riddled with anxiety about growing older, especially what he perceives as the contrast of his waning of physical prowess with his continuing creative powers.² In her attempt to "[cast] light on both an aging Modernism and the poetry of age" (*At Last* x), aging studies scholar Kathleen Woodward compares the late style of four American modernist poets. She notes, for instance, a new meditative tone and respect for tradition in their late work, tracing the aging poetic speakers of T. S. Eliot from the middle-aged Prufrock in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), to the elderly wartime and postwar figures of "Gerontion" (1920) and the *Four Quartets* (1943). Women were especially targeted for the new cultural mandate of preserving youth. As Cynthia Port demonstrates in her analysis of novelist Rose Macaulay, both popular and "high-brow" writers responded by demonstrating the potentially destructive consequences of social devaluation of age (139).³ This thematic ambivalence also registers in formal choices. Cynthia Port argues, for instance, that stream-of-consciousness developed as a modernist narrative

² See, for instance, George Bornstein, "W. B. Yeats's Poetry of Aging."

³ For another examine of the response of women writers to aging in the modernist period, see Woodward's analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Years* in *Aging and Its Discontents*.

technique in part as a response to gendered social stigmas around aging, which were targeted particularly injuriously at women during this period. The temporal fluidity between the past and present that is a hallmark of this technique, Port argues, is used by writers like Virginia Woolf to “[hold] age and youth in a narrative balance” (144) and thus circumvent ageist prejudices.

In short, the first few decades of the century saw the emergence of aging as cultural and social “problem,” as registered by the literature of the period. The goal of this project is to understand how aging subjects and organizations of the life course are produced, resisted, and destabilized in the literature in the postwar period through the contemporary moment, and how it reacts to Margaret Gullette’s concept of “age ideology.” Age ideology describes the cultural construction of aging and aging subjects, though she cautions that it is a complex system: “In age, as in gendered and racialized constructions, relations of difference depend on the din of representations, unseen internalizations, unthinking practices, economic structures of dominance and subordination” (*Aged* 27). Even when—or *especially* when—old age appears merely marginal or tangential in these literary texts, its absence is a material reminder of unresolved narrative tensions, poetic occlusions, or dramatic possibilities; blindspots in identity work and intergenerational relations; structural inequalities and problematic hierarchies of difference; and the “burden” of youth that is the ironic legacy of modernism.

Age as a Literary Problem

The meanings of old age are as varied as the discourses, societies, and individuals who encounter and produce them. By itself, *aging* simply refers to a temporal process involving change or transformation (Birren 655). But is that process best understood as a biological one of senescence, a process of “dysfunctional change” (Crews 4) in which the probability of a living

organism's survival decreases, and incidence of disease increases, as dictated by genetic and environmental factors? Or a process and identity that is culturally dictated? Is it an object of medical, scientific, and sociological study, or a topic for cultural studies and intersectional analysis? Should a distinction be made between pathological old age and "normal" aging as an established part of the human life course? Is it best understood as universal human process, or as a facet of individual experience? And at what point does an aging individual become *old*, and is that distinction even worth preserving?

The answers to these questions vary as a function of culture, history, and individual experience. For instance, though historian Pat Thane points out that as far back as ancient Greece, ages 60 through 70 have been socially acceptable points at which a public figure leave civic life, there is no historical consensus defining old age or categorizing the life course. As Thane points out, "old age" can culturally connote anywhere from age 50 to beyond 100, as life expectancies continue to increase. It is only relatively recently that fixed, chronological age has become relevant (or easily documented) at all; many periods and cultures understood age categories based less on the calendar and more on practicality; "functional age," for instance, might measure an individual's ability to fulfill important, everyday tasks (Thane 3-4).

In *Disciplining Old Age*, Stephen Katz argues that the twentieth century witnessed the creation of specific kinds of aging subjects, including the retired man and woman, the welfare recipient, the nursing home resident, and the medical patient. Where Katz demonstrates how these subjects came under the umbrella of a social and scientific "problem" to be managed, I ask how literature constructs and deconstructs this problem, and creates other important aging subjects, such as the aging or "late" artist and the narrator as a "life-writer." Though these subject models and their underlying material bases are continuous with or at least traceable to

older and earlier British cultural patterns and social policies (the Poor Laws are one example),⁴ and are in themselves often contradictory and evolving, there are four reasons why their identification in this literary context is important.

First, if we seek to find the origins of contemporary, twenty-first century definitions of old age, characterized as they are by “ambiguity and heterogeneity” (Bytheway et al. 3), we must look to the changing demographics, social policies, and medical ideologies that began in the early twentieth century and were consolidated in the postwar period (Gilleard and Higgs, *Cultures* 2).⁵ The demographic panic about an aging population that grips society in the first quarter of the twenty-first century is a forgotten echo of the same panic that is still gripping the first few decade of the twentieth (Thane 13).

Second, both the shift to an aging population profile *and* the broad trajectories of British literature correspond with the “working through of the modernist project” (*Cultures* 7), to use Gilleard and Higgs’s phrase from their discussion of twentieth-century age demographics. My argument here is that shifting models of aging are reflected not only in the literature but in its “aging,” its shape over time. And vice versa: aging takes on important narrative and performative components. This is particularly the case for those most canonical literary highlights: the “make it new” philosophy of the high modernism of the 1910s, 20s, and 30s, the tragedies of the world wars (and the “angry young men” who followed), and political and social upheavals and changing demographic profiles caused by colonialism and then decolonization. Thus this study

⁴ Though my focus is how this process developed in British history and literature, it applies to the many developed countries whose populations have aged rapidly in the past century.

⁵ Gilleard and Higgs write in *Cultures of Ageing* that “[t]he contradictions that make up the emerging cultures of ageing exist with an increasingly reflexive modernity. Their origins can be traced through the social history of the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time these processes must be set in the context of demographic changes of much longer duration. It is this combination of population, social and cultural change that provides the main framework by which we seek to approach and understand ‘ageing’” (2).

also shows how old age and aging function as an “excluded middle” component to these important narratives of twentieth-century British literature.

Third, these changing models of aging shape discourses of identity and consciousness, which, in turn have subtly shaped not only the trajectories and narratives of British literature but also other key twentieth-century topics of study—memory, trauma, psychoanalysis, madness, consciousness and cognitive studies—that hinge on a concept of the (continual) self through time.

Fourth, and finally, because of its centrality to human experience, both individual and social, old age has a powerful representative value. Cultural representations of aging matter. They shape how we treat the elderly and how we treat ourselves (as always-already aging subjects), and they have the potential to either enforce or resist the tendency to normalize this treatment.

Age in “The Darkling Thrush”

“The Darkling Thrush” enacts at the initial moments of the twentieth century what Simone de Beauvoir, seven decades later, will demonstrate in her ground-breaking treatise of feminist aging studies, *The Coming of Age*: namely, that understanding aging means recognizing how it encompasses interlocking elements of the biological, psychological, existential, and the social. For instance, though aging is marked on the body (as it is on the thrush), Beauvoir urges us to consider aging’s existential dimension, as change over time, and how it thereby “changes the individual’s relationship with time and therefore his relationship with the world and with his own history” (9). “The Darkling Thrush” deliberately excludes the existential experience of aging from its representation of the thrush, but it does have a curiously ambivalent relationship toward *time* that influences its model of aging. On the one hand, the poem laments the passage of

time and the perceived decline that inevitably results; this temporal lateness and decline is repeated in the poem in the lateness of the day (“The weakening eye of day”), the lateness of the year (“Winter’s dregs”), and, finally, the lateness of the century (“The Century’s corpse”). Implicitly organized around a model of aging, the poem naturalizes the passage of time as a gradual decline, tying it to the landscape and the seasons.

In *Declining to Decline*, however, Margaret Morganroth Gullette cautions against this stereotypical pattern. She argues that “decline” has now become the dominant narrative of the life course, internalized by us at ever-earlier ages as a universal, biological imperative, and injuring our thinking about aging and the experience of time and change in general. In “fling[ing] his soul / Upon the growing gloom,” Hardy’s thrush appears to be resisting this overwhelming narrative of decline, yet its success in doing so is incomplete. In Gullette’s words, Hardy offers no concrete “counternarrative” to the imposed master narrative of decline, though it is clear that the speaker, like Gullette, endorses the search for one, and recognizes the shifting ground of representations of age. Like Thomas Hardy himself, “The Darkling Thrush” straddles the lines of late Victorian and modernist literary space. The poem searches for new aesthetic forms to replace the older once-productive and dynamic ones. Now only the broken trappings of these old forms remain, like the “strings of broken lyres.” The bird’s song-first arrival, with its powerful voice belying its frail frame, marks the change from what Andrew Blaikie calls the Victorian sense of self, one committed to progress and authenticity, conscientiously acquired through culture and civilization, and, on the other hand, the burgeoning “performing self” of the twentieth century (*Ageing* 205). Thus, the decline of the old ways does suggest the birth of a new (modernist) aesthetics along with a new method of identity formation, one performed by an aging self.

In contrast to the gradual passage of time (and accompanying decline) implied in the poem, Hardy also offers a sharp calendrical delineation of time: the end of one century and the beginning of the next. Yet even this seemingly clear demarcation of a particular date, a fixed point in time, is illusory. Kent Puckett has demonstrated that the canonical date affixed to the end of “The Darkling Thrush”—31 December 1900—is in fact neither the date of the poem’s composition nor, more importantly, an unambiguous marker of the century’s end. In fact, the poem has had at least four different datings in its composition and publication history, from the original (altered, as indicated) manuscript title, “The Century’s End ~~1899~~ 1900,” to its initial publication (and therefore implied dating) on December 29, 1900 in *Graphic*, to the final, most well-known version indicated above. Puckett argues that this re-dating of the poem is more than mere trivia of publishing history. On the contrary, rather than determining a precise calendrical date and delineation between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and, by extension, past and future), “[l]ike an itch that will not be scratched, the poem’s date becomes more and more marked (and perhaps less and less accurate) the more Hardy worries at it” (60). Puckett points out that Hardy’s vacillation over this seemingly extra-poetic text reflects the wider disagreement among the public about whether 1900 or 1901 marked the start of the twentieth century, with Hardy’s manuscript revisions indicating that he ultimately favored the latter date, which has become the accepted standard.

Just as “The Darkling Thrush” establishes a particular moment in time only to dismantle it, so too does it enter into a pattern of making and then unmaking representations of old age. While the dating points to the inherent ambivalence in marking time calendrically or chronologically—itself a prominent concern in aging studies—this paratextual vacillation also stems in part from Hardy’s own concerns about age, particularly in relation to his literary output.

Thomas Hardy's portrayal of aging is notably sympathetic (though not necessarily optimistic), sensitive as he was about his relatively late-life turn to publishing poetry, and proud at having kept writing poetry into his 70s and 80s (Pritchard 78). As a writer of poetry about aging *and* a late-life writer of poetry—one of the prominent twentieth-century “poets of ageing” and the Old Poets⁶—Hardy frequently evokes the passage of time with a seeming stoicism and resignation.

At the point of publication of the “The Darkling Thrush,” Hardy, at age 60 and a published novelist for decades, had only been publishing poetry for a few years and was concerned about its “late timing” and his own reception as a poet (Puckett 59). Samuel Hynes regards this literary lateness as central to Hardy's poetic persona, coining the phrase Old Poets to describe Hardy (among other poets, including Yeats). The Old Poets are those who “in their old age make poetry out of that state—make age not simply their subject, but the condition of consciousness in their poems” (190). But Hardy cannot be viewed only through the lens of “aesthetic lateness” or “late style,” a topic of much recent debate among scholars of aging, which attempts to find particular significance in an artist's last or late works (or their reception), particularly as they may reflect the artist's experience of aging, incapacitating illness, or even encroaching death.⁷ While a quiet acceptance of aging as inevitable loss and diminishment is a common feature of many of Hardy's poems, it features only tangentially in “The Darkling Thrush.”⁸ Other poems appear to address aging more specifically, as, for instance, the “Poems of 1912-13” he wrote after his wife's death, or even the poem from his earliest collection in 1898,

⁶ The others are William Butler Yeats and Philip Larkin, who are often compared with one another. See Raphael Ingelbien “From Hardy to Yeats? Larkin's Poetry of Ageing” and Samuel Hynes “How to Be an Old Poet.”

⁷ Interest in this topic was most recently precipitated by Edward Said's *On Late Style*. Partially citing Adorno's critical work on Beethoven, Said differentiates between those artists whose late works were continuous with their earlier and middle periods, and those whose work showed a disruptive force, a “nonharmonious, nonserene tension” (7) that he finds more aesthetically interesting. For a critique of the concept of aesthetical lateness, see Michael Hutcheon and Linda Hutcheon, “Late Style(s): The Ageism of the Singular,” as well as Devoney Looser, “Age and Aging Studies, from Cradle to Grave.”

⁸ For a discussion of Hardy's poetic depictions of old age, see Samuel Hynes, “How to Be an Old Poet: The Examples of Hardy and Yeats.”

Wessex Poems and Other Verses, that acknowledges the bodily signs of aging: “I look into my glass, / And view my wasting skin” (Hynes 198). Despite its seeming distance from issues of old age compared to Hardy’s other poetic work, “The Darkling Thrush” enacts the very challenges of examining a topic so long under-studied: the thrush serves as Hardy’s, and the speaker’s, stand-in for literary, personal, and social anxieties about aging while the poem’s temporal fixation historicizes these very anxieties.

“The Darkling Thrush” demonstrates that literary representations of aging are always overdetermined, carrying metaphorical and material weight. While “The Darkling Thrush” does use several conventional tropes in its representation of time and change (the winter season, a glorified, indeterminate past), it does not *only* use the figure of the aged bird to bemoan the passage of time, or to take the spiritual temperature of the fin-de-siecle. Rather, Hardy evokes the twentieth century as one defined by old age, not only as a conventional literary metaphor, but as one of its key preoccupations and its key signifiers. As in Kathleen Woodward’s groundbreaking analysis of feminist and psychoanalytic aging studies, my focus in this study is “on old age itself rather than an old age as a metaphor for something else” (*Aging* 8). “The Darkling Thrush” is anxious about time and change, influence and legacy, but it mediates this anxiety through a discourse about aging; in particular, it historicizes models of old age that gain ascendancy in the twentieth century, and that also shape our narratives of twentieth century literature. The individual and personal significance of becoming or being old has and will vary throughout history; aging creates uniquely individual biographies and age identities. Nonetheless, this significance is informed by normalized cultural models of aging—what Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs call “cultures of ageing” in their eponymous work—that define what it means to be and become “old.” However, one’s biographical aging and negotiated age-identity also have material

components. These are the physical bodily changes that occur over time and the lived conditions of everyday life, what Stephen Katz terms the “materiality of embodied aging” (“Hold” 191).

The poem locates these representations of old age at the unsteady and already temporally unmoored beginnings of the twentieth century. Historians of gerontology and scholars of aging studies have frequently noted that the twentieth century marks an important and noticeable shift in perspectives on aging: specifically, it is at the beginning of the twentieth century that old age becomes a “problem.”⁹ No longer merely a personal, individual experience, or a matter for spiritual or philosophical inquiry, old age became subject to the disciplining, defining, and managing forces of science, medicine, social welfare, and consumerism, a consequence of its own increased visibility as well as the strengthening and coalescing of the social and political practices (and the broader practices of what Michel Foucault calls governmentality) that seek to organize it.

Though this change occurred at the turn of the century, it gained the most tangible momentum in the post-World War II period; the key textual analyses in this study thus begin in the mid-century. The postwar period consolidated the disciplining forces that sought to “solve” the crisis of an aging population. This process involves the “disciplining” of old age, a term Stephen Katz uses to refer to the ideological forces that regulated prescribed models of aging, both within the creation of the multi-disciplinary field of inquiry that is now gerontology, and beyond it. Katz further identifies the twentieth-century formulation of gerontology as a “subject-

⁹ “Old age becomes a ‘problem’ worth investigating scientifically” (21), according to historian W. Andrew Achenbaum. Though he focuses mainly on its history in the United States, he traces the emergence of contemporary gerontology—systematic, research-based scientific and social-scientific investigation of aging—from the work of such early pioneers as George M. Beard in the late nineteenth century, to Elie Metchnikoff (who first coined the term gerontology), Gnatz Leo Nascher, G. Stanley Hall, and Edmund Vincent Cowdry in the first third of the twentieth century. Though geriatrics as a medical subspecialty also developed somewhat alongside gerontology, John Grimley Evans argues that its presence was felt much more in Britain than in the United States as in, for instance, Dr. Marjory Warren’s work in the 1930s improving the conditions of elderly inmates of the former workhouse wards (1075).

constructing discipline” (*Disciplining* 17), one in which these models of aging are used to create particular subjects of old age. Katz calls on Foucault’s theorization of three “fields of subjectivity” to show how the aged subject is regulated: the body, the population, and the individual. Just as the aged body becomes both the signifier for aged identities and the focus for new forms of knowledge about old age, so do changes in the demographics of western populations (as well as changes in labor and production patterns in industrializing societies) result in a bio-political management of old age. At this point in history, as Katz explains, “old age was cast as a social problem requiring governmental response” (24); the governmental response particularly examined here is the institutionalization of the welfare state and, in particular, the creation of retirement. Finally, it is at the level of the individual that Foucault locates the possibility for resistance to the identities regulated by biopolitics. This literary analysis of old age examines individual subjectivity (in the context of the twentieth-century construction of aging subjects) as a function of narrative, character, performance, and—as in Hardy’s poem—poetic persona, including at times a discussion of an author’s autobiography as it relates to the creation of these literary constructs. It seeks to find patterns of instability, points at which the text disrupts and destabilizes pre-determined age identities, by using any or all of the following: a) exposing the historical, material bases of these models’ conditions of existence, including the problematic gender, racial, and class inequalities underlying their creation; b) offering alternative, ironic, or less restrictive or less implacable models; or c) by understanding the aging process as itself inherently fluid and destabilizing.

Sharing with Stephen Katz and other scholars a commitment to critical gerontology, this study takes as its starting point Katz’s analysis of the disciplinary forces shaping our understanding of old age, and extends to the field of British literature these three Foucauldian

domains of subjectivity, which Katz argues are critical to the creation of twentieth-century “knowledge” of old age. All three fields of subjectivity are relevant, for instance, to Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush.” At the level of the body, the poem contrasts the bird’s joyful voice and, by extension, its soul, with corporeal manifestations of its aged state: frailty, desiccation, weakness, all traditional, Hellenistic bodily markers of advanced age (Minois 70). It also reinforces a typical psychological division, one of the results of age ideology, between a physical aged body and the real “self” inside. Hardy also expands the speaker’s bleak outlook to the population at large, contrasting a mythical former society pulsing with “germ and birth” with the “fervourless,” “hard and dry” present, again using classical aging models—age as a drying up, a desiccation—to portray the past as young and thus therefore productive, and the present as old and unproductive. The poem’s implicit reliance on these traditional representations of aging takes on new meaning in the twentieth century as population aging as well as changing industrialization patterns spur re-definitions of productivity in the form of retirement and pension programs.

As much as it acts within standard and normalized representations of old age, “The Darkling Thrush” also suggests how representations of old age can destabilize these norms. Stephen Katz argues that these “undisciplining” forces are as much at work in the construction of knowledge about old age as those that attempt to regulate and stabilize meaning (136). As the poem’s representative of both age and art, the bird operates within an easily identifiable system of signification: the allegories of its song and wintry season are well-established. Yet Hardy’s ambivalence about time disrupts this easy allegory, as does the relationship between the poem’s speaker and its aged representative, the bird. Because the defining models of both age and art are now on unsteady ground, moving targets instead of fixed ones, these significations falter. The

poem's four-stanza structure promises a narrative resolution to the twinned problems of time and artistic endeavor established in the beginning, but that resolution is only partial, limited as it is by the speaker's inability to internalize it. For to really internalize the bird's "happy good-night air"—instead of facilely attributing to it a vague message of "Hope"—would mean accepting the material realities of the coming of age, the "terrestrial things" the poem cannot quite transcend.

The last two lines of the poem enact the kind of epistemic distance that makes discussing aging particularly fraught. According to the speaker, the thrush sings of "Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew, / and I was unaware." Though in this case the epistemic gap between knowing bird, posited here as an aviary version of the Lacanian "subject who knows," and the questioning speaker can partly be attributed to the difference in species (and also partially to Hardy's deliberate echoing of romantic poetic tropes), it also enacts a separation seen frequently in discussions of aging, that between a seemingly aloof, "objective" observer, and the aging subject, whose knowledge and experience the observer cannot fully encompass or embody. Its distancing of age transfers the speaker's anxiety about aging in this upcoming century onto a seemingly unknown and unknowable entity, an artistic and inhuman sublime.

Within the multidisciplinary fields of study aimed at understanding aging, the "objective" pole is claimed by such fields as gerontological and medical practice, sociological research, and demographic and population studies, while the "subjective" pole has more recently been promoted by proponents of humanistic gerontology, particularly as it intersects with cultural and literary studies. Even Simone de Beauvoir, early pioneer of feminist aging studies, organized *The Coming of Age* around these two poles, with the first half examining "the aged man as an object, an object from the scientific, historic, and social point of view" (279), and only in the second half turning to a study of the existential experience of what Mike Hepworth calls "ageing *into* old

age” (2). Along with other literary or critical gerontologists, Hepworth uses this phrase to signal a more comprehensive definition of aging, one not tied strictly to a biological or chronological definition of old age categorized by life cycle or life “stages,” but rather one in which “the constitutive strands of the [aging] process—biological (body); psychological (self); and society (culture and social structure)—are not seen as distinctive factors which can be separated out but are woven closely together into the fabric of everyday social life” (2). Beauvoir’s treatise outlines a similar thesis: because of the “close interdependence” of the biological and psychological, it is “pointless” to study these aspects of human aging separately (9). In fact, Beauvoir argues that old age is the human situation *particularly* positioned to study the intersection between body and mind, biology and culture.

Recent critical gerontological work has tried to merge these divisions, bringing subjective experience, narrative, and literature together. Yet, like Hardy’s “Darkling Thrush,” many of the literary projects we encounter in this study stop short of representing the existential element of aging, or, in fact, deliberately stage an encounter between an outsider to aging and an aged subject that avoids interiority or empathy. A scholar of feminist and aging studies, Kathleen Woodward reads this type of avoidance encounter, which she categorizes as containing “a certain kind of spectatorship—of distance” (*Aging* 57), as a symptom of denial and repression triggered by fears of aging. In a variation on Lacan’s mirror stage theory of subject formation, Woodward describes one fundamental psychological reaction to age as the “mirror stage of old age,” in which a figure (not identifying as elderly) encounters but stops short of identifying with an older person and thus, of themselves, as aging. Hardy’s 1898 poem “I Look into my Glass” enacts this state of double consciousness, with the speaker unable to reconcile the reflection he sees in the mirror (including his “wasting skin,” a stereotypical bodily marker of advancing age) with his

“true” self, which still throbs of “noontide” and refuses to be relegated by others to a forgotten seclusion. Beauvoir explains this phenomenon psychologically by showing how our social and political ostracism of the elderly conditions our rejection of our own eventual aging. This lack of recognition creates a culture of complicity, in which patterns of denial and ageism are represented, internalized and thus repeated.

“The Darkling Thrush” displaces personal, social, and literary anxiety about aging onto a romantic image of a bird, but beyond the symbolism lie historical, material practices that create and regulate aging subjects throughout the twentieth-century. Even as the speaker of “The Darkling Thrush” uses conventional images of aging to describe the landscape and the passage of time, he posits the very unknowability of the existential elements of aging onto the inscrutability of the thrush. While the scope of Hardy’s poetry seems to embrace aging through what Hynes calls “accepting silence, accepting forgottenness” (201), “The Darkling Thrush” in fact offers little acceptance. It only shakily patches over the difficulties in embodying what are becoming, at the cusp of the century, problematic and problematized models of growing older.

The Aged Body, the Aging Population, and Aging “Well”

The twentieth century launched aging as a “problem” to be known, managed, and disciplined. This section briefly outlines some of the historical processes and material practices that inform the creation of aging subjects in the twentieth century, especially at the level of the individual and the collective. What does it mean to be an aging subject in an aging population?

The Aged Body

The body is one of the key sites wherein cultural discourses of aging are both developed and enacted. The cultural imaginary typically narrates the gradual changes undergone by the body (hip replacements, stooping, grey hair, wrinkles, internal complaints, and so on) in terms of decline. Popular representations of the elderly often conform to this narrative. Sally Chivers argues that in Hollywood cinema, for instance, these corporeal signs of aging—wrinkles, grey hair, etc.—function as a system of “abbreviated symbols that connote decay, decline, and death” (*The Silvering* xix). According to Chivers, this cinematic shorthand works to homogenize and universalize social identity in old age rather than celebrating the plurality of aging narratives and identities in late life (xviii-xix). Attempts to erase or reverse these perceived bodily differences (through cosmetic surgery, for instance) only serve to reinforce their cultural entrenchment and their unequal coding along gender, race, and class-based lines. Women in particular are disproportionately socially pressured to disguise wrinkles or grey hair in comparison to men. This remains the case in the popular imagination despite what Gilleard and Higgs call the “new ageing,” or a version of post-modern aging that relies less on the corporeal definitions of what constitutes old age and instead on a proliferation of aging self-identities and their expression in embodied everyday practices. For Gilleard and Higgs, the heteroglossia of contemporary aging is an improvement, but possibly an overwhelming one: “As chronological age ceased to exercise its monopoly over the organization and control of resources directed toward ‘old age,’ the fears and confusion surrounding its ‘identity’ rendered age a more unstable and contested system of social categorization and individual distinction” (*Ageing* 29). We can thus understand the attempts of contemporary culture to “pin down” a stable model of old age as a reaction to this new proliferation of possible identity positions. While most of the texts examined in this study

attempt to undermine homogenization in aging, I argue in the last chapter that *popular* works of fiction in particular often perform the same function that Chivers identifies, presenting a model of “successful” aging that re-directs personal anxieties about aging (often expressed via bodily markers) through more typical, and less demanding, literary genres and narrative structures. As Chivers says of most contemporary cinema, such a narrative channeling in popular fiction serves to make growing old “[appear] to be, if not avoidable, at least manageable” (*The Silvering* xix).

But whereas we take these bodily markers for granted, a model of old age defined around the body and its physical markers is not a historical given. Stephen Katz explains how defining aging *predominately* through the body developed within the last several centuries, and particularly escalated post-Enlightenment as medical and scientific classifications of aging were matched on political and social levels. Premodern periods, he explains in *Disciplining Old Age*, did not necessarily equate aging to the body. Medieval definitions, for example, understood aging as part of larger theological, astrological, and medico-philosophical systems; in the Galenic humor theory of the body, for instance, old age and femininity were tied to “cold” and “wet” phlegm humor, while the astrologers defined the seven ages of a person’s life to the movement of planets and other heavenly bodies. The “body” was not a homogeneous or ontologically unified entity, nor was death considered a necessary part of aging or subject to medical knowledge, but rather a natural and communal part of life (Katz 31-2).

Gradually, as science replaced theology and philosophy in medical discourse, aging became primarily described in biological and medical terms, particularly focused and oriented through the body. The aging body was circumscribed by a limited biological lifespan and described through its organs, tissues, body functions, and related regulatory systems. This biologically-oriented view accelerated in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and

eventually led to the mid-century development of the specialized fields of gerontology and geriatrics (which tended to re-invent their own genealogies to emphasize a scientific trajectory).

The consequences of this medical gaze were varied. First, as the aged body became medically legible, it came to stand in for the “inevitable difference of a subject of old age” (Katz, *Disciplining* 27); old age became a separate, definitive, and coherent category of existence. One way this difference came to be expressed is via a slippage of the typical medical meanings of normal and pathological. Early medical and scientific examinations of the aged body questioned whether the changes caused by senescence were normal aspects of aging or were symptoms of specific diseases that could be targeted and treated. Katz argues that, ultimately, the pathological changes in the aged body (disease, incapacity) came to be defined as the norm in aging. This stance, that what is pathological at other points in the life course is considered “normal” in aging, reinforces the separation of old age as a distinct existential and especially corporeal entity. It is on the basis of the normal/pathological binary, Katz argues, that the biopolitical commandeering of old age became possible (27). In fact, Calasanti, Slevin, and King claim that this normalization or naturalization of pathology in old age becomes a justification for ageism (20). Something of a tautology arose, as well, in which the aged body was the key indicator of an aged subject, even as a subject was classified as being old through his or her body.

Difference and Redefining the Aged Body

Defining aging through the body threatens to become essentializing or reductive; however, current aging and culture studies scholarship recognizes how “the body” does or can expand possibilities of agency and subjectivity rather than only limiting them. Even Stephen

Katz's Foucauldian analysis of the medical disciplines codifying a set of signs for old age qualifies these practices as ultimately opening up a positive discursive space:

The medical practices under discussion did not simply negate the aged body but rendered its energies, vulnerabilities, and peculiarities visible to scientific scrutiny and to the temporalizing power of insurance, retirement, pension, and consumer industries. In other words, such practices were positive; they brought the body into discourse in subject-constituting ways... Contrary to popular criticism, therefore, medicine does not repress human nature but produces it through specific discursive practices. (*Disciplining* 27)

One way of understanding the centrality of the aged body to constructions of aging, therefore, is to see it as an initial entry point into discussions of constructions of aging in the twentieth century, establishing the condition of possibility for "aging" to become a reified aspect of human existence. Furthermore, literature can mediate the relationship between the materiality of the body and its social and cultural constructions.

This project shows how literary texts of the twentieth century negotiate the aging body without essentializing it, by either creatively expanding ways we define the body, recognizing its inherently complex relationship with self, identity, and consciousness, or exploring the significance of the materiality of the body itself. Gilleard and Higgs argue that the body is central to how we understand aging, but in a way that deviates—in positive ways—from the genealogy outlined above.¹⁰ The "new ageing," according to *Ageing, Corporeality and*

¹⁰ In fact, Gilleard and Higgs's genealogy of twentieth-century aging is frequently the reverse of Katz's. They argue that the construction of aging was the result of social policies inaugurated in the twentieth century, and that the image of the aging body in decline is more a limitation used to justify these policies than a construction of the bio-medical sciences (*Cultures* 126). They argue that chronological age was more important than physical, corporeal aging during this period, and that the aging "body" as such was not an important political factor until after World War II. "Exact ages for pension entitlement, for men and women, varied considerably during the first half of the twentieth century, but the debates were not concerned with identifying biological markers and had more to do with identifying acceptable political boundaries and feasible national resources. With one or two exceptions, medicine too showed little concern with the ageing body until the Second World War created a new concern over ageing

Embodiment, no longer merely reinforces body-based definitions of what it means to be old. Rather, bodily aging mediates between the corporeal and the social/cultural, and, in doing so, “[negotiates] a wider performative space for ageing and the development of a richer set of narratives through which ageing can be experienced, interpreted, represented or understood” (30), even as these attempts necessitate some resistance to the persistent circulation of more essentializing perceptions of old age as frailty and decline. Gilleard and Higgs identify this shift as beginning in the 1960s, as social activist movements (and scholars of cultural theory) encouraged the proliferation of more contingent identity formations. These “embodied identities,” Gilleard and Higgs suggest, formed around gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, which biologically- or chronologically-based models of aging tend to ignore (29). I argue in the fourth chapter of this project that this binary plays a large role in the “alzheimerization” of contemporary models of aging.

What followed was the fashioning of these identities through habits of self-care and lifestyle, made possible above all by a consumption-orientated consumer society, one which gained ascendancy in the postwar period and which is a central factor, Gilleard and Higgs argue, of the “new ageing.” Although the potential problems with validating a model of aging based on a post-welfare commodity culture are discussed later, in the section detailing the Third Age, Gilleard and Higgs are right to note that shifts in models of aging are structured around broader turns in modernity (*Cultures* 7). The earlier models tended to be based around corporeality: the valuation of productivity and labor resulting from industrialization; the establishment of “universal” retirement based on chronological age; institutionalization of the elderly in hospitals

bodies occupying potential soldiers’ beds” (25). Unlike Katz, they identify the “somatic turn” as a distinctly post-modern rather than modern phenomenon, whereas Katz argues that an orientation around the body was a necessary condition of possibility of the creation of social policies like pensions to begin with. Ultimately, it is impossible to definitively distinguish the origins of these constructions, as they reinforced each other’s ideologies.

and nursing homes, accompanied by the postwar emphasis on social welfare and national health (Gilleard and Higgs, *Ageing* xi).

Though late-modern commodity culture has destabilized the connection between aging and the body that these earlier modern moments created, this potential for flux is not unproblematic. For one, the rise in “grey capital” in the past few decades has coincided with a decline in welfare responsibility and publicly funded services for the elderly. The result is a transfer of responsibility for well-being in old age to the individual, with late life seen as a heavily moralized “final reckoning,” in Gilleard and Higgs’s ominous terms, of how well an individual has fulfilled those responsibilities (*Cultures* 62). This shift from welfare to postmodernity, and the resultant creation of a “success” model of old age, will be examined in a later chapter. More insidious, however, is the possibility that the seemingly defiant cultural positions of the “new ageing” are, in fact, not new positions but reactionary ones, in which the “new ageing” reflects a pressure to *not* age at all and to remain young (or ageless, or “young at heart”); this “age-resistance” is in fact not a resistance at all.¹¹

Recuperating positive representations of aging is only a small part of the important work of cultural studies of aging; rather, it seeks to explain the subtle and insidious ways in which age has and often does still function as an “undertheorized sign of difference” (DeFalco 1) and exclusion. This critique is often framed as a call to add age to forms of both historicist and intersectional analysis already in practice, as in Devoney Looser’s manifesto from the inaugural issue of *Age, Culture, Humanities*:

We must continue to seek out the ways that the meanings and practices of age and aging changed from decade to decade, generation to generation, or century to century. We must

¹¹ Gilleard and Higgs note the contradictory tension within this attitude of age-resistance: “As third-agers, these individuals occupy significant positions within ‘grey capital’; but they are required at the very same time to continue to invest that capital within markets dominated by youth-oriented modes of consumption” (*Cultures* 64).

do so in conversation with the other categories of identity that have become central to our work in the humanities, particularly in cultural studies: gender, race, class, nation, and sexuality among them. Age belongs on that list. Age must be added to that list. (“Age” 26-7)

Aging, however, is not as additive as Looser’s formulation implies. Age multiplies rather than adds; it complicates or bifurcates these always already present identity constructions. It multiplies differences or inequalities, even as age stereotypes and normalized models of aging threaten to homogenize the elderly in the popular imagination. Though the fact of human senescence is universal, the experience of aging varies from individual to individual.

Aging bodies are heterogeneous; their physical existence and their embodied expression in self are informed by gender, race, class, disability, and nationality. Furthermore, systemic inequalities expressed via social difference contribute heavily to differences in aging. Women, for instance, with longer life expectancies and traditionally more unpredictable employment histories, are vulnerable to the lack of support and services in late life, not to mention unequally pressured to conform to the “anti-aging” cultural mandate. The need to add “aging” or even “old” to this litany of identity positions and their corresponding critical agendas and theoretical frameworks, while obvious, is also challenging. In its interest in re-thinking the “body” as a positive agential force, gender studies in particular seems positioned to be a natural ally of aging studies. Yet, the default ideological position of its critical discourse in fact often neglects or even rejects older subjects; the default embodied subject possesses a “youthful healthy body” (Woodward, “Performing” 162). Susan Sontag famously called attention to the “double standard of aging” in 1972 whereby she showed that women beyond a certain age are de-valued twice, first by age and secondly by gender. Our cultural prejudices condition spectators—in what

Woodward calls the “youthful structure of the look” (“Performing” 163)—to see an older person as primarily old and devoid of any other identity presentations, such as gender or sexuality. In attempting to correct or at least call attention to this contemporary imbalance, Margaret Cruikshank argues that the term “old”—no matter how that term is reclaimed—should be interlaced with other identity positions, such that the late life can operate within a “space of difference” (151) rather than problematic essentialism.

In an earlier section, I showed how Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush” enacts the cultural switch to a more performative model of the self, one linked to the bird’s aged frame and to double consciousness of body-based age identity. In recent decades, Kathleen Woodward and other advocates for a feminist aging studies have turned to performance and performativity to re-program our cultural “gaze” vis-à-vis aging. They do so by locating potential for examples of non-normative models of aging within performance spaces, which by their nature mix representation and physicality: film, television, theater, and performance art.¹² In addition to using performance spaces to re-calibrate ageist depictions, these scholars also argue that seeing aging itself as inherently “performative” increases its potential for transforming both cultural perceptions of late life as well as the potential ways we can embody aging. To define age as performative means “that each of us performs the actions associated with a chronological age minute by minute, and that the repetition of these performances creates a so-called reality of age both for the subject and for those who interact with the subject” (Lipscomb and Marshall 2). Furthermore, understanding aging as performative involves negotiating the cultural parameters

¹² Margaret Gullette, for instance, advocates age-appropriate casting, or at least deliberately and ironically “age-inappropriate” casting in theater productions (*Aged* 176). Sally Chivers uses the film career of Jack Nicholson not only to demonstrate the perceived loss of masculinity that comes with aging, but also to argue that Hollywood’s privileging of the (white) male actor/character manages this perceived threat at the expense of “malleable and malicious” on-screen depictions of women and racialized characters (*The Silvering* 120-21).

of aging with the physical fact of bodily change over time.¹³ Feminist aging studies is a growing area of study, one generating significant interest in both fields. This is in important recognition of the fact that aging is not only frequently feminized, but that “old age has long been predominantly a female experience” (Thane 3). Because it is a complex topic that requires significant theorization (one much more profound than provided in this introduction), this study does not focus directly on gender and queer theorizations of aging, instead leaving it as topic for more systematic future inquiry.

While an ageist gaze threatens to erase an older women’s sexuality and femininity, an ableist gaze might unthinkingly see her as disabled, equating age with disability. Cultural perceptions of aging are certainly gendered, classed, and racialized, but, above all, growing old is associated with increasing physical and mental impairment. Anti-ableist social activism and disability studies, with their deep-seated suspicions of essentialism, pathologization, and institutionalization, may seem a natural ally of the elderly and of aging studies. Yet the opposite is more often the case: as Gilleard and Higgs explain, disability advocates have traditionally chafed at confining their interests to a narrow, late “slice” of the life course, while grey advocates tend to balk at the assumption that late life must come with impairment and bodily decline. In short, “each [camp] fears containment by the other” (*Ageing* 19).¹⁴ In *The Silvering Screen*, Sally Chivers calls this a case of “competing interests,” and provides a telling real-life example wherein a group of elderly bus riders were aggressively asked to vacate their seats for a boarding wheelchair-bound passenger, though those seats were specifically designated for

¹³ For additional discussion of aging feminist studies and performance/performativity, see Calasanti, Slevin, and King, “Ageism and Feminism: From ‘Et Cetera’ to Center”; Woodward, ed., *Figuring Age: Women Bodies, Generations*; Dolan and Tincknell, eds, *Aging Femininities: Troubling Representations*; Basting, *The Stages of Age*; and Whelehan, “Not To Be Looked At: Older Women in Contemporary British Film.”

¹⁴ Gilleard and Higgs trace the origins of this mutual unease to the fact that disability activism emerged in the 1960s as a predominately “young,” anti-establishment movement.

seniors and disabled passengers (4-5). The inclusion implied by that “and” will continue to be tried in upcoming decades, for, as disability studies theorist Lennard J. Davis asks, “how will...older people redefine disability, since they did not grow up with a disability or acquire one early in life? Who will get to claim the definition of disability or the lack of one?” (24-5). A recent issue of *Age, Culture, Humanities* has sought to draw these two fields into a productive dialogue, and suggests some productive ways of doing so, by emphasizing their similar theoretical grounds as well as common goals. Some challenges of such a potentially mutually beneficial exchange might include, as Erin Gentry Lamb explains, a possible doubling-down on a medical model of the “problematic” old and disabled body (216), but such challenges are worth overcoming because aging and disability frameworks can enhance one another’s interests, rather than compete.

Population

While changing perspective of aging bodies served as one way the twentieth-century reified old age, equally influential were the changing social demographics, and the resulting policies and institutions designed to respond to them, particularly those centered around health and social care. This section explains how age ideologies were effected by the aging of the population, a worldwide phenomenon that has been gradually taking place over the past 200 years, at varying rates and with varying relationships to processes of industrialization and development (Peace et al. 1). This demographic change is most prominent in the British population at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the notable rise in life expectancy (the average expectation of number of years left to live, which changes throughout a life course) and

the rise in the proportion of older individuals (over age 60) in the population.¹⁵ Two comparisons, both from the population of the United Kingdom, illustrate the effects of both changes in longevity and population aging, respectively: In the second decade of the twentieth century, only about 74 people a year reached 100 years of age, while at the end of the twentieth century, about 3,000 people become centenarians. In 1900, the percentage of the population aged over 65 was 7% and 18% a century later, in 2000 (Thane 1). Because women are and have always had longer life expectancies, this aging population is also increasingly feminized, making “later life more of a woman’s world than a man’s” (Peace et al. 9).

Termed the secular shift by demographers, this change was caused by many factors, most directly the decrease in mortality and the decrease in fertility (fewer deaths; fewer births), which are also influenced by such socio-economic factors as changes in food availability, migration patterns, disease epidemics, and quality and availability of medical care.¹⁶ According to Peter Laslett, who has documented this shift extensively in England, it takes some time for these changes to make their effects felt in population changes, so though this shift began in England in the 1890s, the population “aged” most dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s (“Necessary” 14). The shift was relatively gradual (in that it took decades), but palpable, and it meant that we now think very differently about aging, both individually and as a society, than did our ancestors who “never seem to have been subject to aging changes on anything like the scale that has been experienced by the populations going through the secular shift” (21). Though it is possible that this trend will not continue in the future, for now, at least, we must remember that our

¹⁵ Although, as Peter Laslett points out, these two phenomena are not always necessarily related; i.e., it is possible for a population to have both high life expectation but still be relatively “young” (“Necessary” 14).

¹⁶ For instance, the immigration of Britons to countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia in the 1880s would have added to the effect of the “aging” population (Laslett, “Necessary” 11).

expectations of longevity, as individuals and a population, are relatively recent, and consider that their imprint can be felt on cultural representations of aging throughout the twentieth-century.¹⁷

Ironically, this longevity is treated as both blessing and curse. Historian Pat Thane notes that while “[t]he twentieth century has achieved what earlier centuries only dreamed of,” namely, the dream of longer life, and of more people living to old age, this change “is greeted, not with relief and pleasure, but with apprehension, even panic” (1). This panic about the social burden imposed by an aging population is apparent in the frequent use of apocalyptic rhetoric: for instance, Paul Wallace’s 1999 book *Agequake* uses the metaphor of a natural disaster—an earthquake—to describe the “greying” of populations. In her analysis of the contemporary uses of this rhetoric, Andrea Charise identifies the use of a metaphor of capacity in both discussions of population aging as well as the aesthetics of individual aging authors (i.e. “late style”), one which represents agedness “as a damaging and destructive excess” (2). Charise’s analysis is only one example of how age anxiety is experienced on both the individual and the larger social level, with significant areas of crossover. How an individual experiences aging is influenced by how society conceives of changing population age profiles; while as individuals we are glad to live longer, society often expresses the opposite sentiment.

In discussing the changing age profiles of the UK and other developed countries in the twentieth century, we must be wary of falling into the trap of idealization. Pat Thane cautions that while the twentieth century has witnessed significant changes in constructions of age, many of these have longer histories or reveal patterns that have been true in many societies past. A common complaint today is that the current generation has declined in respect for the elderly, but that same “kids today” complaint was voiced in Plato’s *Republic* and was perceived to be as true

¹⁷ This does not mean, however, that reaching an advanced age was an unheard of or mysterious phenomenon before the twentieth century; on the contrary, historian Pat Thane dispels that myth quite definitively.

then (Thane 6). Thane reminds us that there is in fact no “golden age” of some mythic past wherein age was unequivocally and universally revered or respected. Rather, respect for advanced age is and was highly contingent upon relative power relations and individual idiosyncrasy: “Older people were, and generally are, respected, or not, for their social position or for their personal qualities rather than on account of their age” (7). That advanced age has not been (and may never be) a guarantor of “social value or...cultural inclusion” (7) is perhaps, not incredibly optimistic, but, then again, neither is it discouraging. Thane’s historical evaluation simply reminds us that aging in society remains contingent yet highly negotiable. It also reminds us that while age demographics definitively do change over time (and will continue to do so, in possibly unforeseen directions), the *meanings* of this change are subject to interpretation. Stephen Katz defines this relationship as a kind of feedback loop, wherein fears about the consequences of a “graying” population, feared to be a disastrous drain on state resources and destructive to future generations, may be as much anticipatory as they are based in demographic fact. Population changes are, in other words, “both a bio-demographic reality and a social construction reacting back into each other” (“What is” 18).

The Third Age and Aging “Well”

What role does the individual play in this negotiation? How can individuals act as agents of resistance to age ideologies? Previous sections have suggested the role that material embodiment can play in multiplying potential identity positions and presentations. To confront or find alternatives to the profound narratives of decline in which aging is frequently or almost always placed, Margaret Morganroth Gullette suggests individuals—at any and all ages—

produce a new form of age autobiography that includes “ever thicker layers of what it has meant to be an embodied psyche, in culture, over time” (*Aged* 11).

One key challenge for individuals is to identify and negotiate what this study identifies as the dominant age ideology at work today, one that has been developing for several decades and which takes the place of the waning of social welfare and state support for the elderly. The “Third Age” model (discussed earlier as the “new ageing”) potentially creates a new subject of aging. The term refers to a re-division of the life course, with childhood and adolescence the “first” age and middle-age the second. While societies have frequently imagined the life course as divided into stages, these divisions vary. Continuing a much older classical tradition, scholars in the Middle Ages, for instance, routinely divided the human life span into four, six, seven, or 12 parts. These divisions often corresponded to some aspect of the natural world, such as the number of seasons, the number of planets, or the 12 months of the year (Minois 158-161). The dominant life course division today divides the gap between age 50 and 100 into two groups, the “young old” and the “old old,” or, more commonly, in the terms popularized by Peter Laslett in 1989, the Third Age and the Fourth Age, respectively.¹⁸

One feature of this new re-definition of the life course that sets it apart from medieval or early-modern divisions, however, is its claim to novelty. The concept of the “Third Age” that was popularized by Laslett and began to be reflected by the 1980s in scholarly work, social and economic policy, and popular representations of retirement and aging, describes a relatively new period in the life course: the period of “healthy retirement,” when older individuals are retired from traditional work and financially secure but not (yet) burdened by the ill health and disability of “old” old age (Carr and Komp 3). This part of the life course emerged from the combination

¹⁸ The term “young-old” comes from Neugarten’s 1974 essay, “Age groups in American society and the Rise of the Young-old” (Carr and Komp 2).

of two relatively recent social shifts, which I argue had the most significant impact in changing representations of aging in twentieth-century British literature: The first is the dramatic increase in life expectancy in the twentieth century, a result of changes in lifestyle and medical knowledge. The second change is the rise of state-supported and widespread retirement, particularly in the period after World War II.¹⁹ These two conditions created the possibility of the Third Age: a large, longer-lived, and relatively healthy retired population.

The concept of the Third Age has gained momentum in popular and scholarly discourse because it presents an attractively upbeat alternative to negative stereotypes of aging. As Dawn Carr and Kathrin Komp demonstrate, the Third Age concept appears to promote a positive view of aging that counters fears of decline and isolation in old age: “With growing evidence that baby boomers especially are rejecting traditional images of old age that depict later life as a period of frailty, loneliness, and withdrawal, the language associated with the Third Age has come to represent a more positive, uplifting perception of later life, whereby aging is being reassigned qualities such as personal growth and meaningful engagement” (3). To a certain extent, and for a certain section of the population, the changes in social policies and improvements in healthcare in the past century and half-century have resulted in a current level of good health, longevity, economic security and access to medical care that is unprecedented.

The reclamation of aging identities against historically negative portrayals of late life and lack of political and social agency—and the accompanying prosperity of these groups—is to be celebrated. However, critics of the concept point out the dangers of widely defining this view of old age as the new normal, an accurate portrayal of lived experience, or as a widespread and

¹⁹ Other explanations for the rise of the Third Age have also been proposed; for instance, Gilleard and Higgs argue that the Third Age originates in newly emergent post-war identities and lifestyles driven by consumerism. (“The Third Age” 34; see also their book-length treatise on this topic, *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment*.)

universally applicable phenomenon (L. George 257). As per Margaret Cruikshank's striking image, "jogging centenarians" may be an old-age goal to aspire to, but so too should be the woman in the wheelchair, coping with infirmities (151). The most significant critique is that this new re-definition of old age projects a program of "successful aging," essentially the application of the Third Age model onto a practical program of aging, popularized by Rowe and Khan's 1998 eponymous book, wherein individuals are encouraged to recognize and exhibit behaviors throughout their lives that promote healthy aging and a productive late life (Holstein and Minkler 787). This model emphasizes the prevention of "unsuccessful" (disabling or unproductive) aging through careful planning and healthy behaviors throughout the life course. According to Holstein and Minkler, this model not only places a moral worth on an individual's ability to age "well" (one that they liken to Victorian morality), but also ignores the life-long effects of systematic inequalities, and the differing influences of genetics, gender, race, and class, that make it impossible for all individuals to practice (or want to practice) these behaviors (794), and does little to combat the effects of age inequality (Calasanti and King 67). In their feminist critique of the Third Age model, for instance, Calasanti and King point to the differing expectations for men and women in late life; whereas 'retirement' is presumed to mean an end of work for men, women (especially poor women of color) are expected to continue or return to informal care work (69).²⁰ In another example, the Third Age model, influenced by "outdated gender and age scripts and in enduring race and ethnic discrimination" (Moen 20-1), does not take into account the unequal access to healthcare throughout the life course that then impacts the appearance of disability or illness in later life, access which is heavily divided across class and racial lines.²¹

²⁰ They argue that the study of inequality in old age should be less concerned with categories than with how ageism intersects with other "cumulative social inequalities based on gender, race, class, and sexuality" (76).

²¹ Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs offer an alternative definition of the Third Age, seeing it instead as an outcome of the rise of consumerism as the defining element in post-war lifestyles and identities, including aging identities. My

While this new model benefits many older people, others maybe feel unable to comply with what Katz calls “an idealized ethic of busyness” (*Disciplining* 7). We can hear in this ethic of busyness an echo of Victorian models of productivity—and their moral impetus, as in the “ancient pulse of germ and birth” that Hardy lamented the passing of in “The Darkling Thrush.”

Despite the real and positive changes to longevity and healthcare benefiting and empowering older people, Third Age and similar calls to age “well” or “successfully,” can reinscribe harmful stereotypes, even as they seem to do the opposite, as Holstein and Minkler suggest in their example of the popular Third Age iconography of active senior citizens: “By suggesting that the great majority of those elders in wheelchairs could indeed have been on cross-country skis had they but made the right choices and practiced the right behaviors can burden rather than liberate older people” (794). Moreover, rather than eliminating negative stereotypes of aging entirely (as Third Agers renounce the labels and, in some cases, the physical and social markers of traditional old age), this idealized image of post-retirement merely pushes them further into late old age. The significance of “real” old age does not disappear, but rather persists in the “Fourth Age,” the period of late life when physical frailty and ill health become inescapable. Thus another critique of current representations of old age is that rather than overcoming negative stereotypes, they merely transfer and concentrate them to a later age range or set of physical characteristics. Gilleard and Higgs describe this process as a shift, rather than an elimination, of negative representations of “agedness,” as “old age is shifted elsewhere, either chronologically upwards...or buried deeper into sites of darker, more profound abjection”

critique remains the same, however; access to this consumerist culture is still limited to the privileged few. See *Cultures of Ageing: Self, Citizen and the Body* (2000) and *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* (2013).

(“Ageing Abjection” 137).²² Counteractively, the more positive the imagery of the Third Age, the darker that of the Fourth Age.

This shift has important repercussions for not only negotiating the individual life course but also for articulating generational cohorts and negotiating intergenerational relations. The two levels of analysis are conceptually linked, as social gerontologists have noted: “the life course individualizes across time what the concepts of cohort and generation attempted to collectivize through the juxtaposition of time and space” (Hardy and Waite 8). As Andrew Blaikie asks, what happens when “the cohort that ought to become ‘old’ does not” (“Visions” 19)? According to Vern L. Bengtson and Norella M. Putney, contemporary age models have the potential to create conflict between generations, which they argue is primarily fueled by economic concerns, wherein “the focus is on the sharing of—or competition for—scarce resources between older and younger generations, or between working and non-working cohorts” (20). This discussion of individual experiences of aging must situate the individual relative to inter- or intra-generational relations.

While much of this introduction critiques the social, biopolitical, and discursive factors shaping age ideology in the twentieth century, it is not meant to decry many of the empowering changes that have come with the social and political policies, scientific studies, age-related fields such as gerontology and geriatrics, and positive cultural representations targeted toward the elderly. There are very real benefits: people live longer, have access to efficacious medicine, can make their voices heard. Pat Thane cautions us that not to dismiss as “self-deception” older individuals’ often satisfied evaluations of their own lives. Such a patronizing dismissal only

²² Gilleard and Higgs provide two reasons for this contradiction: “Two recent developments seem to have brought about this position of irredeemable abjection associated with the fourth age. One is the remarkable narrowing of mortality within the lifespan, and the other, the expanding possibilities of not appearing or not performing as ‘old’” (“Ageing Abjection” 138).

serves to idealize the past (7). At the same time, we must remember that there is no single, homogenous elderly group, just as there is no singular aging body, and that the benefits of aging in the twentieth century are not available or distributed to everyone equally, or may actually serve to disadvantage some. As Margaret Gullette cautions in *Aged by Culture*, we must consider the regrettable possibility that “forces that make the life course bearable for some can unmake it for many more” (28).

Aging in Literature

Age studies and aging studies²³ emerged in recent decades and their interests are reflected in several recent intellectual trends: identity-based social advocacy of the previous decades and related theoretical frameworks, the “cultural turn,” and an interdisciplinary interest called critical gerontology. The latter is a development of the past several decades that sought to investigate the seemingly unreflective positivism of “mainstream gerontology” (Moody xviii). Thomas Cole was an early advocate for incorporating a humanities perspective (including literature) to the field of gerontology to provide a more ideologically, culturally, and historically nuanced understanding of the roles of power dynamics, individual agency, social values, and representation in gerontological theories and practices (Cole vii). However, in another sense, Stephen Katz explains, gerontology has always been doing “age studies” in that “early gerontological thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew from the world’s interdisciplinary philosophies, literatures, medicines, poetics, spiritualities, and aesthetics”

²³ Age studies and aging studies are often used interchangeably to indicate an interdisciplinary effort to critically examine the constructions of aging and old age as well as to combat negative stereotypes, but the two terms differ in their implied emphasis. Where “age” emphasizes constructions of identity and dismantling difference, “aging” studies emphasizes that aging is a continual process of change; neither is limited to a particular elderly group but rather both can encompass childhood and middle age. The distinction is not preserved in this study as, in practice, contemporary age and aging studies are sufficiently aware of these nuances of characterizing age. See the 2014 inaugural issue of *Age, Culture, Humanities* for more information, especially Devoney Looser, “Age and Aging Studies, from Cradle to Grave.”

(“What is” 18). This interdisciplinary aspect of studying aging has presented both a challenge, and, increasingly, an opportunity.

The *literary* study of aging can also take on many forms. One is to utilize the work of gerontology to enrich readings of literary texts, and vice versa, to bring the critical powers of literary scholarship to bear on aging research and theories. A prominent example of this interdisciplinary work is the recent interest in narrative gerontology and in the importance of story-telling, autobiography, and “life review” to the construction of an aging self. William L. Randall and A. Elizabeth McKim term this the “poetics of aging,” stressing that it expands on biographical aging “to nuance our understanding of the complex relationship between narrative and experience...particularly as that relationship evolves in later life” (236). The chapter on Muriel Spark that appears later in this study examines the relationship between narrative and aging, especially in the context of these recent theories.

This type of research is but one example of how aging studies looks to literature for examples of what is frequently termed the “inside of aging,” that is, aging in its subjective, individual, and everyday experience.²⁴ Some work in this vein looks to psychology or psychoanalysis for insight into the workings and phenomenology of the aging subject or to the embodiment of aging identity; examples include the work of Kathleen Woodward and Amelia DeFalco’s recent Freudian reading of aging and narrative. Another version of this type of reading involves the previously mentioned work on “late style” or aesthetic lateness, recently given more prominent attention thanks to Edward Said’s work on the subject. These studies examine literary works both thematically and stylistically for traces of the artist’s autobiography as it pertains to the phenomenology of aging or of facing mortality. While some scholars of late style were

²⁴ For instance, Mike Hepworth writes that gerontologists “with an interest in fiction increasingly regard novels as an important source of information about the meanings of ageing” (2). See also, for instance, Julia Johnson, ed., *Writing Old Age*.

looking for “evidence of enhanced creativity and transcendence in old age” (Wyatt-Brown, “The Coming” 302), more recent work, including Said’s, has identified more chaotic or at least more ambiguous patterns in the later style of an artist’s work.

Much literary work on aging as well as literature explicitly centered around elderly figures or characters carries a more interventionist agenda, such as featuring positive representations of aging, or advocating for political agency and an end to ageist discrimination or marginalization of the elderly. Certainly, literature often takes such an overtly activist role. May Sarton’s short novel *As We Are Now* (1973) depicts the suffering of an elderly woman relegated to the confines of a nursing home.²⁵ Her helplessness at these injustices culminate in an act of righteous anger: setting fire to the nursing home. Other “condition of the elderly” literary works depict a more balanced approach. Elizabeth Taylor’s 1971 novel *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* also depicts the straightened means and limited options of her elderly protagonist, but her new relationship with a young artist relieves some of her boredom and unhappiness. Culture studies scholars, as we have seen, frequently use representations of aging in film, theater, art, literature, advertisements, and media to indict their unthinking endorsement of negative stereotypes and the cultures that produce them.

Literary analyses of aging—also termed literary gerontology or humanistic gerontology—have also begun exploring the material and historical bases of representations of or attitudes about aging. Much of this work stems from feminist aging studies.²⁶ For instance, in her study of elderly female characters in Victorian children’s literature, Teresa Mangum argues that the figures of the old women function to “expose the false promises” (64) of the nineteenth-

²⁵ For a discussion of May Sarton’s works, see Sylvia Henneberg, “Of Creative Crones and Poetry: Developing Age Studies Through Literature.”

²⁶ Not exclusively, of course; for instance, in *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature, from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear*, Christopher Martin examines the cultural construction of early modern age subjectivity around the ambiguous but flexible concept of “constitution.”

century gendered social division of separate spheres. Cynthia Port's work on women writers in the modernist period, referenced earlier, provides another important example. Port explains the inter-war period's obsession with youthfulness, as demonstrated in popular media and in literature of the period—an attitude particularly destructive for women. She further argues that these ageist attitudes were a cultural anxiety not about aging, but rather a response to the increased presence of women in the workplace and playing more active social and political roles after World War I. Like Port, Devoney Looser also investigates the professional lives of women, but during an earlier period. In *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, she examines the artistic lives of women writers, arguing that even after gaining success and recognition as authors (during a professionally very difficult time for female authors), women writers had to navigate a public relations minefield as they grew older, facing complicated prejudices due to the gendered standards of aging *and* of literary reputations.

The key challenge in examining literature from the viewpoint of age or aging studies, and what this project attempts to do, is to identify the material and historical bases of definitions of aging that underlie the figurative uses of age and aging in literature. This analysis is never clear-cut, however, as literature frequently uses aging as a powerful metaphor. These metaphorical uses often rely on and even reify cultural stereotypes of aging, whether cruelly dismissive or sentimentally romanticized. These figurative uses function as a kind of shorthand, for decline, or stoicism, or the end of an era, or the “exhaustion of energy or of the spirit” (Woodward, *Aging* 8). Likewise, age is used to signify certain archetypes or literary figures; the wise old man, the senile old woman. For instance, the physical embodying of a century (or another significant historical period) is a common literary trope. In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai is born at the instant of India's independence. In Pat Barker's 1986 novel *The Century's Daughter*

(published in the U.S. as *Liza's England*), the eponymous daughter is Liza Garrett, the first child born in London at the start of the twentieth century. Now very ill and lacking resources, Liza's memories of wartime and an impoverished childhood, and her inadequate care under the British social services, function in the novel as a reflection on twentieth-century society as well as on contemporary treatment of the elderly. The elderly twin sisters, and vaudeville performers since childhood, in Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991), while not encapsulating the timeline of the century quite so neatly as Liza, nonetheless embody a condensed history of British performance.

This project, like many within the emerging field working between aging studies and literary analysis, seeks to avoid the pitfalls of age-as-literary-trope while also recognizing that representations of aging are always overdetermined and work on multiple levels.²⁷ Thus Hardy's aged thrush can be a poetic shorthand for a perceived decline and a stubborn spiritual stoicism, while also functioning as an example of Hardy's mid-life change in creative focus from fiction to poetry, as well as a shift away from industrial models of aging that prioritize productivity. Because aging is a topic so fundamental to human experience, it is not surprising that a shorthand for its representation has developed. As this study shows, however, aging is also fundamental to the shaping of British literature in the twentieth century; it not only shapes our understanding of self and society while navigating the dangers of biological reductive and cultural essentialism, mediates the discourses of cognitive science, psychology, and trauma, and forms the material, historical, and phenomenological constructions of identity, consciousness, and narrative, but also functions as the excluded middle of modernism and postmodernism.

²⁷ In this, I echo Kathleen Woodward, who explains in *Aging and Its Discontents* that her intent "is not to present a typology of literary figures of old age. Aging characters can serve as metaphors, for example, of the sterility of an age, just as aging can be used as a figure of speech for the exhaustion of energy or of the spirit. I want instead to focus on old age itself rather than an old age as a metaphor for something else" (8).

Voicing Age

This project begins its literary analysis in mid-century British literature, the 1940s through the 1960s, and continues to the contemporary moment, but it traces its roots, as does Hardy's poem, to the turn from the late Victorian period to twentieth-century modernism. While authors such as Samuel Beckett are well-known for incorporating representations of aging and of elderly figures in their work, some of the literary texts herein appear to figure age only tangentially. My argument, however, is that even seemingly marginal figures of aging, in addition to providing an ironic commentary on the marginal socio-cultural status of the elderly, are central to the text's understanding of identity and material embodiment as well as to its narrative coherence (or incoherence).

This introduction shows how definitions of aging have changed over the century, with the advent of significant material changes in the population and with new discourses of the body in scientific and popular discourse. While the first few chapters focus on postwar trends from the 1940s to the 1970s, especially the creation of the welfare state and institutionalization of retirement, the second half of this study examines the effects of Third Age discourse on aging selves, especially in the context of related conversations about identity and embodiment in cognitive studies and in postcolonial theory; thus, these chapters tend to trace in literature the larger pattern of aging, from postwar social welfare and state's assumption of responsibilities in caring for its citizens, to the Third Age model that places more responsibility for well-being in late life on the individual. This shift may even account for social responsibility, as Kathrim Komp suggests, because, by providing volunteer and care services, Third-Agers "perform tasks that governments would otherwise have to organize themselves" (57). By tracing this history we expand our understanding not only of age but also of the multiple kinds of actors and processes

that comprise the “welfare state” and its supersession by globalization and neo-liberal capitalism. In expanding our definitions of identity and agency beyond narratives of decline, representations of old age also potentially revise narratives of twentieth-century literary history.

In the first chapter, “Creating Postwar Retirement,” I show how Samuel Beckett’s plays *All That Fall* and *Endgame* as well as Pinter’s play *The Caretaker*, all plays from the late 1950s, negotiate retirement policies: Pinter by demonizing bureaucratic wastelands, and Beckett by refusing the separation between pre- and post-working life, especially as it relates to creative work. Beckett’s and Pinter’s texts demonstrate underlying anxieties about retirement, generational conflict, and the provision of care by representing leisured, healthy old age as a potentially traumatizing fantasy. From Beckett’s extreme caricature of age anxiety (Nagg and Nell confined to dustbins in *Endgame*), to Pinter’s fledgling model of collective care (as in *The Caretaker*), this chapter examines contradictory postwar representations of labor and late life that still impact debates about retirement and social welfare today.

My second chapter examines how B. S. Johnson, like Beckett, presents the dynamic narrative possibilities of mental life in old age. As I argue, Johnson’s experimental novel *House Mother Normal* (1971) is a product of a later moment in the cultural history of old age. Drawing closely upon Simone de Beauvoir’s treatise on age as well as Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope, I claim that the novel negotiates the anti-psychiatry, anti-institution impulses of 1960s Britain. The novel narrates one evening in the lives of eight elderly nursing-home patients routinely abused by their caretaker, the “house mother.” Johnson manipulates conceptions of time and space through the patients’ sensory environments (a lamb chop dinner, the stickiness of glue) and their physical and cognitive impairments. For Johnson, the figure of the house mother emphasizes how the aged and disabled body challenges normative models of health and disease.

The caretaker punishes her charges for poverty, poor health, and memory loss—failures to age successfully—yet Johnson ultimately shows that her abilities are likewise flawed, a hypocrisy that charges readers (of all ages) to reflect on their participation in normalizing age identities.

Like Beckett, Scottish novelist Muriel Spark is suspicious of the tendency to equate the self with a unified narrative. My third chapter, “Muriel Spark and the Ethical Violence of Narrating Age,” challenges the recent field of narrative gerontology, or, rather, the unquestioning privileging of life-writing and unity and continuity as the prerequisites of subjectivity. This chapter focuses on several of Spark’s novels that explicitly lampoon this model of aging, including her 1959 dark comedy *Memento Mori*, in which a group of senior citizens—among them a famous writer whose memory and well-being improve when her novels are re-issued—receive anonymous calls telling them to “remember you must die.” In addition to analyzing the novel’s critique of the officious bureaucratic evaluation of “successful” aging and comparing its models of care to Spark’s contemporaries, including Doris Lessing, I argue that Spark’s ethics of aging rejects empathy-based models of care as transactional and potentially psychologically damaging, and thus that current genre conventions of age novels could potentially fall into the same patterns.

Nowhere is the ideal of aging “well” or “successfully” more clearly threatened than in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005). Extending the ethical challenge of the previous chapter, my fourth chapter examines the fate of old age within the context of a prominent neuroscientific turn in popular and academic discourses, including a broader phenomenon in which age is “alzheimerized.” In tying old age to cognitive decline and then dehumanizing its sufferers, McEwan reveals the dangers of making individuals alone responsible for “success” in old age.

The conclusion returns to the question of retirement, but as a reflection on the legacy of colonialism. As the empire “retires,” it leaves behind representations of aging that postcolonial texts productively disrupt. Novels such as Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* (1975) demonstrate the challenges and isolation faced by immigrants in a prejudiced society; however, I argue that they also highlight the cracks appearing in the welfare state’s treatment of the elderly. V.S. Naipaul’s 1963 “English” novel *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* imagines the limitations of institutionalized retirement. In deliberately framing it as an Anglo work, Naipaul hints at the conundrum that Selvon’s novel makes explicit: namely, that there is little place in British concepts of aging for migrant populations.

Because age anxiety bookends the twentieth century, it is important to identify how literature productively disrupts the twentieth-century tendencies to normalize and discipline how we age. But aging also disrupts how we view the history of twentieth-century British literature itself. Like the darkling thrush in Thomas Hardy’s poem, whose sudden, powerful voice precedes (and belies) its aging body, art and age share a single source.²⁸ After all, the bird responds to the speaker’s lament over a perceived loss of productivity and cultural relevance with modern(ist) aesthetics that look shabby but sound strong.

²⁸ Lawrence Cohen uses voice as a metaphor for senility, an “old voice [returning] as something that cannot be heard” (Introduction 5), and which demands from us an ethical response.

CHAPTER 1

CREATING POSTWAR RETIREMENT: SAMUEL BECKETT AND HAROLD PINTER

“Could early retirement kill you?” asks a 2009 *Telegraph* article, one which cites the work of American researchers who ascertained that for retirees there are health benefits to remaining in the workforce part-time instead of transitioning abruptly to full retirement (Alleyne).²⁹ The article’s sensationalist title suggests the ambivalence regarding retirement in the Great Britain, wherein concerns about the feasibility of retirement as a matter of socio-economic policy (given receding state social protections and pension provisions but greater elderly population) exist separately from questions about its medical or psychological legitimacy. British sociologists Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs argue that images of what post-work life looks like today is increasingly up for grabs, resulting in “a more heterogeneous and fragmented experience for people reaching retirement age as well as more contradictory practices by which to live one’s life as a retired person” (*Cultures* 205). This fragmentation also means the assumption of new kinds of risks by the individual (as opposed to the state) over an entire lifetime. For instance, Dale Dannefer and Casey Miklowski argue that shifts in the UK to defined-contribution pension schemes now require the individual to manage his pension scheme as an investment, with uncertain benefits: “More knowledge and more control can also mean more risk and more stress. Some individuals may prefer not to spend their time becoming amateur investment counsellors, but they may perceive little choice in that matter” (37). As both the possibilities and the anxieties about the future of retirement proliferate, it is important to remember how institutionalized

²⁹ For the original study, see Zhan et al., “Bridge Employment and Retirees’ Health: A Longitudinal Investigation.”

retirement in the postwar welfare state first changed the nature of aging in the twentieth century, creating a complex and often contradictory “culture of retirement.”³⁰

This chapter looks to two prominent mid-century authors, Irish dramatist and novelist Samuel Beckett and English dramatist Harold Pinter, whose work in the postwar decades negotiates the changing definitions of old age against the backdrop of the newly emergent social security policies of the welfare state, especially its establishment of retirement pensions. This new institutionalization normalized “retirement” as an important transition in the individual life course, but as Dannefer and Miklowski argue, it also had a more symbolic value in that it allowed “age” to become “a normative force integral to the social order of these [western bureaucratic] societies” (35); in other words, it allowed for other age-related norms to develop. The institutionalization of retirement reorganized the twentieth-century life course and created new possibilities for the construction of meaning in late life, even as critics (then and now) were concerned that it imposed governmentality and fostered dependency. In these earlier works in particular, Beckett’s and Pinter’s models of care are based more on citizenship rather than empathy; thus, their work is able to explore the structural ambiguities inherent in the emergence of welfare policies, as in any system that seeks to balance collective responsibility against individual idiosyncrasy, while also giving a voice to the anxieties about aging that gave rise to those policies—and that continues to do so, even as these policies change.

The sensationalist anxiety voiced in the *Telegraph* article, for instance, has been a part of the contradictory attitudes toward labor and late life since the emergence of our contemporary definitions of retirement in the postwar period. Despite early provisions such as the 1908 Old

³⁰ Although this chapter focuses on Britain, similar social securities were put in place in the United States and other industrialized nations. For a discussion of the latter, including the pension systems in France, see *Old Age and the Welfare State*, edited by Anne-Marie Guillemard.

Age Pensions Act³¹ and rising concerns about an aging population in the first half of the twentieth century,³² it was not until the Second World War that old age and the elderly became the objects of sustained inquiry and social change. John Myles characterizes “the contemporary welfare state in the capitalist democracies” as particularly and primarily a “*welfare state for the elderly*” (2). The inauguration of welfare policies, particularly the 1946 National Insurance Act, re-oriented the definition of old age around retirement, a shift that Myles suggests also entailed a) insistence on chronological age as a marker of entry into old age; b) the creation of a social (and political) cohort based around age; c) a more democratic discourse surrounding age that emphasized citizenship rights guaranteed by the state; d) a new relationship toward work, which required a clear separation between working life and leisure; and e) a distinction of the elderly from more generalized discourses and policies surrounding disability and poverty.

Just as retirement was “universally”³³ granted, however, it also became an object of anxiety. According to British sociologist Chris Phillipson, “in the very process of introducing [the condition of retirement], the Government launched a stiff ideological offensive against the idea that it was actually encouraging retirement” (*Emergence* 28).³⁴ In a speech in 1951, for instance, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour said that “a man of 65 can today look forward to a long period of useful life” (qtd in Phillipson, *Emergence* 32). The culture of retirement was not set only from the top down, however; many analyses of the origins of

³¹ For additional information about this act, see Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History*.

³² After World War II, fears of a rapid increase in the age of the population drove research and inquiry. Medical needs also played a considerable role; the elderly were considered to be taking up beds needed for soldiers (Gilleard and Higgs, *Ageing* 25), and geriatrics and gerontology began to emerge as professions. For the history of geriatrics and gerontology, see Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age*.

³³ It usually did not apply to married women who had not participated in formal employment.

³⁴ The Insurance Act followed Beveridge’s initial views on the subject, which were that “the conditions governing pensions should be such as to encourage every person who can go on working after pensionable age, to go on working and to postpone the claiming of the pension” (qtd in Phillipson, *Emergence* 28).

retirement now stress the role that organized pensioners' groups played in obtaining the freedom to either utilize retirement pensions or remain working (Blaikie, *Ageing* 43).

According to one analyst, the pressure to delay retirement (at the very moment when it became widely available) was ideologically reinforced through the 1950s by sociological research in gerontology, key themes of which included "the 'burden' of the very elderly, the 'anxieties' of retirement, and the 'dangers' of an increase in the numbers of economically inactive" (Phillipson, *Emergence* 27). Such research argued that the transition to sudden retirement, after a lifetime of work and of evaluating social worth on a scale of productive labor, would be psychologically and psychically harmful to new pensioners. Although Phillipson does not deny the actual challenges faced by many in adjusting to retirement—and neither do I—he demonstrates in *The Emergence of Retirement* the degree to which the circulation of these fears was politically and economically motivated.

Phillipson's analysis of the political economy of aging in the postwar decades, cited above, is but one example of the myriad ways of understanding the relationship between retirement and the construction of aging identities in this period. Subsequent decades brought many reactions to the perceived success or failure of the establishment of the welfare state, as well as many revisions to attitudes toward pensions and pensioners. For instance, the economic recessions of the 1970s shifted this discourse once again, now encouraging retirement as the performance of "active choice" and pursuit of leisure or other, non-work-related endeavors (Blaikie, *Ageing* 63).³⁵ This rhetoric of agency also appeared in the emerging theory of structured dependency, which argued that social policies (including those of a universal retirement age) in essence marginalized elderly people as a separate, vulnerable, dependent group (Gilleard and

³⁵ Phillipson thus concludes that in the twentieth century the elderly act as a "reserve of labour" (*Emergence* 3), encouraged or discouraged from retirement as needed in response to economic conditions. Not all sociologists agree; see Anne-Marie Guillemard's introduction to *Old Age and the Welfare State* for a critique.

Higgs, *Cultures* 13). Peter Townsend, one of the key proponents of the theory, argued that the institutionalization of retirement, pensions, and social services “has played a big part in fostering the material and psychological dependence of older people” (“The Structured” 12).

The pendulum has since swung back again from structured dependency theory. Gilleard and Higgs critique the theory for reifying the elderly population as a single homogenous group and for looking to the state, rather than the individual, to solve the problem (of dependency) that it claimed it had itself caused. Today, theorists claim, late life is fragmented, individualized, and divorced from the (waning) welfare state, and thus age scholars are focusing on the way individuals “negotiate their own life courses” (Blaikie, *Ageing* 59), construct their own age identities, and find their own ways to express the subjective experience and meaning of late life. Hence the turn toward critical gerontology and humanities-based gerontology: it promises a view into precisely this phenomenon.

In examining the representation of late life, work, and retirement in Beckett’s and Pinter’s plays, I am working somewhat against the current trend of humanistic gerontology, which seeks to find the “inside” of aging experience, and instead I look at the “outside,” the hopes, fears, and material realities that shaped what is a significant moment in the construction of aging identity in the twentieth century. Beckett and Pinter are interested in exploring how we make sense of, and how we contend with, human vulnerabilities, both our own and those of others—and what is the welfare state but a socially structured version of the same concern?

Beckett and the True Gerontology

One of the most striking images of Samuel Beckett’s 1957 play *Endgame* is that of the elderly and disabled Nagg and Nell, stuck waiting out eternity in two dustbins filled with

sawdust. In many respects, Nagg and Nell embody some of the cruelest stereotypes of old age: Hamm laughs at the possibility of their continued sexual activity, while Nagg tells raunchy stories, the stereotype of the crude older man. They are profoundly infantilized, clamoring, like children for both food and father in the form of “pap,” (16) while Hamm and Clov speak of “bottling” them. In *Malone Dies*, which had only just been published in English in 1956, Beckett describes this infantilizing feeding in more violent terms; the institution where his ill, elderly narrator is confined/cared for is filling the patients “full of vitaminized pap, so as not to be accused of murder” (252). In her analysis of the novel, literary aging studies scholar Kathleen Woodward uses Winnicott’s theories of object relations and childhood development to describe Malone’s dependence on objects as a reversal of the progress from infancy to adulthood (*Aging* 136). For Beckett, Nagg and Nell’s reversion to childhood is both a commonplace representation of late life, but also part of his frequent superimposition of birth and death. One need only think of the old lady in the rocking chair in *Rockaby*, or indeed the rocking chair in *Murphy* that functions for the character as both metaphoric birth and the place of his death.

Nonetheless, Beckett’s treatment of Nagg and Nell has a gentler side. Nagg, for instance, easily intersperses his childish demands with lucid and pointed remarks, and he and Nell share affectionate, if disjointed, reminiscences about the past. Furthermore, Beckett makes it clear that although Hamm treats his “accursed progenitor[s]” (16) with disdain and disgust, he in fact at some level recognizes that he will one day share their fate. Though not yet quite as immobile as Nagg and Nell, he cannot leave his chair and is dependent upon Clov to care for him. Unable to face the inevitability of his own decline, he projects his anxieties onto Clov, saying, with “prophetic relish,” “One day you’ll be blind, like me. You’ll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me” (44). Clov’s own position vis a vis Hamm—playing his servant,

caretaker, domestic partner,³⁶ possible friend, and implausible son—remains ambiguous throughout; *Endgame* ends with Clov poised to leave, but remaining to watch Hamm return to the position in which he began the play, in the middle of the stage. However, the possible arrival of the young boy, the “potential procreator” (87), whom Clov claims to see outside the window and who appears to be a material instantiation of Hamm’s story, suggests that the cycle of generations will continue. One day Hamm will, like Nagg and Nell, return to the position of infantilized elderly, as Nagg prognosticates: “I hope I’ll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope” (65). The return to infancy in turn creates new faultlines of care and interdependence among the group, albeit not ones based on parental or familial affection but rather on “contingency and survival” (16), as Michael Davidson has argued in his analysis of the “dialectics of dependency” in Beckett’s work. Rather than seeing in Beckett’s sparsely populated worlds and abjectly impaired characters a metaphor for the alienation of modernity, Davidson argues that by making disability a kind of default setting, Beckett challenges the objectivizing gaze of compulsory able-bodiedness as well as “liberal theories of autonomy and independent agency” (15). Beckett thus reveals a vision of the world based on mutual dependence and articulated through the (differently-abled) body.

On the one hand, works such as *Endgame*, which Davidson includes in his analysis, reveal the fundamental interdependence of the social body, a revelation that normalized able-bodiedness (with its privileged fictitious autonomy) works to obscure. On the other hand, texts such as *Malone Dies*, similar in that its construction of the body also relies on prostheses³⁷ and

³⁶ Beckett suggested that Hamm and Clov’s relationship (amongst others in his literary works) represented that of himself and his wife Suzanne (Worton 67).

³⁷ For a systematic discussion of Beckett and the body, see Yoshiki Tajiri, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*, and Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body*.

human/object hybridity, are less sanguine about the consequences of such a contingent relationship, especially given its conscription by institutions. Malone can never obtain a clear response about the nature of the nursing home in which he resides from the nurse-attendant Lemuel, whom he asks “for example to state whether Saint John of Gods was a private institution or run by the State, a hospice for the aged and infirm or a madhouse” (266). Malone’s is a point of historical significance; the postwar establishment of the welfare state also meant at least a nominal break-up of the old workhouse system of public assistance into a new system consolidated by the state; as Peter Townsend observed in his 1962 study of residential homes, *The Last Refuge*, the transition was spotty at best. The indeterminate confusion of the nursing home and its system of care reaches a climax at the end of the novel, as Lemuel slaughters the residents, including, potentially, Malone himself. Thus, an awareness of human interdependency exists in tension with a suspicion of the human institutions and systems supposedly designed to reflect it—perhaps because Beckett suspects that they sometimes serve to re-enforce the norms of intentional, individual selfhood.

A similar slippage between competing ideals of care occurs in *Endgame*. In the role of the supervisor, Hamm asks Clov: “And your rounds? When you inspected my paupers” (15). Here, Beckett refers to the language not of the nursing home but of the older workhouse. In other parts of the play, Hamm implies that the care he and Clov provide each other is more familiar in nature—yet still not ideal: “The old folks at home. No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that’s all they think of” (16). Care within the family rather than the institution seems likewise fraught. This is a familiar tension, for it stands at the heart of any discussion of welfare and the welfare state. At certain historical moments, the welfare state represents in the popular imagination—and in political discourse—full social inclusion and communal well-being, whereas at other times, it

represents the worst excess of bureaucracy and state intervention. In *Inventing Retirement*, Leslie Hannah summarizes the vacillating ideologies either justifying or denying the development of welfare and retirement:

Radicals on the libertarian right and the socialist left alike have interpreted it as the product of unjustifiable discrimination against the old. Others, by contrast, have seen it as the virtuous consequence of the greater choices provided by increased wealth, greatly augmented by the modern spread of pensioning. *This ambivalence in the image of retirement is, moreover, reflected in the mixed trauma and relief of those undergoing the retirement experience.* There is a fear of loss of status and of psychological strains in retirement; yet at the same time many welcome the release from the burdens of working life, particularly those to whom generous pensions are paid. (122, emphasis mine)

This ambivalence in both retirement's creation and its reception, as Hannah writes, is what we seek to trace in the literature of the period, for it means that the nature of aging identity and the meaning of late life are constantly and necessarily being negotiated.

Endgame is frequently understood as taking place in a world that has experienced some sort of trauma, a post-apocalyptic or post-lapsarian world. Theodor Adorno frames the play in those terms in his 1963 essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," in which he locates the play as "corresponding to conditions after catastrophe" (128), in his view, World War II and the Holocaust. In his essay (which Beckett famously disliked),³⁸ Adorno emphasizes Nagg and Nell's extreme abjection:

'Today old people are thrown in the trashcan' and it happens. *Endgame* is the true gerontology. According to the measure of socially useful labor, which they can no longer

³⁸ Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, describes Beckett's reaction to Adorno's lecture in *Damned to Fame*, p. 428.

perform, old people are superfluous and must be discarded. That is extracted from the scientific ruckus of a welfare system that accentuates what it negates. *Endgame* trains the viewer for a condition where everyone involved expects—upon lifting the lid from the nearest dumpster—to find his own parents. The natural cohesion of life has become organic refuse. The national socialists irreparably overturned the taboo of old age. (73-4)³⁹

Adorno imagines the “truth” of this gerontology as a performative act, something which must be discovered by lifting a lid, revealing the buried figure of the elderly-as-refuse. Furthermore, Adorno describes this discovery as a staged intergenerational encounter between the elderly and the (supposedly) not-yet-elderly. This emphasis on the staged encounter, and the tropes such as mirroring and doubling that signal its psychological effects, appears frequently in drama dealing with aging, and contrasts with the more subjective experience of old age delineated in novels such as *Malone Dies*.

Importantly, Adorno’s analysis associates the “true” study of old age with the story of labor relations in their social and materialist forms. It is certainly the case that Beckett frequently criticizes the way that society determines social worth through an objective measure of capitalist productivity. In his earlier 1938 novel *Murphy*, for instance, Murphy predicts that his search (at Celia’s insistence) for a traditional job, among other obligations to social convention, “would be the end of them both” (22), and it is indeed a factor in his death. Murphy’s anti-work sentiment pushes back against new twentieth-century models of labor and subjectivity, ones that redefined work as contributing to psychological wellbeing and self-fulfillment, rather than being the means

³⁹ This provocative imagery, of old people discarded in waste receptacles, appears in other texts; for instance, in *As We Are Now*, May Sarton’s 1973 short novel about the profound institutional indignities experienced by the elderly, the narrator describes her nursing home as “a place where people dump their parents or relatives exactly as though it were an ash can” (3).

of its prevention. In *Governing the Soul*, Nikolas Rose argues that this transformation accelerated in Britain after World War II with the fusion of the values of “democracy, productivity and contentment” (80). In response to Celia’s equation of herself with her profession, her “I am what I do,” Murphy demurs, saying, “You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are” (37). Comparing the published *Murphy* with an earlier draft typescript, Lidan Lin demonstrates how Beckett’s revisions exaggerated “his parody of the Protestant work ethic and capitalist exploitation” (323). According to Lin, Beckett’s draft revisions included removing the protagonist’s job (the original Mr. Quigley had a profession as a writer) and ennobling Murphy’s swindle at the teashop, positing it as a blow to the capitalist owners and the complicit waitress Vera (who Murphy describes as “a little bit of sweated labour” (83)).

Adorno’s critique of the social and materialist forms expressed by treatment of the elderly can be grounded in the context of the 1950s and early 1960s and within the history of Adorno’s thought and its more recent iterations within humanities-based aging studies. In *The Long Life*, Helen Small aligns Adorno’s Marxist reading of the play with his other literary analyses, including that of Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*. As in his reading of the novel, in *Endgame* “[t]he old are, once again, symbolic representatives of the damage done to human subjects under capitalism, except that now they symbolize a more drastic loss of value” (201). Adorno claims that the national socialists and the atrocities of World War II are what made it possible for individuals to ignore the plight of society’s most vulnerable, causing “irreparable” harm. It is here that, according to Small, “liberal welfarism, in offering to care for the old” (201), steps in and exposes this moral weakness. Furthermore, Adorno’s essay describes the welfare system’s reliance on statistical measurement and demographics, a form of “scientific ruckus” that “accentuates what it negates,” and that he suggests flies in the face of a natural life course.

Here he may be referring to the kind of statistical analyses and calculations policy makers such as Beveridge made to determine specific welfare economics, or to the prolific growth of gerontology and geriatrics within the scientific and medical fields in the postwar decades.

While *Endgame*'s depiction of old age and Adorno's analysis of it both express some of the conflicting tensions in building the "welfare state for the elderly," they also invoke the nature of the creative act in old age. After recounting the story of the young boy (presumably Clov), Hamm describes himself as fatigued by the "prolonged creative effort" (70) of storytelling. If old age acquires a special, separate status in the postwar period, then so does the status of the aging artist; in fact, the question of what happens to the creative process in late life is one of the key questions in aging studies today. One variation of this interest is the question of "late style" or "aesthetic lateness," which examines an artist's last or late works for a change in style or form that might signal an existential awareness of aging, mortality, or lack of a future. Edward Said's 2006 *On Late Style*, written when Said was himself in ill health and published posthumously, has become a recent critical touchstone on this issue. Said interrogates how aesthetic style relates to the condition of the artist's body, but he is particularly interested in aging, which for him equates to decline, "the decay of the body, the onset of ill health or other factors that even in a younger person bring on the possibility of an untimely end" (6). Said relies in part on Adorno's analysis of Beethoven to argue that the work of some artists, such as the composer Benjamin Britten and poet Constantine Cavafy, registered lateness as disruptive tension, "a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against*..." (7). Said's definition of late style has been used to analyze Beckett's late work; Steven Matthews, for instance, argues that Beckett's second trilogy of the early 1980s (including *Ill Seen Ill Said*) evokes a mourning of change and loss that is strongly and deliberately reminiscent of Lear. One problem with Said's analysis is that it tends

to reify the presence of *male* artists as *the* voice of age anxiety and concerns about creativity and productivity in late life, a gendered narrative that tends to exclude women because of their typically less frequent, less linear, or less direct opportunities for creative expression (Wyatt-Brown, Introduction 8).

Perhaps more to the point, Helen Small problematizes Said's concept of late style by showing the centrality of old age to Adorno's theories—but not in the way that Said imagines. According to Small, Said elides “lateness” with late life, whereas Adorno's original use of late style referred to lateness not strictly as a stage of an individual's life course but to *late capitalism* (Small 183). Even more importantly, Small argues that Adorno's *Endgame* essay itself proves the centrality of old age to Adorno's eventual metaphysics, an argument she summarizes as follows: “Beckett's anti-metaphysics, I argue, helped Adorno towards revising his own understanding of ‘negative metaphysics’, in which old age emerged as the symbolic prompt to thinking about the limits of thinking” (181). In short, Small argues that Adorno utilizes old age as a way of representing how to “think thinking” after World War II (180).

This philosophical dialogue among Small, Said, and Adorno demonstrates that one of the key tensions in discussing old age in *Endgame* is the push-and-pull between the material and the existential as appropriate realms of age discourse. Beckett's work urges us to acknowledge the physical, material realities of aging—its biological, socio-historical footprint—while also responding to the need to think beyond those (seeming) limits, to a metaphysical, or philosophical place of meaning. As Small writes, old age “has repercussions for what we deem to be a good life, how we measure happiness, what we think a person is, when we think we are at our best, what we consider thinking can and cannot achieve” (272). *Endgame* enacts this very tension. Responding to Clov's first blanket statement that there is “no more nature,” then his

addition of the geographical and historical qualifier, “in the vicinity,” Hamm exclaims: “But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!” (18). The movement telescopes from macro to micro, then back again, from Clov’s grand negation of “no more,” to a localized qualifier, “in the vicinity.” Hamm’s response evokes the biology of senescence, the familiar story of aging as loss, but then zooms out again to an evocation of grand universals, moving from small losses (teeth) to larger cultural constructs (the bloom of youth) to moral philosophy.

To this complicated chain of scholarship, Small reading Adorno reading Beckett, I must add one important addendum. Small is somewhat impatient with what she points out are Adorno’s misreadings, or his deliberately allegorical readings of *Endgame*, including the following appraisal of Nagg and Nell based on “socially useful labor.”

Similarly, when Adorno observes that “by the criterion of socially useful labor, which they are no longer capable of, the old people are superfluous,” he gives Nagg and Nell a context and a history that are strictly absent from the play. They do not have histories of labour, or any reliable histories for that matter. Their “past” exists as performance in the present—a series of seemingly well-worn gags about losing their legs in a tandem accident “on the road to Sedan”; about rowing on Lake Como.... (203)

For Small, Nagg and Nell are indicative of the tendency of Beckett’s work to invite and repel referentiality; Nagg’s well-rehearsed stories emphasize presence and performance instead of documented, historical pasts. Both Small’s discussion of the inconsistencies in Adorno’s *Endgame* essay and her general argument about the larger role of literary texts in the development of Adorno’s metaphysics are insightful and persuasive; nonetheless, the passage quoted above is an example of precisely the kind of thinking in Adorno’s essay that warrants

greater investigation, for it strikes at a necessary ambiguity in the postwar establishment of universal retirement age. The establishment of a retirement age based on chronological age (65 for men and 60 for women) divorced the definition of old age from physical disability or even income levels; one retired whether one “needed” to or not. As Myles explains, “The transformation of old age into a social category to which one gains access by virtue of reaching a specified age was made possible by the establishment of a set of age-based income entitlements administered by the state—that is, the public pension” (2), whereas in previous centuries retirement had been reserved for the ill, disabled, or wealthy (Phillipson, *Reconstructing* 1). This is no mere technical or historical curiosity. On the contrary, this reorientation of old age under the welfare policies is an exploitable ambiguity that makes our contemporary ideals of retirement, the so-called third age, possible. Such ambiguities are not mistakes; in his history of Beveridge’s reforms, Nicholas Timmins argues that they are endemic to the system, writing of the inevitably imperfect policy proposed by the Beveridge Report that “[a]ny social security system must generate conflicts between individual and collective responsibilities, between rights and duties, between incentives and security of income. It may never be got right once and for all; the balance will endlessly shift” (61).⁴⁰

Retiring Bodies in *All That Fall*

In *Endgame*, Hamm tells Clov: “One day you’ll say, I’m tired, I’ll stop. What does the attitude matter?” (44). Clov claims he cannot sit, hence their argument over the resultant pose or “attitude.” Hamm’s absurdly irrelevant discussion with Clov about whether he will “stop” (living, working) while posed standing or sitting may seem a trivial matter, but like all the trivialities in

⁴⁰ For a succinct discussion of the Beveridge Report, see Brian Abel-Smith, “The Beveridge Report: Its Origins and Outcomes.”

Beckett's work, it often makes all the difference. Beckett's 1956 radio play *All That Fall*, written just before *Endgame*, has a similar moment, in which Mr. Rooney asks his wife, "But why do we not sit down somewhere? Are we afraid we should never rise again?" (26). *All That Fall* is a play of continuous but futile motion, a "changeless flux" (Boyce 504) that, like *Endgame*, cannot end. Set in a small Irish village that closely resembles the Dublin suburb of Foxrock in which Beckett grew up, *All That Fall* follows the seventy-something-year-old Mrs. Rooney during her walk through her village, on her way to the train station to meet her husband as he returns from work in the city. Though the various encounters that the elderly Maddy Rooney has with townsfolk are tinged with comedy, the play ends with a possible tragedy, including what we eventually suspect is Dan Rooney's complicity in the death of a child on the train ride, an echo of an earlier traumatic loss of a child in the Rooneys' marriage. The play is set sometime in the past, more particularly *Beckett's* past, taking place sometime in the interwar years and containing strong echoes of Beckett's own boyhood experiences and acquaintances.

The play, Beckett's first for radio, was commissioned for the BBC Third Programme, and was a new medium for Beckett. "'Never thought about Radio play technique,' he wrote to Nancy Cunard, 'but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something'" (Knowlson 385). The sounds that he mentions end up populating the play's tragicomic aural landscape. According to Knowlson, the play's autobiographical touches, and perhaps Beckett's ambiguous feelings about these memories, evoke a larger pattern, "a complex kaleidoscope of images of sterility, decline and fall, suffering and death" (386). Although at times enlivened by comic moments, such as when the fittingly named Mr. Slocum is unable to start his car ("All morning she went like a dream and now she is dead" (11), he bemoans), the play opens on a sterile, childless landscape

populated by elderly and aging characters, such as the Rooneys, and dead children. Beckett opens with the lines “Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house,” complete with the strains of Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” (3).

The nature of the play’s medium and its reliance on the power of sound and the act of listening rather than visual cues offer an opportunity to analyze the gendered nature of aging stereotypes as represented in Beckett’s work, especially as it is negotiated through representation of aging bodies. In addition to a reluctance to sit down (for fear of not standing again), Mr. Rooney also fears falling down; at one point in their walk home, he is anxious that his wife’s shaking will cause them to “fall into the ditch” (22). The “Fall” of the play’s title comes from a Biblical text referred to in the play, “The Lord upholdeth all that fall” (32). While in its downward trajectory, “falling” contributes metaphorically to what Knowlson writes is the “central theme of collapse, decline, dissolution, and death” (386) in the play, the “upholdeth” suggests that a complete fall, a complete decline, is forestalled. Stephen Katz has argued that, in addition to its metaphoric quality, the physical act of “falling” and concomitant programs of fall prevention for older people have become a “multidimensional” field unto their own (“Hold” 199). Katz urges us to consider how the “older body that falls or is at-risk of falling is a portal from which to view the contingent nature of the aging process, and the ways in which biography, culture, politics, and biology are braided together” (“Hold” 200).

Although an important aspect of contemporary Beckett studies in general, theorizing the body poses a particular problem for *All That Fall*. Beckett was very resistant to theatrical staging of the play and insisted in a letter to his publisher that the play was “for voices, not bodies” (qtd

in Campbell 149).⁴¹ Though focalized through Maddy's experience, we experience the play, much like the blind Dan Rooney, in darkness. As Julie Campbell notes, the reliance on the exaggerated sounds of radio drama allows Beckett both a comic and tragic commentary on existence. Maddy continually reminds other characters that she exists, that she is not "invisible," as she reminds Miss Fitt, though to radio audiences, she technically is. What could be taken as a playful recognition of the limits of radio drama also takes a more serious thematic turn when Beckett references Mrs. Rooney's recounting of the psychoanalyst, whose lecture had described a girl who "had never really been born!" (30). Suddenly Maddy's concerns about her invisibility take on an existential quality, acknowledging the temporality of human experience. Campbell shows how Beckett uses the radio medium not only to demonstrate but also to enact this existential dilemma within listeners, in whose minds the characters take on a temporary existence (162).⁴²

This being and simultaneous not being, what Campbell terms the characters' "ghostliness" (147), provides an important demonstration of the gendered history of the representation of aging. On the one hand, as Stephen Katz has noted, the body is "the foundation for what we know, experience, and imagine the aging process to be"; more particularly, conventional representations of the *aging* body focus on the physical and physiological signs of incapacity or debility, the "biology of decline" ("Hold" 187). On the other hand, age scholars such as Margaret Gullette argue that the predominant forces shaping age identities are cultural,

⁴¹ Although the *voice* is, of course, part of the body. For an important discussion about the *vocal* performance of aging in Beckett's work, see Ruth Pe Palileo, "'What Age Am I Now? And I?': The Science of the Aged Voice in Beckett's Plays."

⁴² This explains the play's ambiguity regarding visual description. At times, Maddy is described in concrete visual terms detailing aspects of her appearance that audiences would have seen in a stage play, such as when Mr. Rooney chides her for her "Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat!" (24). On the other hand, Beckett also brings these descriptions out of focus, refusing visual description, as when Miss Fitt sees Mrs. Rooney as "just another big pale blur" (15).

specifically, a cultural “resocializing” that involves accepting and internalizing aging as the story of self-in-decline (*Aged* 33). There are several ways to synthesize the aging body with the cultural construction of aging. One is to consider age, like gender, as essentially performative. Citing Judith Butler, Lipscomb and Marshall explain that age can be viewed as performative in that “each of us performs the actions associated with a chronological age minute by minute, and that the repetition of these performances creates a so-called reality of age both for the subject and for those who interact with the subject” (2). By highlighting the ambiguity of the characters’ existence, especially that of Maddy, Beckett also exposes the degree to which a representation of aging also entails performance.

One problem facing the elderly Maddy Rooney is the double standard of aging, famously described by Susan Sontag, which devalues older women in terms of both their age and their gender. In *Aging and Discontents*, Woodward likewise argues that the gaze of Western culture erases an older women’s femininity, such that “age takes precedence over and may swallow up gender” (16). Maddy Rooney has internalized many of these gendered stereotypes of advanced age. Recalling, as she does throughout the play, the death of their child years ago, she thinks, “oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness” (5). Maddy self-identifies with both derogatory age-based stereotypes (“hag,” sickness, personal loss) as well as gender-based ones (hysterical, fat, traditional female social roles related to family and religious life). Her somewhat vulgar and sexualized humor plays to yet another stereotype of an elderly woman, yet such a sexuality, because presumed no longer relevant, is perceived as unthreatening. Maddy’s internalization and self-identification in such derogatory age-based and gender-based terms can tend to reify those stereotypes, or potentially call attention to their problematic normalization.

On the other hand, Beckett's commentary on Maddy's "invisibility" also marks what Kathleen Woodward has identified as the historical absence of the elderly woman in art and in scholarship. Woodward argues that "We need to bring the representation of the older female body into focus, and we need to reflect on what we see and what we don't" ("Performing" 162). In the play, the absence of bodies paradoxically highlights their very importance. There are moments where Mrs. Rooney asserts herself and her limits, as when she tells Mr. Tyler (first mistakenly calling him by her husband's name): "No, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them" (6). Despite her *lack* of a body (for the audience), Mrs. Rooney reminds us that those who are silent (or silenced) demand recognition. She tells Miss Fitt and Mr. Tyler: "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on" (18). She continues by describing that she sees: "...the pretty little wayside station, even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue." In this moment Mrs. Rooney demands that we see with her eyes and inhabit her sensory experience: "oh if you had my eyes...you would understand" (18). It is one of the rare moments of the play that asserts the empathetic power of subjective experience.

A gender asymmetry also exists in the play's referencing of retirement; namely, only the men retire. Given women's less systematic presence in the organized and paid employment in the first few decades of the twentieth century, this makes historical sense. Gilleard and Higgs summarize these different constructions of the gendered life course as follows: While male aging followed along the social trajectory of institutions, namely education, work, and now (as we have seen) retirement, "'nature' and the somatic still framed those of women. For women, education and employment were squeezed together into childhood and youth, while marriage, child rearing

and household management provided the domestic anchors of an adulthood that continued more or less uninterrupted, unless, and until, illness or widowhood intervened” (*Ageing* 37).

All That Fall juxtaposes two different visions of (male) retirement. The first is idyllic retirement, which provides an opportunity for leisure and the pleasurable pursuit of hobbies—such as growing roses—in a period of life after employment ends but before the onset of ill health. Dan Rooney mentions the possibility of retirement after he steps off the train:

MR. ROONEY: Do you know what it is I think I shall retire.

MRS. ROONEY: [*appalled*] Retire! And live at home? On your grant!

MR. ROONEY: Never tread these cursed steps again. Trudge this hellish road for the last time. Sit at home on the remnants of my bottom counting the hours—till the next meal.

[*Pause.*] The very thought put life in me! Forward, before it dies! (24)

Mrs. Rooney is appalled by Dan’s proposal to intrude on her domestic space, and, indeed, later Mr. Rooney admits to hatred of the “horrors of home life” (27), including the presence of children. Nonetheless, the *idea* of ending an unfulfilling working life seems to (temporarily) enliven Mr. Rooney. Yet, this ideal is short-lived. Before Dan arrives, Maddy asks Mr. Barrell how long he has been station master, reminding us that Mr. Barrell had taken on this employment from his father.

MRS. ROONEY: You stepped into your father’s shoes, I believe, when he took them off.

MR. BARRELL: Poor Pappy! [*Reverent pause.*] He didn’t live long to enjoy his ease.

MRS. ROONEY: I remember him clearly. A small ferrety purple-faced widower, deaf as a doornail, very testy and snappy. [*Pause.*] I suppose you’ll be retiring soon yourself, Mr. Barrell, and growing your roses. [*Pause.*] Did I understand you to say the twelve thirty would soon be upon us? (13)

Here, Mr. Barrell and Mrs. Rooney are referring to a vision of retirement as idyllic, imagining it as a period of “ease” and leisurely activities. The mention of the grant suggests that Mr. Rooney may be expecting an occupational or government pension. Beckett then proceeds to undercut this “growing roses” retirement ideal. After all, Mr. Barrell’s father did not live long after retirement. The phrasing of Mrs. Rooney’s last question is also suggestive. Although she is merely referring to the arrival of her husband’s train, Beckett’s phrasing makes the train’s arrival sound menacing and aggressive—appropriate, considering the train brings tragedy in its wake.

The ideal “growing roses” vision of retirement is undercut by the child’s death on the train. The structure of the Rooneys’ conversation, with its strategic interruptions, juxtapositions, and omissions shows the associations Beckett makes between Dan Rooney’s discussion of retirement and the loss of their child Minnie, now recalled by the accident of the child on the train. When Dan does finally begin to tell his wife what happened on the train, he begins by describing his idea about terminating his employment and staying home in his pyjamas. Yet he ultimately talks himself out of it, unhappy at the thought of staying at home: “And I fell to thinking of my silent, backstreet, basement office, with its obliterated plate, rest-couch and velvet hangings, and what it means to be buried there alive, if only from ten to five....Nothing, I said, not even fully certified death, can ever take the place of that. It was then I noticed that we were at a standstill” (28). Mr. Rooney compares his dreary working life to being “buried alive,” yet prefers it to a domestic retirement. The train journey’s dramatic structure juxtaposes Mr. Rooney’s thoughts of retirement with the child’s death, the cause of the train’s sudden “standstill.” This uneasy juxtaposition hints at a possible demographic cause-and-effect whereby the continued long life of the elderly (now suggesting an enjoyable post-working life) comes at the cost of younger generations.

By contrast to *All That Fall*, *Malone Dies* suggests that the deconstruction of an idyllic vision of retirement also has to do with some guilt on the part of the (now adult) child. In *Malone Dies*, Sapo's "poor and sickly parents" (187) share a vision of the retirement in which their adult children play a large role:

Then little by little the house would empty. And at last they would be all alone, with their memories. It would be time enough then to move. He would be pensioned off, she at her last gasp. They would take a cottage in the country where, having no further need of manure, they could afford to buy it in cartloads. And their children, grateful for the sacrifices made on their behalf, would come to their assistance. It was in this atmosphere of unbridled dream that these conferences usually ended. It was as though the Saposcats drew the strength to live from the prospect of their impotence. But sometimes, before reaching that stage, they paused to consider the case of their first-born. (188)

Beckett chides the Saposcats for what he perceives as their conventional, unimaginative view of late life, but this depiction also has an element of self-critique. After all, it is Sapo's desire for an unorthodox, artist's life (autobiographical echoes here of May Beckett's desires for the young Sam Beckett) that dispels the Saposcats' dream: "They did not know why he was committed to a liberal profession... They thought of him as a doctor for preference. He will look after us when we are old, said Mrs. Saposcat. And her husband replied, I see him rather as a surgeon, as though after a certain age people were inoperable" (188-9). Malone recognizes the futility of such a dream. Malone's simultaneously guilty but also contemptuous description of this vision of late life exhibits a pattern similar to what Paul Stewart has identified in Beckett's work, including *All That Fall*: namely, Beckett's depiction of the dangers of sexual procreation, which only prolongs human suffering into the next generation, and instead his preference for "sterile, fictional

reproduction” (181). Thus Stewart argues that the Beckettian message of “going on,” with its implication of terminal deferment and directionless motion, is the “reproductive” product of “aesthetic creation” rather than biological procreation (169). Such a vision of artistic creation as disrupting established, conventional patterns of the human life course, including retirement, also applies to the experience of aging in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Confronted with younger versions of himself, Krapp nonetheless refuses to “want them back,” preferring instead to keep honoring the creative “fire in me now” (58). These elements of creative ambition also offer an important alternative to the frequent equation of late life with a narrative of decline, loss, or decay, which Margaret Gullette argues that *Endgame* universalizes (*Aged* 133).⁴³

Is *All That Fall* a vision of a world in decline? The play’s emphasis on sterility and childlessness, especially coupled with Beckett’s unusually specific use of the Irish setting, has certainly prompted scholarly interpretations that emphasize twentieth-century Irish social and cultural tensions, namely, those pitting Protestant decline against Catholic fecundity.⁴⁴ My reading of the older people’s “survival” looks more toward popular fears of population aging that have sporadically surfaced throughout the twentieth century. One such instance of demographic panic about the aging of the population occurred during the 1930s in Britain. Andrew Blaikie explains that this demographic panic was caused by decades-long falling infant mortality rates, among other sociological factors, but its effect in the popular imagination was to create panicked speculation about a “future Britain...clogged up with pensioners in bath chairs,” according to

⁴³ Kathleen Woodward, for instance, describes old age in Beckett’s work as “the infinitesimally decremental process of the subtraction of strengths” (*Aging* 38) and *Malone Dies* in particular as “the *fading* of the subject in the context of old age” (144). Even Michael Davidson, in subsuming old age into his category of dependencies, uses “decline” to describe the change in bodies over time (17); thus, what Gullette condemns as ageist, Davidson commends as anti-ableist.

⁴⁴ For more on this topic, see: Sean Kennedy, “‘A Lingered Dissolution’: *All That Fall* and Protestant Fears of Engulfment in the Irish Free State”; Emily C. Bloom, “‘The Protestant Thing to Do’: Anglo-Irish Performance in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* and Samuel Beckett’s *All That Fall*”; and Brynhildur Boyce, “Pismires and Protestants: The ‘Lingered Dissolution’ of Samuel Beckett’s *All That Fall*.”

one news source, as well as fears of a resulting “decline of ‘creativity’ and energy in the national psyche” (*Ageing* 37). This rhetoric, combined with economic pressure and encroaching war, meant that “older people had become victims of their own survival” (38). My reading of *All That Fall* suggests that it presents an extreme reaction to or even parody of this demographic panic. And while Becket demonstrates some guilt over the idea of the old outliving the young—Maddy Rooney mourns her lost daughter even as Dan Rooney appears to have caused one child’s death—his dismissal of the image of an idyllic retirement positions such late life “survival” as the act of artistic creation, not aging decline.

Pinter’s Generational Encounters

For Bruce Robbins in *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, British and American stories of upward mobility provide insight into the historic reception of welfare practices and ideologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Understanding the welfare state broadly as “a set of imperfect institutions, produced in part by management from above and in part by pressure from below, which also enters into the unfinished project of ‘social citizenship’” (9), Robbins demonstrates how through such figures as the therapist and the mentor, the trope of upward mobility necessarily disavows a strict moral code of individualism and self-reliance and instills instead an appreciation of collectivity and social interdependence. This collective moral logic ultimately turns out to factor into the social rise of even the seemingly resistant figures, including his most prominent mid-twentieth century literary examples, the Angry Young Men’s rage toward the emasculating blandness of state support, and the child’s fraught encounter with the state health visitor.

For minimalist dramatic works, like those of Beckett and Harold Pinter, the challenge is to scale up: how can these authors use the interactions of just a few individuals in sparsely populated dramatic worlds to posit collective responsibility, especially for the vulnerable, while acknowledging fears of governmentality and state surveillance? This question seems almost too easily answered for Harold Pinter, who frequently stages the terrorizing conformity and ubiquity of government control and institutions, including the 1958 *The Hothouse* (published decades later), set in a mental institution, and the 1957 play *The Birthday Party*, during which a pair of official authorities intrude on the life of shabby outsider Stanley. Stanley is forced to obey, and as D. Keith Peacock writes, he must join a world “which bears an uncanny resemblance to the ‘cradle to grave’ institutionalism of the welfare state that had been established in Britain in 1947” (67). For giving up his “individuality,” Stanley is promised shallow material comfort. Despite this deep suspicion of government intrusion, Pinter’s plays do find some ground for solidarity and shelter for the vulnerable. I argue that Pinter’s plays of the late 1950s, *A Slight Ache* (1958) and *The Caretaker* (1959), negotiate this uneasy terrain in their depiction of elderly characters by mapping a familiar Freudian generational struggle onto sociopolitical generational conflict over resources and services.

Like *All That Fall*, Harold Pinter’s *A Slight Ache*, written in 1958 and performed in 1959, was originally conceived as a radio play. The play is set in what appears to be an idyllic country house retreat, complete with prominent garden, and presided over by the aptly-named Flora and Edward. Their presumption of a cultured, middle-class existence in a pastoral landscape is undermined, however, by the spectral presence of a “very old” man, seemingly homeless, who spends his days standing at the foot of their garden selling matches. Like many Pinter works, *A Slight Ache* turns on notions of uncertain identity. By gradual degrees, as the couple invite the

matchseller into their home, his and Edward's identities become confused. The "slight ache" in Edward's eye becomes the matchseller's glass eye, and by the end of the play Flora has given the tray of matches to Edward, and the matchseller, who suddenly appears much younger, has attracted Edward's wife—her sexuality newly reawakened—and assumed Edward's place in the garden. For Edward, the transformation is very painful (at one point, Pinter stipulates "nausea and horror" as his stage directions). As with *All That Fall*, the radio medium of the play is significant. As Martin Esslin points out, because the matchseller never speaks, we can never be sure that he actually exists; "he might equally well be a figment of the old people's imagination" (*The Theatre* 242) instead. Several references in the play reinforce this possibility; Edward describes the passing monk as failing to notice the matchseller, for instance. A staged production of the play eliminates this potential ambiguity.

The play is structured around a common trope in literature dealing with aging, the encounter between the younger and older person. The encounter is a powerful moment because it closes the physical and ontological distance between different ages. Borrowing from psychoanalysis, Kathleen Woodward describes a version of the "encounter" as the "mirror stage of old age." Woodward points to Freud's account of his encounter with an old person in his essay on the uncanny as a key illustration of this concept not just *for* psychoanalysis, but epistemologically *of* it. In demonstrating the concept of the uncanny, Freud uses his own experience aboard a train, in which he initially mistakes his *own mirror reflection* to be that of another (older, and to Freud, horrifying) person. Woodward points to the marginalization of this example as evidence of Freud's difficulty in accepting the fact of his own aging and mortality. Freud's encounter with his mirrored double, and his horrified reaction, are part of a reoccurring

theme in accounts of the elderly (Freud was 63). Woodward understands this phenomenon as having roots in both biology and culture, but reducible to neither:

Is the obsession with mirrors a symptom of this stage—old age—or is this stage triggered by one’s mirror image, by the reflections of others, that is by the values held up to us by society? Although I believe knowledge of old age can come to us from our infirmities (our own bodies can speak to us of old age), I would want to argue that old age is in great part constructed by any given society as a social category, as is, for example, adolescence. The mirror our society holds up to the elderly reveals the image of death. This is why Freud did not at first recognize himself in that image of an elderly gentleman and why that image aroused the “dread and creeping horror” he associates with the uncanny, for the Other was indeed the self and uncannily prefigured the coming years of suffering which Freud was destined to live out. (“The Mirror” 109)

A Slight Ache performs a similar encounter between self and elderly Other. According to Martin Esslin, the matchseller, in his mirror-like smooth silence, “acts as a catalyst for the projection of the other’s deepest feelings” (*The Theatre* 242).

While not utilizing an actual mirror, Pinter does use the conventional connotations of blindness (with denial or impotence, for instance)⁴⁵ to show Edward’s gradual but deeply painful and “disgusted” (187) identification of himself in his reflected Other, and thus with the physical manifestation of his own aging. Though the matchseller has been standing outside for two months, Edward’s first admission of his existence (of which he had previously been in denial) coincides with the day he experiences the eponymous “slight ache” in his eye. This is, as Esslin notes, “the start of the descent into the decay of old age” (*Peopled* 89) via slow recognition of himself in the matchseller-mirror. Pinter’s depiction of old age is rather reductive, based

⁴⁵ Esslin claims that Pinter frequently equates blindness with “sexual inadequacy and death” (*Peopled* 88).

primarily on appearance and the physical condition of the body. Indeed, much of Edward's interaction with the matchseller involves commenting on his body, his clothes, and his physical appearance.⁴⁶ After Flora brings the matchseller into their home, Edward, alternately paranoid and pompous, attempts to question him. At times, he denies his identification with the old man, calling him an "imposter" (179), while at other times he claims a relationship or similarity with him, by means of a shared love of cricket or Edward's past work as a businessman: "I was in much the same position myself then as you are now, you understand. Struggling to make my way in the world" (184). Although he begins by repressing his recognition of the matchseller, he eventually claims even a stronger relationship with him, calling him "My oldest acquaintance. My nearest and dearest. My kith and kin" (196). Eventually it is Edward who imagines his own death (in the ground in a sheltered "nook") and it is now the matchseller who looks no longer old but instead "extraordinarily... youthful" (199). The matchseller takes Edward's former place in the garden, with Flora, while Edward is left reminiscing with the tray of matches.

In her study of aging in Freud's psychoanalytical writing and theories, Kathleen Woodward describes an elderly, depressed Freud contemplating a memory from decades earlier that seemed to him tainted by feelings of "filial guilt," a symptom of professionally exceeding his father's achievements. Woodward concludes from this example that Freud's anxieties about aging are explicable through his own theories: "At the end of his life then, we find Freud still thick in the world of two generations, after all these years still tragically bound to his now long-dead father, fastened tight by the cord of the Oedipus complex, and ruled by its dynamic of desire and prohibition, guilt and punishment" ("Inventing" 150). Clearly impatient with Freud's inability to imagine a positive form of old age, as evidenced by her word choice, Woodward

⁴⁶ Both Flora and Edward describe the old man as a "bullock," for instance, echoing the description of Davies as a "wild animal" in *The Caretaker*.

instead strives to imagine new, supportive crossgenerational models, those provided by an audience ill-served by Freud's theoretical models: elderly women.

Despite Woodward's misgivings of Freud's internalized fears of aging, the Oedipal triangle as a model of age anxiety is useful to us in analyzing the dynamics at work in *A Slight Ache*. According to Woodward, the Oedipus triangle is fundamentally a childhood phenomenon, ameliorated with the child's identification with the father. When experienced in middle age, however, two outcomes are possible: "Perhaps the aggressivity of what we might call the inverse Oedipus complex of middle age is transcended *positively* by identifying with one's own child (or with the younger generation in general) and *negatively* by displacing that aggressivity onto the category of old age in general" (*Aging* 37). Of these two outcomes, Edward's confrontation with the matchseller falls into the latter category. Edward, Flora, and the old man enact the Oedipal triangle. Flora, the wife-mother, gradually transfers her affections from her husband-child Edward ("Beddie-Weddie..." (178)) to the matchseller, whom she again treats as both sexual object and child, naming him (Barnabas) and imagining bathing him. Edward almost even calls the matchseller his father (he comes as close as "My nearest and dearest" (196)) and, as in the *negative* Oedipal construct described by Woodward, ends up swallowed up by the father-older man.

This conventional, domestic Oedipal struggle maps onto a broader conflict between an older generation and the younger/middle-aged generation behind it. At stake are the resources of the welfare state. Beveridge's goal in designing the postwar welfare policies was fairly low: he aimed to reduce poverty by providing for a "subsistence" income, "a term he defined as meaning 'benefit adequate to all normal needs, in duration and in amount'" (Timmins 52). By the mid-1950s, however, the cracks in the plan were beginning to show, and the state pensions were

proving inadequate to stave off poverty in old age (Timmins 193). To whom should limited state resources go? *A Slight Ache*'s Oedipal conflict suggests a generational struggle over this issue. To begin, there is the specificity of the matchseller's "profession" and position. Unlike Freud and his mirror train double, Edward and the matchseller do not immediately share the same space or social class. The matchseller inhabits a liminal space; he is technically standing on a public road, just outside the frequently mentioned confines of Edward and Flora's garden. Yet, as Edward says, the road is not much of a public thoroughfare, "'It's not a road at all. What is it? It's a lane, leading to the monastery'" (176).⁴⁷ Moreover, he sells his wares on a public road, and, though nominally involved in trade, is effectively a recipient of charity.

From the first, Edward's own employment is also unclear; he may even be officially retired, as Peacock suggests (167). At breakfast with Flora, he excuses himself from recognizing Flora's work with the garden flowers, saying "It's not my job" (170). Though Edward's work functions as a commentary on the couple's gender dynamics, Pinter is deliberately being unclear about the nature of his employment (though intellectuals rarely fare well in Pinter's universe). Edward tells the matchseller he "write[s] theological and philosophical essays" (183); he tells Flora he is working on an essay on time and space, though she seems to think it is about the Belgian Congo. For the most part, Pinter dismisses Edward's intellectual pretensions; his is a life of relative leisure. When Edward initially discusses the matchseller, he berates him for his poor business acumen: "He's sold nothing all morning...He made no effort to clinch a sale" (179). Yet he also identifies with the matchseller's work in sales: "Yes, I...[sic] I was in much the same position myself then as you are now, you understand. Struggling to make my way in the world. I was in commerce too" (184). By the end of the play, the matchseller has usurped (or been

⁴⁷ As in the *The Caretaker*'s reference to the monks, the monastery is potentially a place of charitable, self-sacrificing giving.

granted) Edward's place amongst a leisured middle-class, and Edward is the subject to the pittance of selling wet matches.

Edward's clear discomfort with the matchseller as a vision of his future elderly self also suggests a broader conflict about resources, with Edward, the younger generation, anxious that the older will be a burden, take more than their "deserved" share of resources, or take their station in life without providing anything in return: "God damn it, I'm entitled to know something about you! You're in my blasted house, on my territory, drinking my wine, eating my duck! Now you've had your fill you sit like a hump, a mouldering heap" (194-5). What *A Slight Ache*'s failed Oedipal struggle demonstrates, in short, is the danger of seeing the distribution of resources in terms of a generational struggle between older and younger generations. It likewise cautions against an overly paranoid, unsympathetic anxiety about the process of aging; for Edward, the matchseller functions as "a reminder of those universal vulnerabilities that define collective obligation" (Robbins, *Upward* 153).

Pinter's near-contemporaneous, and decidedly more famous play, *The Caretaker*, likewise features a tense domestic triangulation among people whose allegiances and alliances constantly shift, resulting in changing policies of inclusion and exclusion. Like the matchseller, *The Caretaker*'s itinerant Davies, described as an "old man" of unspecified age in the introductory character list, "has lost not only his place in the world—he is homeless—but also his identity" (Esslin, *The Theatre* 244). Scholars of the text disagree about the exact nature of the relationship between Davies and the two younger brothers, Aston and Mick, who begrudgingly offer him both a temporary place to stay (in their dilapidated house) and a makeshift identity or social role (as the eponymous "caretaker"). Similar to the father/son conflict in *A Slight Ache*,

Aston and Mick band together to expel Davies as an enactment of an “archetypal” expulsion of the much older father figure (Esslin, *Peopled* 110).

Do the brothers expel Davies from the house, or does Davies, “find[ing] comfort and security in rejection” (Morgan 88), participate in his own expulsion? Davies continually performs his own rejection, and blames others for his lack of success or even acceptance. He and Aston meet after one of these expulsions, as Davies is fired from his janitorial job after a violent altercation. He paints himself as an outsider, as unable to find a place in the world, symbolically saying to Aston of his former job that “ten minutes off for a tea-break in the middle of the night in that place and I couldn’t find a seat, not one” (17). In being a forced outcast, Davies is the mirror image of Aston, who, as an unwilling mental hospital patient, was forced to remain contained *inside*. Though Morgan argues that Davies finds secret relief in his outsider status, he also rails against it using the language of citizenship and rights. Fired from his job at the café, Davies argues, “Look here, I said to him, I got my rights. I told him that. I might have been on the road but nobody’s got more rights than I have. Let’s have a bit of fair play” (19). Even about something as trivial as sharing the toilet he vaguely intones “fair’s fair” (27).

In several moments Davies relates the perceived injustice to his age. In one instance, he complains to Aston about his poor treatment at the hands of the monks, who give him a meal but no shoes: “Now look here, I said, I’m an old man, you can’t talk to me like that” (22). In the earlier telling of the café firing, he uses nearly the same words to explain why his status as an older man should earn him respect: “Look here, I said, I’m an old man, I said, where I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with the proper respect” (19). Davis makes an appeal to social justice based on an idealized cultural construction of aging, a romanticized notion of old age as the embodiment of wisdom and experience. While such

idealization is common, the sociohistorical reality is not; historian Pat Thane explodes that particular myth in *Old Age in English History*, then as now, she writes “old people in general were not respected or despised by reason of the simple fact of their advanced age” (7). Davis is searching for a place from which he can advocate for a social role, but is having trouble finding one.

On the one hand, part of the problem is that Davies is having trouble adjusting to a rapidly changing postwar environment. In the most glaring examples, he displays his racist prejudice against the postwar influx of immigrants into Britain. However, Pinter also offers hints at the possibilities of other national and social traumas, embodied in Davies, though these traumas are never completely confirmed: Davies hints vaguely that he may have fought in the war (30) or served in the colonies (59). Of course, since Davies is, as Mick says, a “born fibber” (43), and has proven to be lazy, evasive, and prejudiced, neither Mick nor the audience is likely to trust him. Nonetheless, Pinter implies some more generalized source of unrest in Davies’s past, as when, for instance, Davies has trouble remembering where he was born, answering Mick’s questioning with a vague response about it being “a bit hard, like to set your mind back” (34). More importantly, Davies’s unconscious seems troubled; Aston complains that he wakes him up by “jabbering” in his sleep.

Davies is also reacting to ambiguous and conflicting messages about his role as an older man in the new construction of age identity in the postwar welfare state. He has supposedly gained rights and a defined role (old age pensioner, for instance), yet he remains excluded. The elusiveness of identity and the struggle for its articulation are some of Pinter’s most frequently explored themes, and that includes age identity. Sidcup represents one of Davies’ most persistent dreams/delusions in the play; Sidcup is the place where he claims he can obtain the papers that

prove his identity, his real identity as Davies. These mysterious papers, held by an equally mysterious man in Sidcup, will “prove who I am!” (29). Pinter may want us to believe that this is yet another of Davies’s convenient excuses. Yet, for Davies, the concept of identity is completely tied up with the concept of bureaucracy and legal documents. His identity requires the official, bureaucratic confirmation; when Mick asks him, in cruel jest, for references, Davies insists that they, too, are in the unreachable Sidcup (54). Mick in many ways exacerbates Davies’s obsession with the papers, because he frequently embodies the role of the permissive (or dismissive) state. For instance, to taunt the unknowing Davies, Mick demands to see his references and inquires after his bank details. He overwhelms Davies with his long lists of financial terms, such as his speech about insurance payments and benefits (45).

Like many of Pinter’s characters, lacking a tenable social identity, Davies ends up doubling himself by assuming another name. His assumed name, Jenkins, is the first he uses with Aston, but negates the name as soon as he gives it: “Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins. That’s my name. That’s the name I’m known, anyway. But it’s no good me going on with that name. I got no rights. I got an insurance card here” (29). The mention of the insurance card—an artifact of the National Insurance Acts of the previous decade—establishes Davies’s identity as one guaranteed by the state (the welfare state, specifically). Yet Davies instantly disavows that name, and insists that, as the state-identified Jenkins, he has “no rights,” presumably because the card is fraudulent or stolen; he claims to be afraid of going to jail if he makes a fuss about the card. This clear contradiction of his previous insistence on “rights” suggests that Davies is struggling with articulating precisely how this new society defines his rights. As himself, Davies, he feels he is owed rights, but as Jenkins he is not. In reaching for an identity, Davies falls short of the ones newly normalized and made available by retirement. He reaches for either idealized notions of a

“golden age” of old age, or else to older models of age identity based, for instance, on generational positions. As Myles explains, before mandatory state pensions, being old was defined less by “chronological age than by institutional seniority, particularly within the family” (2).

Neither does Davies have a clear identity based on work and employment, which is central to the dynamics of *The Caretaker*’s threesome. Aston first meets Davies as he is being fired from shirking on his previous job. Responsibility for completing the house repairs tends to be passed along by each of the characters, and despite Aston’s talk of saws and power tools, not much is accomplished by anyone. Yet the idea of being the caretaker entices Davies. When Aston and Davies argue and Davies threatens to become violent (recalling his earlier employment trouble), the idea of employment produces in Davies one of his very rare assertive statements: ““Not suitable? Well, I can tell you, there’s someone here thinks I am suitable. And I’ll tell you, I’m staying on here as caretaker! Get it! Your brother, he’s told me, see, he’s told me the job is mine. Mine! So that’s where I am. I’m going to be his caretaker”” (77). None of the three fits into the role of the “male breadwinner” that is the underlying ideology of the postwar definition of both masculinity and age. Gilleard and Higgs characterize postwar aging as predominately responding to the retirement of men: “In the male breadwinner ethos of modernity, men’s identities were conferred largely by their work” (*Ageing* 26-7). On the contrary, the position of “caretaker” exists somewhere between traditional gender roles, between the masculine handyman, janitor, or mechanic, and the nurturing, maternal figure. Its gender liminality also makes it highly suitable as a stand-in for the welfare state itself, with its promise of safety nets and social security. In having employment *and* being the caretaker (there is some

overdetermination here), Davies is provided with a firmer identity, a clearer social role, and a direct tie to the welfare state.

Though neither is a sympathetic character, both *A Slight Ache*'s Edward and *The Caretaker*'s Davies face some exclusion from the promise of social security and citizenship promised by the welfare state or struggle to accept its premises. When Edward calls the old matchseller "an imposter" (179), he is refusing to recognize their shared fate. When Mick calls similarly Davies "a bloody imposter" (81), it is because Davies has betrayed the principles that govern Mick and Aston's brotherhood.⁴⁸ The brothers' care of each other is neither ostentatious nor sentimental; it is, like Mick's house, enough to get by and hope for better in the future. It is based on a mutual respect and even respectful neglect. "He's got his own ideas," Mick says, speaking of his brother—"Let him have them" (83). Davies is expelled from this relationship and from their home not because he has failed a test of identification or recognition but because he has failed their test of citizenship.

Third Aging

The postwar welfare state introduced social and economic changes that abruptly re-defined the life course and what it meant to be old, a seismic shift registered by authors imagining the meaning of late life. During a period in which these changes were still being negotiated and consolidated, however, the works by Beckett and Pinter from the 1950s and early 60s must cope with anxieties about aging and the ambivalence inherent in the social implementation of collective responsibility, especially in the institutionalization of retirement. While the focus of this chapter has not been the "inside" of retirement, the subjective experience

⁴⁸ For a clinical reading, geared toward medical practitioners, of the play's failures in supplying ethical and adequate palliative care to Davies, see Ewan Jeffrey and David Jeffrey, "I Could Never Quite Get It Together: Lessons for End-of-Life Care in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*."

of transitioning to a post-working life as part of a broader expression of age identity, many literary works have done so, including, for instance, Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn* (1977). Moreover, such a look at the "inside" of the retirement experience can show, as historian Pat Thane reminds us, that despite popular or academic fears to the contrary, "Many older persons' own representations of their lives as active, involved, and happy" (7).

Much has changed in the administration of social security since the postwar decades. In recent decades, welfare reform in Great Britain has moved toward, as Gilleard and Higgs write, "a framework of common citizenship to one based around sectorized consumers" (*Cultures* 121); a concomitant change has been a shift away from state-provided pensions and toward private and occupations pensions, yet these, too, are a risky proposition (Price and Ginn 76). Thus while retirement has become established part of the life course, it will continue to be a source of some uncertainty, as expressed in the *Telegraph* article that began this chapter.

A concern similar to that expressed in Alleyne's *Telegraph* article regarding the psychological adjustment to life post-retirement is played for comedy in a recent novel, Mark Haddon's 2006 *A Spot of Bother*. Initially, 57-year-old protagonist George Hall seems to be adjusting well to his early retirement. His wife is pleased to see him keeping himself occupied with a building project in the garden, as she seems patronizingly aware of the fears of poor adjustment to early retirement, by men whose lives previously revolved around the traditional gender roles of provider and bread-winner. Watching George assemble bricks, she compares him positively to another recent retiree of their acquaintance, one who had "started to go downhill as soon as they handed him the engraved decanter. Eight weeks later he was in the middle of the lawn at 3:00 a.m. with a bottle of Scotch inside him, barking like a dog" (7).

A Spot of Bother's George is entering what Peter Laslett defines as the third age, a contemporary reconfiguration of the life course defined by a period of "personal fulfillment" after retirement, when health and finances remain strong, but before the onset of "true" old age in the Fourth Age, with its accompanying "dependence, decrepitude and death" (*A Fresh* 4).⁴⁹ Pensioners in George's circumstances are able—and actively expected—to take advantage of their good health, financial security (often the result of generous occupational pensions), and comfortable lifestyles to engage in personally fulfilling activities for which they lacked time during their working lives. Theories of the life course such as the third age have been key to promoting a positive view of aging and promoting the individual's agency in constructing his or her own aging identity and post-work lifestyle.⁵⁰ It is also an age identity closely linked with consumption and spending patterns, and with the repositioning of the older person as a consumer (Gilleard and Higgs, *Cultures* 9).

Haddon quickly reverses the initial expectations that George's early retirement will be an easy transition. The danger is spotted in the novel's first line, just as George is engaging in his role as third age consumer (that is, while shopping): "It began when George was trying on a black suit in Allders the week before Bob Green's funeral" (1). The hypochondriac George panics at the sight of what his doctor diagnoses as eczema, but which George believes to be a cancerous tumor on his hip; part of being a member of the third age means surveying oneself for signs of more debilitating decline to come. The eponymous "spot of bother" physically and

⁴⁹ Laslett popularized the concept in his 1989 book *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age*, in which he divides the life course of individuals (predominately those living in industrialized countries) into four ages, which are experienced on both the individual and social level. Laslett argues that such a re-definition occurs in a society in which changing demographics of national populations are coupled with accompanying cultural and economic changes, such as in labor practices. Laslett argues that, in Britain, these conditions were initially met in the 1950s but were not well-established until the 1980s (79).

⁵⁰ For a critique of the concept of the third age, see Martha Holstein, "Cultural Ideals, Ethics, and Agelessness: A Critical Perspective on the Third Age."

narratively marks George's ensuing crisis while simultaneously undercutting it. Expected to be enjoying his early retirement from a career as a manufacturer of children's playground equipment—another comic touch meant to infantilize George—George slides into a bout of depression, his panicked concern for his health exacerbated by his graphic discovery of his wife's affair and his discomfort with his family, including his daughter's upcoming remarriage. His breakdown eventually includes black-outs, fugue-state walks, and semi-accidental self-harm. George's family and even his physicians downplay his symptoms and fears as Haddon emphasizes their comic consequences: George "mooring" during panic attacks, for instance, and distracting himself by watching children's television with his grandson. The comedy is heightened by George's poor attempts to maintain his own vision of himself as rational, matter of fact, and in control. Underlying the comedy are some serious fears; despite the conventional happy ending of the domestic comedy, George has not fully faced these fears: "...I'm not entirely sure what I was frightened of. Getting old. Dying. Dying of cancer. Dying in general. Making the speech" (347). Instead, Haddon reunites the family and restores George's well-being by the end of the novel, in part through his son's rhetorical performance in front of the assembled crowd, and in part through performance of agency and self control. George begins to make plans for the future again, and revokes his earlier supposed lack of control, saying "It was time to stop all this nonsense" (554). George's "recovery" depicts several possible consequences of current changes in social policy regarding retirement and late life more generally. As the editors of *The Futures of Old Age* note, the emphasis on individual agency in managing late life (including pensions, health, and activity) can be productive in encouraging early detection of potential problems. On the other hand, such agentic rhetoric could be "illusory," and serve to punish or

exclude those “who fail to adhere to a healthy lifestyle regime in their earlier years” (Vincent, Phillipson, and Downs 136).

Despite a difficult adjustment period, Haddon’s novel tries to remind us, as historian Pat Thane writes, of “the pleasure retirement can bring to the generations who have been able to expect and plan for it” (7). Yet, what of those who have not, who through the accumulation of “structural inequalities arising out of the norms and values prevalent in society” (Price and Ginn 79) are then penalized by poverty in late life? According to scholars such as Debora Price and Jay Ginn, such potentialities must be considered in evaluating current pension systems. Amid broader social, political, and cultural debates about the future of pension schemes and aging populations, the current route to that “pleasure” of retirement is through the exertion of individual agency rather than collective wellbeing. It seems that, for the present, we are all going our separate ways; like the documentary about the surgical separation of conjoined twins that Haddon references at the end of the novel, it seems a risky move.

CHAPTER 2
“THE FUTURE DWELLING-PLACE”
B.S. JOHNSON, ANTI-INSTITUTIONALISM, AND THE SPACE OF OLD AGE

Simone de Beauvoir’s *La Vieillesse* (published in French in 1970 and as *The Coming of Age* in 1972), a ground-breaking study of old age and a pioneering work of anti-ageism advocacy, opens with the story of Siddhartha’s encounter with an old man. The future Buddha’s reaction to the aged figure, Beauvoir recounts, is an epiphany of recognition, a call to serious and pessimistic reflection, and a *memento mori*:

When Buddha was still Prince Siddhartha he often escaped from the splendid palace in which his father kept him shut up and drove about the surrounding countryside. The first time he went out he saw a tottering, wrinkled, toothless, white-haired man, bowed, mumbling and trembling as he propped himself along on his stick. The sight astonished the prince and the charioteer told him just what it meant to be old. “It is the world’s pity,” cried Siddhartha, “that weak and ignorant beings, drunk with the vanity of youth, do not behold old age! Let us hurry back to the palace. What is the use of pleasures and delights, since I myself am the future dwelling-place of old age?” (1)

Siddhartha’s moment of transformative recognition of himself as an aging subject serves as counterpoint to one of Beauvoir’s chief complaints and corrections in *The Coming of Age*, that is, our individual and collective refusal to meaningfully acknowledge the existence of old age, in our individual and social futures. Siddhartha’s awakening is framed as spiritual self-denial, in which the acceptance of eventual aging and mortality is tied to the renunciation of material wealth, but it is not necessarily a liberating one. The prince becomes conscious of a heretofore unknown existential condition, but in the story he returns to the same prison-like palace from which he emerged. Such a moment of recognition, Beauvoir claims, is particularly difficult and

anxious for those still relatively young, for whom old age is “unrealizable,” a condition of human existence that cannot ever be fully appreciated and integrated: “Old age is something beyond my life, outside it—something of which I cannot have any full inward experience” (291).

According to Kathleen Woodward’s reading of Beauvoir, the “Othering” of the elderly is a cultural mindset that we internalize as part of a marginalization and devaluing of age and privileging of youth. This inability to integrate the ontology of aging persists into later life, creating what Amelia DeFalco terms an “inevitably split [subject],” one who differentiates between an inner, essential self and a physical, aging body.⁵¹ In creating this disembodied selfhood, “[w]e say that our real selves—that is, our youthful selves, are hidden inside our bodies. Our *bodies* are old, *we* are not” (Woodward, *Aging* 62). As Beauvoir argues, this difficulty in accepting ourselves as aging manifests in a social marginalization and denigration of the elderly; it is a problem of society as much as the psyche. While other chapters in this study will examine the larger consequences of this double consciousness on notions of selfhood and identity formation, this chapter focuses on the anxious cultural and social encounter between young(er) and old(er), the former perceived as the valued norm and the latter as the marker of difference and threatening alterity, in literary examples from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

This problematic dialectic takes on a particular significance during this period, reflecting a larger social and culture shift in definitions of aging, from the emphasis on postwar welfare state homogeneity in retirement to rise of new, more heterogenous but increasingly fractured, age identities. As discussed in the introduction, this shift has important repercussions for not only how an individual navigates life course transitions but also for how different generations can come to understand one another. Just as individual aging is expressed through historically

⁵¹ For Amelia DeFalco, the phenomenon of the “inevitably split [subject]” that frequently appears in discourse about the elderly resonates with Freud’s concept of the uncanny (6), a strangeness within the familiar.

defined social roles, so too are generations shaped by historical and social forces, though they are lived and experienced subjectively (Hardy and Waite 4). In addition to expressing an individual moment of age consciousness, Beauvoir's Siddhartha tale thus also functions as a parable of an intergenerational encounter (albeit a limited one, as the neither represents a sufficiently large sample to demonstrate the differences, often income- and class-based, that can occur within particular generational cohorts).⁵² The prince's renunciation of material wealth and superficial consumption also reinforces Andrew Blaikie's point that "intergenerational differences are not merely ideological, but can have significant material effects" ("Visions" 16). While Beauvoir's story suggests neither outright conflict (such as, for instance, the generational fear that the elderly constitute an economic "burden" on the young) nor active solidarity, it does suggest that individual moments of recognition represent a potential mechanism for social change (hence Siddhartha's hailing of "weak and ignorant beings").

The Siddhartha parable advocates for the confronting of individual and social fears of aging while simultaneously revealing its own critical limitations and cultural blind spots. One significant limitation of Beauvoir's version of the Siddhartha story is that the transformation is one-sided; the parable depicts old age in its effects on the young Siddhartha, leaving the older man unchanged, and the elderly man's description rests only on stereotypical physical markers of age. As explained in the introduction to this study, western culture relies heavily on physical appearance "as the dominant signifier of old age" (Woodward, *Aging* 10). The man's appearance (toothless, white-haired) and the presumption of physical and mental disabilities, as well as the

⁵² While both identify a group based on age, the terms *generation* and a *cohort* are theoretically contested amongst sociologists of aging, a theoretical difference that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Hardy and Waite explain that the two concepts, in addition to the concept of a *life course*, "reflect intersections of age and history [and are] viewed as dimensions of social structure that mediate and reflect change" (3). For further discussion of these terms, including foundational texts, see *Studying Aging and Social Change: Conceptual and Methodological Issues*. Ed. Melissa A. Hardy. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997.

suggestion of poverty, are consistent with the representation of aging as decline and decrepitude, a ubiquitous narrative pattern that leads to a social devaluation of the elderly, according to aging studies scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette. The parable also fits another aging archetype: the old man resembles the elderly “heroic stoic,” implying, if not wisdom and experience, then at least fortitude and perseverance (Woodward, *Aging* 10). Thus, the elderly man functions as a static symbol; he provides no subjective interiority or experiential knowledge but for the revelation he engenders in the still young Siddhartha.

Although *The Coming of Age* is groundbreaking in its attention to the denigration of the elderly in society, Beauvoir’s depiction of the issue repeats some of the same ageist stereotypes and assumptions she otherwise criticizes. Kathleen Woodward argues that Beauvoir’s depiction of the aged in the treatise is itself based on fear, hence Beauvoir’s problematic formulation of age identification in the Siddhartha parable, which Woodward describes as “the identification of a younger person with an unnamed older person who, representing all older people, is cast as an object of pity, one miserable in all sense of the word (impoverished, alone, frail)...” (“Inventing” 156). Woodward argues that Beauvoir’s assumptions are faulty and her view of aging itself often sentimental or itself ageist; she uses one elderly individual to stand in for a homogenous, non-individualized class, one that is economically and politically disenfranchised, and presents aging itself as repugnant and unattractive. From our vantage point, this critique of Beauvoir is apposite and necessary, and more recent work in aging scholarship and within age advocacy groups has sought to unearth such lingering blind spots. Recently, *The Coming of Age* has begun to undergo a critical reinterpretation, with readers discovering a new philosophical richness in Beauvoir’s ambivalence about the aging process, once criticized as unduly pessimistic or “deficient” (Katz, “Simone”) in its age advocacy. Stephen Katz, for instance, locates Beauvoir’s work in a crucial

middle ground between gerontology and the humanities, celebrating the ways in which it precisely “does not fit” neatly into disciplinary categories of age studies.

This chapter will consider Beauvoir’s treatise as a significant historical marker of first wave anti-ageism advocacy, one poised just before the proliferation of the “Third Age” model of aging established older generations as enjoyers of good health, productive leisure, and economic and political agency. The occasionally troubling ambivalence in Beauvoir’s depiction of aging will be used to consider the changes underway in models of the life course in the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly as registered in the work of innovative English novelist Bryan Stanley Johnson. Where the previous chapter discussed the entrenchment of retirement and other models of aging in the postwar period, this chapter focuses on the beginning of a shift in conceptualizations of aging. In the ensuing decades, the state-based universalization of (the expectation of) retirement began to fragment. Andrew Blaikie summarizes this shift as follows: After the instatement of Beveridge’s welfare programs of the 1940s, “[t]here followed a period of consolidation [of retirement as mass experience] until the late 1960s. However, since then an increasing fragmentation has been evident, both as regards the time at which people leave work and the ways in which they spend their time thereafter” (*Ageing* 59-60). While this fragmentation means a larger plurality of age narratives and presentations of the aging self are available to those aging into old age, it also means a move away from social, state-sponsored support for later life to a model wherein the individual assumes the responsibility for aging “well.” Discussion of individual choice and agency in old age thus also means assuming a life-long management of risk. One result of this fragmentation is the creation of a “Third Age” model for later life, and, correspondingly the increasing projection of “true” old age (and thus a more reductively abject existence) into what has become known as the “Fourth Age.” According to Blaikie, the “Third

Agers” are driven by “the urge to remain forever youthful” (“Vision” 15) by remaining healthy, physically active, and productive (for instance, by being active consumers in a lifestyle-drive late modern society). The degree to which this model of later life is indeed “liberating” or equally available to all is, of course, under considerable debate. While this conceptual language does appear until at least a decade after Beauvoir’s and Johnson’s work, I agree that the ambivalent representation of old age in both authors’ works depicts the emergence of these underlying tensions.

Beauvoir’s Siddhartha parable itself also suggests the value of the *literary* in mediating this generational encounter between the young and the elderly man. After all, Siddhartha’s transformation is mediated through the presence and interpretive aid of a third figure: the charioteer, who acts as Siddhartha’s guide in both the physical and literary sense. In the story, Siddhartha requires the aid of his charioteer to understand the significance of what he sees: the charioteer “told him just what it meant to be old.” The chauffeur’s twinned functions in the parable ideologically connect anxieties about age to issues of labor (the charioteer is employed by Siddhartha) and to the hermeneutics of narrative. Likewise, this chapter suggests that B.S. Johnson’s representation of aging also requires the creative, authorial labor of a third party, a position somewhere between author, narrator, and interpreter or critic—a position often occupied in Johnson’s work by a deliberate amalgam of Johnson himself, as author, and the voice of a Johnson-like narrator.

Despite the problematically static nature of the aged figure, Beauvoir emphasizes the transformative potential of this kind of encounter, in which a younger party (inexperienced but malleable) encounters the older party (albeit a static, reified one), thereby awakening his age consciousness. The old-as-symbol or old-as-metaphor can be a useful tool in analyzing the

metaphysical implications and rhetorical power of age in understanding the human condition.⁵³

While aging is typically organized around principles of time, including chronological and biographical time, scholars of aging have found other suggestive ways to re-think our definitions of aging: Kathleen Woodward, for instance, has described the psychological formation of age consciousness using a predominately visual metaphor, a variation of the Lacanian “mirror stage.” Beauvoir, on the other hand, conspicuously uses *space* to organize the internalization of age consciousness: The public space of the encounter (the street) is contrasted with a skewed domestic/interior one, with the “dwelling-place” defining a future aging subjectivity as well as aging body.

In its narrative compression of time and space, Beauvoir’s parable of Siddhartha functions as a constrained example of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope. Literally meaning “time space,” Bakhtin’s term expresses “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Bakhtin’s initial formulation argues that the chronotope is a manifestation of literary genre. He traces a genealogy of generic narrative forms by means of chronotopic expression in order to show that chronotopes both assimilate (albeit imperfectly) and reflect historical change (85). Beauvoir’s Siddhartha parable echoes Bakhtin’s chronotope of the “road,” a literary compression of the time and place of a significant “encounter”: “On the road...the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people—representative of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages—intersect at one spatial and temporal point” (243-4). The temporal and spatial fusion of encounter on the road explains the metaphorical imagery (what we could also call a “conceptual metaphor”⁵⁴) of the road as a life or life course (244).

⁵³ See, for instance, Helen Small’s recent framing of old age as a philosophical limit of experience in *The Long Life*.

⁵⁴ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, and Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind*.

While the road chronotope explains the aphoristic quality of Beauvoir's tale and the important conceptual correlation between our experience of aging and the significance of time and place in dealing with alterity (as in the chance encounter with the aged Other), it also captures a sense of the materiality underlying this symbolic act. While Beauvoir does not make explicit the historical conditions for the young Siddhartha's new-found age consciousness, her parable is rooted in material references to labor, institutional space, and the body. However, gaining age consciousness requires more than a metaphoric appreciation for aging; age is rooted in the materiality of culture, time, space, and—in Johnson's case—text. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to examine the material bases of age-related chronotopes, noting how changing sociocultural models of aging impinge on the subjective experience of aging and the development of age consciousness. Furthermore, using Beauvoir's description of the aging self as a "future dwelling-place of old age," I argue that, in Johnson's work, such an act of age consciousness requires not only an exercise in imaginative and literary time travel to one's *own* aged future, but also to a future in with *old age* itself will be expressed differently. Johnson's work hints presciently at the problematic nature of these emerging models of late life.

"Little Old Lady"

This chapter historically unpacks Beauvoir's description of a Siddhartha as a "dwelling-place" of old age by examining the spaces of the old age "encounter" in the works of English author Bryan Stanley Johnson. It examines the specific materiality of aging hinted at in Beauvoir's parable, especially as it manifests in a chronotopic articulation of space in several of Johnson's prose works involving aging and old age. Working as a poet, novelist, journalist, scriptwriter, and TV and film director throughout the 1960s and until his tragic suicide in 1973 at

the age of 40, B. S. Johnson is perhaps best known for his dogmatic championing of formal innovation in literature as a form of “truth-telling.” As such, Johnson deliberately and sometimes aggressively incorporates himself (or an authorial self-projection) and his worldview into his prose works. The results are what Philip Tew describes as not only the “materially ludic qualities” (*B.S. Johnson* 54) of Johnson’s prose, but also a narrative responsiveness (phenomenological in nature) that is the result of this authorial presence.

Critical scholarship has focused heavily on Johnson’s stylistic and formal experimentation, his interest in representing mental processes and consciousness in writing, and on how these features of his work speak to his relationship to modernism (and, eventually, postmodernism), especially considering his very vocal championing of Beckett, Joyce, and those of his own contemporaries who likewise practiced a non-conventional narrative form or style. Philip Tew and Jonathan Coe have been particularly instrumental in advancing a more nuanced understanding of Johnson’s work, with Tew, for instance, arguing for Johnson’s tangential rather than merely belated or derivative relationship to modernism. To do so, for instance, both Tew and Nicholas Jones have interpreted the postcolonial critiques in Johnson’s work, with Tew demonstrating how Johnson uses a white, working-class masculine subjectivity to condemn practices of cultural prejudice in post-imperial Britain (“Otherness”), and Jones the admiration that Johnson felt for Welsh nationalism in the face of English colonial practice.

Both Tew and Coe, among others, emphasize Johnson’s interest in the potential of *space* to articulate not only his artistic and aesthetic projects but also his resistance to the authority of oppressive systems and power structures, which in Johnson’s view included contemporary literary institutions (including the BBC, according to Valerie Butler),⁵⁵ the British imperial

⁵⁵ In one example of Johnson’s contempt of the “establishment,” Valerie Butler explores Johnson’s relationship with the classically, conservatively British institution, the British Broadcasting Corporation. Johnson’s experimental,

enterprise, and capitalism-maintained class hierarchies. While this critical stance sometimes reads as self-obsession or solipsism, Tew argues that Johnson's "layered self-identifications" function alongside his rejection of conventional narrative form to create a material grounding for the "innate ontological truths" that Johnson's work attempts to capture ("Moving" 54; 55). It is no surprise that the first two issues of the *B. S. Johnson Journal* (recently published by the B. S. Johnson Society in 2014 and 2015) are organized around the topics of "institutions" and "materiality," respectively: these constitute the key problematic foci in Johnson's work (Darlington et al.).⁵⁶

Attention to the representation of old age and the elderly in Johnson's work has tended to be subsumed as part of this larger problematic, that is, Johnson's resistance to oppressive ideologies, and thus his sympathy with those marginalized, exploited figures who resist the attempts of authority to impose ontological or epistemological "order," or curb the expression of personal truths. Alternatively, Johnson's representation of aging has been read in light of his early death, as a metaphor for his psychological and artistic exhaustion (McGeough 141), or else it has been dismissed or undertheorized as an idiosyncratic quirk, as simply part of what Coe refers to as Johnson's "frequently expressed horror of the ageing process" (75).⁵⁷

innovative, and often socially critical writing not only irritated literary scholars and critics, but also unsettled the BBC, which was in the 1950s and 60s a key media presence with multiple radio channels and television stations (117). Though the BBC offered Johnson a chance to share his work on the air, their working relationship "was destined to be a volatile one" (117). According to Butler, the BBC objected to Johnson's desire to export his style of experimental literature to mainstream audiences. The fate of *House Mother Normal* provides a good example: "*House Mother Normal*...set in a residential home, explores dementia, cancer, sexual perversion, cruelty and exploitation of the elderly. This was considered too contentious and the Head of Radio Three withdrew his interest in broadcasting the 1971 novel as a radio play" (118). It is clear from this example that Johnson's brush with "institutions"—at least culture institutions like the BBC—was a difficult one, since he often found himself at odds with their more conservative artistic and political visions.

⁵⁶ According to Tew, this represents one of Johnson's divergences from Samuel Beckett; Beckett was interested in the interpellation of the subject in language, where Johnson is more interested in the particularities of space and place (*B. S. Johnson* 148-9).

⁵⁷ Coe uses this phrase to contrast Johnson's "horror" of aging with his own (Coe's) visits, decades later, to Johnson's friend Joyce Yates.

It is ostensibly the case that Johnson frequently expresses such horror, akin to what Julia Kristeva calls the abject, in his representation of elderly figures. In the following poem “Little Old Lady,” published in *Poems Two* (1972), near the end of Johnson’s career, the woman’s aging body demonstrates how the physical and physiological changes that come with senescence are interpreted and diminished socially and culturally as moral losses of agency, and abjection.

Buffalo-humped, bent, next to no muscle
substance on any limb, her face pale where
it is not grey-yellowed at the temples,
sunken where it is not puffy under
the eyes; her step hammertoe, hesitant:
even a trivial fall may snap off
the frail neck of a femur; no eyebrows,
hair sparse except on upper lip and chin;
her skin with unsuntanned sunspots, her pulse
slow and temperature low, the genital
tract become bloodless, unmoist, atrophic,
her eardrums are in retraction, a sluice
of cataracts lapses before her eyes;
she is querulous, forgetful, unclean,
distressing to others; and to herself.
...*Well done God!*

The poem demonstrates Stephen Katz’s dictum that in western culture, aging is understood principally in terms of the deterioration of the aging *body*, wherein “physical aging appears to represent the deepest, most natural and most obvious truth about what it means to age” (“Hold” 187). The twentieth century, especially the postwar decades, saw the establishment of gerontology as a medical science, and much of Johnson’s poem speaks in this biogerontological voice of the physiological deteriorations of body cells and systems, though these observations are also part of the normalized western “truth” of aging, as Katz notes. These changes include muscle and bone loss, metabolic changes to the lens of the eye leading to cataracts, histological changes to skin tissue, as well as changes to cognitive processes such as memory (de Magalhaes

21; Rafuse and Kelly 407; Wulf 1077). The poem's conventional meter, atypical for Johnson, enforces its uncompromising ageist gaze, just as the alliteration and asyndeton emphasize the clinical and foreboding nature of the litany of descriptions, with their focus on aging as loss (sunken, frail, sparse) and lack (no muscle, no eyebrows).

Johnson's initially clinical-sounding descriptions take on social and cultural valences toward the end of the poem. When in the penultimate line the poem's gaze turns from the body to the person, the effect is of Johnson proving an argument or scoring a point: "Unclean" suggests that the woman's present condition signals a moral failure and thus a social burden. Indeed, sociologists Christopher Gilleard and Paul Higgs suggest that implied lack of control compounds the problem of objectification of the elderly; lacking attention to proper performance of everyday tasks is a signifier of the "failure of intent," whereupon the "[social] agency and hence the orderliness of the person is questioned" ("Ageing Abjection" 139). Following Kristeva, Gilleard and Higgs understand abjection as the "individual failure to manage one's own corporeal boundaries and the resulting failure to sustain the distinction between oneself as subject and oneself as object" (135). As the elderly woman's body breaks down its former barriers and orderly physical functions (the "sluice" of cataracts, for instance), she becomes an object of horror, "distressing" to others, abject. This abjection is then internalized, creating the "split subject" who rejects her own aging body.

The poem's end line acknowledges the troubling nature of such objectification and abjection of aging. Unlike the other examples of Johnson's work examined in this chapter, "Little Old Lady" has no spatial component. The woman exists—nowhere. As a result, the poem's view of aging is limited to the aging body, instead of, as Katz suggests it should be, the "*materiality of embodied aging*; that is, the inseparability of the physical realities of aging from

their lived material context” (“Hold” 191). Focusing our attention to embodied aging rather than aging bodies would lend a more sympathetic perspective to how or why the elderly woman is “unclean.” Instead of resorting to an immediate moral rejection, we could ask, for instance, what resources the woman could use to help her perform the activities of daily living, such as caregiver assistance. Katz also urges us to examine the assumptions made in objectifying aging bodies. Even the woman’s fear of falling rests partly on gendered constructions of aging, wherein women’s bodies are portrayed as more frail and vulnerable than men’s.⁵⁸ Even if women do suffer from falls more often, Katz claims, “this is also a social consequence of the embodiment of asymmetrical gender relations and the cultural bias that depicts female physical strength as unfeminine and older female frailty as natural” (197). Normalized gender depictions factor significantly into Johnson’s representation of aging; unlike this poem, many of the texts analyzed in this chapter assume an aging male subjectivity.

Johnson’s concluding exclamation, “Well done God!”, partially recovers “Little Old Lady” from what seems like a mere rehearsal of biogerontological objectification and social abjection. Johnson sardonically voices his frustration with these prevailing ideologies, but the vagueness of the exclamation’s direction neither entirely negates them nor suggests an alternative. Other works of Johnson’s, however, paint a clearer picture, though Johnson’s struggle to express the nature of aging is never fully resolved. I understand Johnson’s ambivalence about the aging process to be expressing considerable foresight about the fragmentation of age identity that was emerging during the 1960s and early 1970s, that is, the period of both Johnson’s most prolific work and the publication of Beauvoir’s *The Coming of*

⁵⁸ The concept of “frailty” as used in biomedical and gerontological research has come under scrutiny in recent years for its collapsing of physical vulnerability and lack of social agency. See, for instance, Amanda Grenier, “Constructions of Frailty in the English Language, Care Practice and the Lived Experience,” and Paul Higgs and Chris Gilleard, “Frailty, Abjection and the ‘Othering’ of the Fourth Age.”

Age. Johnson views aging in part as a generational conflict with a newly consolidated elderly cohort, and struggles in grappling with, in Beauvoir's terms, the "unrealizable" alterity of himself as a future-elderly person. One way to understand this ambivalence is to locate its origins in the newly emergent expectations of a "Third Age" or "young-old" model of late life, which emphasized the continuation of health and productivity. Simon Biggs argues that one potential impediment to the act of recognition between the aging Self and the elderly Other (the Siddhartha encounter) is not the absence of commonality but its overabundance. One consequence of the "life course blurring" that has taken place in the last few decades (itself stemming from a fear of old age) is that there appears to be "at least on the surface, less that is distinctive about later life itself (111). He argues that the social impulse to treat late life (and the elderly) as not qualitatively different than the young or middle-aged, while seemingly a liberating move of "age-blindness," in fact weakens inter-generational empathy and understanding under the auspices of "a masquerade of sameness" (115), ultimately exacerbating ageism and cultural devaluation of the elderly. Using examples from two of Johnson's shorter prose works from his 1973 collection *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973) as well as his longer 1971 novel *House Mother Normal*, this chapter examines the nature and consequences of this historical shift in its discussion of three specific articulations of space in Johnson's work: coastal retirement communities, architecture, and residential care homes.

More broadly, B. S. Johnson's work enacts a broader twentieth-century problematic of aging. This problematic, discussed in more detail in the introduction, contrasts the century-long tendency to treat aging "objectively," as a problem to be managed by science, medicine, and social and governmental policies, with the more recent interest in capturing the subjective experience of aging and the expression of age identity. Blaikie characterizes "age consciousness"

as capturing the inherent tension of this problematic, the subjective experience of this “objective” biomedical and governmental management: “Age consciousness was brought about through the administrative classification of older people which created an enhanced awareness of stigma. It is thus a form of self-consciousness” (65). Johnson demonstrates the ambivalence at the heart of this age consciousness; he is critical of the pathologization of aging and the elderly and of their marginalization, yet simultaneously quite personally anxious about the physical and psychological effects of bodily decay (his friend Tony Tillinghurst’s illness and subsequent death from cancer are depicted in *The Unfortunates*).⁵⁹

While Johnson’s “encounter” with old age (like Beauvoir’s) never easily transforms the subject, or unequivocally rejects characterizations of old age as abject, it nonetheless reveals an urge to make space for art, authorship, and the creative process as an integral (though fraught) part of aging. Johnson’s fraught depiction of aging and the elderly is central to the tension in his projects between aesthetic style and realistic depiction. On the one hand, institutionalized models of aging (especially regarding retirement) create anxiety about the potential for rewarding creative work and what he felt was an artistic gap between himself and many of his more “conventional” contemporaries. Johnson’s dedication to formal innovation and a “truthful” authorial stance, coupled with his frequent discussion of modernists he admired, frequently result in a comparison to modernism. He believed, however, that his “unfashionable” authorial stance, along with his working-class roots, put him at odds with the literary establishment and publishing industry, and thus he felt that he never reached the heights of authorial fame that he desired. I argue that Johnson uses his spatial representation of aging and old age to re-define his artistic purpose and his relationship with the literary world, including what might be called his

⁵⁹ In his biography, Coe includes this extract from Johnson’s diary from 1954: “Once I saw an old man in a public lavatory his raincoat being buttoned up by a small boy. He was helpless. His useless arms swung from his shoulders and on his face was an expression of mingled sadness, regret, shame and pathos” (64).

modernist predecessors. The generational encounter between a younger individual and an elderly cohort functions in Johnson's work as a generational confrontation between his own work and the modernists which he admired.

Bakhtin's literary theory indicates that such an authorial place-setting inheres in the very nature of the chronotope. While initially strictly literary, Bakhtin expands his theorization of the chronotope to include a socio-historical sense of the author and textual artifact:

[From] what temporal and spatial point of view does the author look up on the events that he describes? In the first place, he does his observing from his own unresolved and still moving contemporaneity, in all its complexity and fullness, insofar as he himself is located as it were tangentially to the reality he describes. That contemporaneity from which the author observes includes first and foremost, the realm of literature—and not only contemporary literature in the strict sense of the word, but also the literature of the past that continues to live and renew itself in the present. (255)

Bakhtin suggests that we look beyond the literary metaphor to its material bases and possibilities, including those of the author.⁶⁰ Johnson's ambivalent but self-conscious relationship with modernism, as well as the ubiquitous quasi-autobiographical elements in his prose work, confirm what Bakhtin calls the "dialogical character" (256) between text, author, culture, and space.

Whereas Beauvoir's *Siddhartha* parable hints at this phenomenon, Johnson provides us with a fascinating case study of aging in the late 1960s and early 1970s: an author and a culture caught at a point of transition between a homogenizing, reifying definition of aging that equates retirement with the "end," and, on the other hand, an emerging model of aging that is, though not

⁶⁰ For a discussion of this reading of Bakhtin, see Tara Collington, "Space, Time and Narrative: Bakhtin and Ricoeur."

“better,” nonetheless decidedly more fragmented, increasingly reflecting the plurality of postmodern identities and the rhythms of globalization, late capitalism, and neo-liberalism.

Aging Geographies

In its examination of spatial representations of the aging process, this project participates in the wider critical re-thinking of space and geography within the humanities and social theory. This “spatial turn” of the past several decades follows the twentieth-century “reassertion of space into modern consciousness” (3), after what Warf and Arias argue was the privileging of time (as in indicator of historical progress) in the nineteenth century. A critical examination of space has become increasingly important as globalization accelerates the movement of money, information, and people around the world. Scholars in various fields have begun to use critical geography to understand not only the role of space in fluctuating power dynamics, economic flows, and social movements and structures, but also its use as an analytical tool in understanding cultural history and even constructions of identity and subjectivity (Warf and Arias 6). In seeking to complicate our notions and uses of space, geographer Doreen Massey uncovers some of the related assumptions we make in defining this term. Time and space, Massey says, are defined in relation to one another as binary foils, with time being “the nodal point, the privileged signifier” (257); time is aligned with history, progress, civilization, politics and transcendence and coded masculine, while space is static (“the dimension precisely where nothing ‘happened’”) and, thus, in the traditions of western thought, has been coded feminine (3; 6).

In recent decades, literary scholarship has sought to overturn this binary, and has shown a reinvigorated interest in concepts of space, including such variations as place, cartography, topology, landscape, setting, region, nation, and architecture, as they pertain to literary texts and

the practices of interpretation and reading. Used as “both a framing topic and an analytical tool” (D. James 2), literary applications of critical geography include studying its thematization and aesthetic role in literature, spatially interpreting or “mapping” narrative or generic patterns, and examining the text itself as artifact/object-in-space (Alexander 5).

Space has increasingly been of theoretical use for the study of modernist and twentieth-century literary history, and how the thematization and aestheticization of space relates to the modernist project or to an author’s connection with modernism’s legacy, including its prioritization of formal experimentation. Space has also been of interest to those examining the literary context of colonization and its aftermath,⁶¹ and to the representation of interiority, consciousness, and cognitive processes such as memory and attention (In his reading of *Child in Time*, for instance, David James demonstrates how Ian McEwan emphasizes the process of perception as a spatial phenomenon [10]).

B. S. Johnson and Space

Johnson’s work is singularly fixated on space, both thematically and in his attention to his texts as material artifacts. He is perhaps best known in critical circles today for his commitment to formal innovation, and, relatedly, advocating strongly for Beckett’s and Joyce’s work, as well as more contemporary “experimental” authors such as Ann Quin and Eva Figs. For Johnson, formal innovation often manifested as hybrid genres and in unusual formal and typographical devices. In his second novel, *Albert Angelo* (1964), for instance, small boxes are cut out of certain pages to show the text that appeared several pages later, a device Johnson used to break down traditional narrative chronology. Other texts use the potential of space as a

⁶¹ In addition to the brief forays into Welsh nationalism *House Mother Normal*, B. S. Johnson’s posthumously published *See the Old Lady Decently* (1975) is his most concentrated and direct critique of British colonial history.

narrative conceit; *See the Old Lady Decently*, Johnson's last work and the first in a planned trilogy, intersperses fragmented narratives about his mother as well as more allegorical representation of motherhood, alongside descriptions of where Johnson is when composing the text.

Johnson believed that his attitude made his work less palatable to what he considered the conservative, conventional literary and publishing worlds. This dedication was also central to Johnson's sense of authorial identity and authenticity, for he considered his artistic work to be a form of truth-telling, and conventional narrative to be, conversely, an aesthetic simplification equivalent to lying; as he writes in the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, "Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random." Thus, he posits, "Telling stories really is telling lies" (14). In pursuit of this narrative purity, his work not only contains many autobiographical elements but also often deliberately avoids conventional plot, character-development, and narrative form. His novels attempt to find other formal representations of life's chaos and contingency: His most formally innovative novel, *The Unfortunates*, is not bound in the conventional sense. Instead, small sections of the book are bound and then inserted randomly into a box, so that the novel can be read in any order.

In an important critical evaluation of B. S. Johnson, Philip Tew argues for the centrality of space both thematically and typographically to Johnson's work; for Tew, Johnson's use of "spatial concepts and [his] use of architectural motifs demonstrates the inscription of powers upon a culture, the appropriation of naming by royal and privileged discourses, the hegemony of the familiar" (*B. S. Johnson* 54). Thus, the disruption of space in Johnson's texts represents the compulsion of a consciousness trying to break free of the conventions and institutions that shape and articulate power relations, while simultaneously recognizing how these relations—embedded

as they are in physical reality and the material world—reciprocally structure that consciousness. For instance, in his analysis of Johnson’s novel *Trawl*, Tew argues that despite Johnson’s insistence that the novel represents the workings of the subconscious and of his mind,⁶² the novel in fact shows the effects of the physical environment on mental processes, wherein “the somatic and violent realities of noise and seasickness engage and hijack the narrative flow” (B. S. Johnson 30).

For Tew, Johnson’s interest in representing the “truth” of subjectivity, and its “embeddedness in being and history” (B. S. Johnson 104) is complicated by confrontation with alterity, “a consciousness of a potentially intersubjective presence. Johnson chronicles things, actions, events and surroundings as if circling the interrogative presence of these apparently impenetrable subjects” (97). I argue that, for Johnson, aging subjects present just such “impenetrable subjects,” and old age what Beauvoir calls (and demonstrates in the Siddhartha parable) the “unrealizable” object outside self. Johnson’s anxieties about aging, exacerbated by his discomfort with bodily decay and mortality, are nonetheless in conflict with his deeper commitment to reconcile with this alterity and to dismantle the social policies, conventions, and institutions that marginalize segments of the population, including the elderly.

Age and the Seaside

In 1969, B. S. Johnson wrote a short travelogue entitled, in his typically epigrammatic way, “What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?”. The piece was written in 1969 and appeared in the last of Johnson’s works to be published during his lifetime, in *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), a collection of generically hybrid short prose pieces (some

⁶² In his introductory manifesto to *Aren’t You Rather Young*, Johnson describes *Trawl* as an interior monologue representing “the inside of my mind but at one stage removed” in which the sea and the fishing net—this was a voyage Johnson actually undertook—provide a metaphor for the subconscious mind (23).

essays, others resembling short stories) written between 1960 and 1970. The title's reference to mortality is typical for Johnson but particularly poignant here, for the collection was published just months before Johnson's death in 1973. In "What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?" Johnson describes a visit to the coastal resort town of Bournemouth in which he emphasizes the town's significant retired population. Writing in a quasi-autographical first person, Johnson describes the psychological effect of the elderly population and the space of the retirement community.

Johnson uses space as his dominant image and narrative structure throughout "What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?". The work's hybrid genre structure invites autobiographical reading, for Johnson intersperses his observations of the city with memories of childhood and youthful romances, as well of his earlier writing projects. He begins the piece with a journalistic, objective description of time and place, ("Bournemouth. / A mild morning in early May" (53)), but space is the dominant organizing principle. His movement through the city is implied rather than stated; instead, Bournemouth looks to his eyes as if organized by the needs and values of its elderly population. For instance, when describing the town's public gardens, he not only reinforces the centrality of the elderly to this community's physical organization, but also imbues local spaces with a sense of history and specificity: "The public gardens that run north from the pier seem / especially organized for the benefit of the old: being the / floor of a small valley or chine, the local word, Wessex / word, perhaps, chine, running greenly back..." (54). The public gardens, like other spaces in Bournemouth, demonstrate the reciprocal ontology of space and social relations.

Johnson narrates his experience in Bournemouth as one of a dawning realization that the city functions predominately as a retirement community: "...suddenly I am aware that most of

the people around are getting on, indeed have got on, are old, retired, retire to Bournemouth, for the mildness, the climate, the comfort, for reasons of their own” (54). Johnson uses his personal observations as a springboard into the larger social phenomenon being enacted around him. In speculating about the reasons for its citizens’ choice of Bournemouth for retirement, Johnson is echoing contemporary social research conducted on this very question. While the shift in preference for coastal resorts over inland spa towns (such as Bath) began in the mid-eighteenth century, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that these coastal towns saw a substantial growth in elderly populations (Blaikie, *Ageing* 160-61), as opposed to being predominately tailored to family holidays. Blaikie argues that this trend began in the middle of the century and accelerated in the 1970s, as life expectancies climbed, families chose holidays abroad over domestic coastal resorts, and retirement became normalized as part of the life course (and thus the need for retirement planning, including considering independent living options became more pronounced). The following statistic illustrates this growth, for instance: “[b]y 1981, ten south coast districts had elderly populations of over 30 per cent, compared with a national average of 18 per cent” (*Ageing* 161).

In a study conducted in the early 1970s of retirement migration, and particularly of the British retirement to the seaside, Valerie Kern examines the means, motivations, and experiences of the burgeoning retirement communities in England’s and Wales’s coastal towns in an effort to both analyze and anticipate retirement migration patterns. Her analysis of the census data suggests that financial and familial independence factor into the retirement populations of coastal communities; those who retire to the seaside, in general, tend to be more financially stable, coming often from the professional or managerial classes, and either have no children or relatively fewer children than the national average (34; 41). In both Kern’s study and Johnson’s

essay, we see the late 1960s and early 1970s as an interesting moment in the sociological history of aging and in the phenomenon of retirement. Kern's explanations for the popularity of coastal resorts is consistent with the emergence of a newly leisured, relatively healthy and well-off retirement cohort. The institutionalization of compulsory retirement in the previous two decades, along with increased life expectancy, means that, in short: "there are not only more old people now, there are also more of them in a financial position to live separately from their families. Also a longer period of retirement provides more incentive to make special plans not just for a few 'winding down' years...but for a substantial period of one's active lifetime" (15). While Kern's study emphasizes the domestic activities of these retirees, Johnson, in focusing on the public spaces, is more attuned to the importance of these retiree cohorts in commodity-driven economies. His long lists of the groceries, "the traditional bourgeois goodies" (57) that are tailored to the health-conscious retirement community, look ahead to the increasing relevance of consumer culture in defining contemporary retirement cohorts. In fact, the first interaction in the story is of consumption, wherein Johnson purchases a pair of sunglasses from "Two old men running, slowly, a newsagency" (53), establishing that, while in this earlier instance the power of consumption is Johnson's, all parties relate to one another within the confines of consumer culture. These retirees demonstrate a collective social agency and burgeoning economic power that the abject "Little Old Lady," alone and representationally isolated, is denied. Furthermore, that agency is tied closely to the retirees' appropriation of Bournemouth and the city's reciprocal accommodation of them.

Johnson's Bournemouth story and Kern's sociological study demonstrate the phenomenon of the late 60s, early 70s of a new cohort of pensioners. Yet they both also reach further back, to ideologies of English identity and models of "good" aging based on Victorian

morality. One reason for choosing seaside retirement communities, Kern argues in her 1970s study, is that it “can be regarded as a compromise between urban and country living,” featuring the health and wholesomeness of the country and the convenience of the city (25). Yet Kern’s evidence rests on an implicit model of Englishness when she argues that “This compromise nicely solves the dilemma of the English, who romanticize the country but do not really want to live there permanently” (24). When Kern assumes such a fundamental connection between *space* and English identity,⁶³ she reinforces another long-standing representational convention, that of the elderly as safeguards or enforcers of traditional English identity. The space of the seaside reinforces this convention. Retirement seaside communities are inheritors of what Andrew Blaikie calls Britain’s “maritime heritage,” a convention reaching back to the Victorians, who valorized the elderly inhabitants of fishing villages as protectors of family life, virtuous living, and, in general, “an older moral world distinct from the sins of the city” (150). The seaside’s positive moral qualities, as embodied by its elderly residents, were coupled with the promotion of the seaside as healthy, wholesome, and restorative.

Though the representations of the elderly on the seaside have never been uniformly positive,⁶⁴ Blaikie argues that this Victorian-flavored nostalgia plays a significant role in the choice of the seaside for those (typically relatively well-off) who choose to retire there. The lingering effect of the “heritage process” is significant because, as Blaikie writes, “the creation of the past as a commodity has much to do with tapping the desires of its consumers” (*Ageing* 160). Johnson’s “What Did You Say” describes Bournemouth’s architecture as performing the same function of merging nostalgia with commodity culture; he writes that buildings’ 1920s-30s architecture “seems to serve nostalgic purposes for the retired, recalling the period of the Savoy,

⁶³ For a thorough analysis of this phenomenon, see Ian Baucom, *Out of Place*.

⁶⁴ As one example, Blaikie points to “saucy postcards” of the 1920s and 30s meant to humorously depict older seabathers (*Ageing* 156).

old ladies in touch again with the pleasures (or perhaps what they saw from a distance as the pleasures) of their youths: it means something that they again have them, although once more at a distance, ironically at a another remove” (59). Here, the nostalgia is justified; elsewhere, however, Johnson is critical of what he considers a false or inauthentic exploitation of nostalgia, as in the London Hilton, in its imitation of older building styles, or as in Bournemouth’s public gardens, which, in “parodying the countryside” (54), exploit and romanticize the relationship between English identity and landscape. In Johnson’s eyes, what unites this retired community is a commitment to national identity even over class identity, though the latter does begin to intercede. In observing a group of ladies at the theater who all “stand for the Queen,” he begins to suspect that his initial impression of the uniform financial prosperity of this community is incorrect, and that “perhaps they are not all well-to-do, perhaps they are just ordinary, perhaps there are also homes for the less-well-off” (60). In revising what he initially perceives as the retirement community’s economic coherence, Johnson performs a necessary self-correction: inequalities exist within generational cohorts, and, as sociologists have found, they accumulate during the life course (Dannefer and Miklowski 33).

Yet Johnson complicates Bournemouth’s ideological connection of the elderly as bastions of English identity by showing how the retirement community depends heavily on global flows of capital and labor. Age scholars have increasingly begun to discuss the impact of globalization and late modernity in defining late life; of course, while these impacts are still not completely clear, Chris Phillipson cautions that “there will be losers and winners in this process” (“Ageing” 206) of globalized aging. Johnson, for instance, criticizes the consumerist excess and exploitation of the working-class and working artists. After describing the places and old people of the city, Johnson ends by gesturing outward, away from local specificity to growing

globalization: “It has come to the point where there is no such thing / as a local specialty in the exclusive sense: for everything / is available everywhere, flown in that morning / from anywhere, with the dew and the bacteria and / insects still on it” (62). Importantly, these goods and services are often sourced from Britain’s former colonies: “...this comfort-station for the elderly, is ironically serviced by foreigners the Irish..., the West Indian nurses, the Chinese and Indians with their restaurants, and the hotel restaurants run by Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians” (62). In this, Johnson’s view of retirement migration and models of aging is remarkably prescient, indicting not only a British neo-colonialist attitude, but, even more importantly, implicating its role in contemporary aging. Johnson also forecasts the spatial expansion of aging, beyond the local and English (as constructed by the postwar welfare programs) and toward the global consumer market. This, argues geographer Doreen Massey, is the essence of the spatial. Massey urges us to understand “the spatial,” not as fixed or static but as

constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. It is a way of thinking in terms of the ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations. (4)

This complex understanding of the nature of space is consistent with Johnson’s depiction of the elderly in Bournemouth in “What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?”. The specificity and link with history that characterized the public gardens is dispersed and diluted. The “comfort-station for the elderly,” with its nostalgia and presumption of permanence and stasis, turns out to be the opposite: it is a fluid, dynamic social space pulsing with the changing dynamics of globalization. This change is consistent with what Phillipson argues is the twentieth-

century shift in aging, from a period that saw “growing old as reinforcement of national identity and citizenship,” to a newly emergent phase, under globalization, where “belonging and identity is becoming detached from particular places” (“Ageing” 206). Johnson’s Bournemouth is in the process of enacting this shift.

Age Anxiety at the Seaside

Despite its recognition of the emergence of a globalized age identity, Johnson’s description of the elderly population of the town is fraught with anxieties about becoming old, personal anxieties that are also sublimated social fears of an aging population. Demographic “panic” about the aging of the population is often accompanied by descriptions of the elderly as “burdens” on social and economic resources. While Johnson’s essay and Kern’s sociological study demonstrate the increasing visibility of the elderly as established cohorts, they both simultaneously register anxiety about the social consequences of retirement communities. Kern’s study questions the availability of social and medical services (hospital beds, doctors and nurses, even housing) necessary to cater to a higher-than-average elderly population of seaside retirement communities, especially those with lower-income retirees. She concludes that retirement communities need better health and social services, which local authorities will be pressured to provide (215).

Rather than assigning blame, however, Kern’s conclusion stresses practical re-distribution of resources and is admirably aware that such panicked rhetoric is often the result of ageist attitudes rather than the realities of economic “burdens” created by retirees. In fact, she acknowledges (and then immediately debunks) the “bad publicity” that retirement communities have generated: “Commentators have seemed only too anxious to seize on the idea that the

majority of people who move regret doing so and become lonely and unhappy” (238). Her analysis proves, on the contrary, that although some retirees voice some dissatisfaction in aspects of everyday life in these retirement communities, most were happy with their decisions. Her chief insight is to discredit these claims of dissatisfaction as stemming “from the fear of the young and middle aged of confronting so inescapably the prospect of old age and death” (238), that is, from ageist stereotypes and age anxieties rather than from retirees themselves.

Despite its nuanced observations of the retirement community of Bournemouth, Johnson’s essay exhibits evidence of many of these same age anxieties. The Bournemouth piece concludes with a metafictional maneuver that Johnson deploys fairly frequently, wherein the voice of the author breaks the narrative frame and establishes its existence and its residency in the text. (The “Well done God!” exclamation at the end of “Little Old Lady” likewise uses this technique, and it also occurs prominently *House Mother Normal*). He deploys this technique perhaps more spectacularly in his earlier novel *Albert Angelo*, where the third-person narration abruptly becomes the voice of Johnson himself, who, in an “almighty aposiopesis” declares “fuck all this lying” and decries his novelist creation (167).

The aposiopesis in “What Did You Say...” occurs in the last lines, though it is shorter and less violent than that in *Albert Angelo*. The piece concludes with Johnson rejecting a subjective connection with the elderly residents and with himself as an aging subject. What has been up to this point a Johnson-like narrator becomes Johnson the author, who interrupts the reflection on the Bournemouth community with an expression of his own anxiety and exhaustion, concluding the piece as follows: “I grow tired, my mind coasts. I retire, move towards sleep, am only tired, not retired, / very pleased to have work in me yet” (62). The multi-directional “coasts” associates the place of the retirement community and its leisurely pace of life with a mental

exhaustion, or at least inattention, which Johnson in turn associates with the end of consciousness, both sleep and death.

In creating a binary between retirement and meaningful artistic labor, Johnson's affirmation of work is couched in terms of a denial of the kind of retirement model on evidence here in Bournemouth. It also speaks to wider social anxiety about aging demographics and a vicious internalization of ageist attitudes of the elderly as a drain or burden, wherein "retirement" is figured as the end of productivity and meaningful purpose. According to Beauvoir's analysis of ageism, a still-young member of society views the older person as "defined by an *exis*, not by a *praxis*: a being, not a doing" (217), and thus fails to connect with him and to internalize the fact of his own aging. "That is why he [an old man] looks to active members of the community like one of a 'different species,' one in whom they do not recognize themselves" (217). Johnson's rejection of the retired at the end of "What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?" enacts this very failure of recognition. Johnson contrasts the inactivity of retirement with his own desire and willingness to continue performing work—particularly *creative* work. Active work becomes a means of staving off the anxieties of becoming old.

However, Johnson's seeming rejection of retirement at the end of the Bournemouth piece in fact identifies him as part of the incipient Third Age model of aging. Even as Johnson recognizes and critiques the role of lifestyle consumerism at work in thinking of post-working life, he participates in its generational denial of true old age. Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs argue that this rejection of agedness is part of the history of this ideology, resulting from a postwar rise of youth culture as well as a rejection of war-time generations: "The third age draws much of its dynamic from this 'generational schism,' which was presented publicly and privately as a break with the 'older' pre-war generation and which created a reluctance to identify with that which

was ‘old’ or ‘aged’” (“Aging” 122). Part of this refusal to identify with true “old age” also manifests as, ironically, a renewed impulse to remain “productive” even after retirement (even indirectly, through economic consumption or “staying healthy”), an effect of the “continuing hegemony of the work ethic” that imposes a “moral and motivational bind” on the elderly (Blaikie, “Visions” 14). Thus in demanding greater freedom of choice and agency when growing older and in rejecting the equation of post-working life with loss of creativity and productivity, Johnson demonstrates that he participates ambivalently in an emerging “young-old” identity structure—even as he is remarkably prescient about and suspicious of the consumerist neo-imperial route that this structure would take.

Johnson’s “encounter” with the residents of Bournemouth is only partially transformative. While he rejects the internalization of his own aging at the very end of the piece, other aspects of the text are testimony to how Bournemouth’s retirement community challenges Johnson’s sense of self and changes his perspective. The space of the city, organized by its elderly inhabitants, loops back to influence Johnson himself. He writes, mid-way through the essay, “But I begin to impose, to see / nothing but the aged in Bournemouth, perhaps quite wrongly, yet they are there, begin to dominate my / thinking about the place, I only record what I see, what / happens, how I feel” (56). Johnson depicts the authorial process as inherently contradictory, in keeping with the tone of the piece, which slides between the autobiographical and the journalistic. On the one hand, he desires to report with journalistic objectivity his sensory perceptions and affective responses—particularly ironic as that requires removing affect from the realm of purely subjective experience. On the other hand, he recognizes that the presence of the elderly population skews those responses and his objective performance.

As a manifesto of his authorial principles, the introductory essay of the *Aren't You Rather Young* collection reiterates Johnson's firm belief—which he considered polarizing and essential to his sense of authorial identity—in the mendacity of fiction, and his commitment to telling the truth in novel form. “I am not interested in telling lies in my own novels” (14) is Johnson's central theme and the key theoretical core of all of his works. Although the Johnson of “I only record what I see” strives to uphold his commitment to telling the truth in fiction, his earlier statement belies his objectivity. Bournemouth's elderly residents have already influenced what he sees and thinks, despite his protestations to the contrary; the act of observing changes the observer. Johnson's ambivalent positioning vis a vis aging in the Bournemouth essay is thus part of his working through of this theory of fiction, to render faithfully a constantly moving and evolving target.

This feedback loop between the spaces of the city, its elderly population, and Johnson as author/observer exemplify space as defined by geographer David Harvey. Old age functions in Johnson's “What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?” as *relational space*, the third type of Harvey's tripartite definition of space, the first being *absolute* Euclidian space, and the second being *relative* space. Relational space, according to Harvey, “holds there is no such thing as space or time outside of the processes that define them...the concept of space is embedded in or internal to process. This very formulation implies that, as in the case of relative space, it is impossible to disentangle space from time” (273). As Harvey indicates, the three types of spaces are not mutually exclusive, and indeed we can see all three operating in Johnson's essay. The town of Bournemouth functions as an absolute space, represented on a map; the author bears a relative relationship both to the town and its inhabitants by virtue of being an observer of them. As Kern notes in her study of seaside towns, as these places became more prominently populated

by retirees, “the character of the town’s commercial and social life begins to reflect this role” (1). But the presence of Johnson—or his authorial self-projection—adds an additional dimension to this picture.

The concept of relationship space is useful in not only examining Johnson’s ideas about aging but in encapsulating in general the complexity of thinking old age in the twentieth century. For one, as Harvey indicates, relational space is useful in discussing the political role of collective memories; it is a concept that contains multitudes but also allows for individual activity and identity. Furthermore, thinking about old age in this way already automatically incorporates the idea of “process.” Space, as Harvey explains, “is embedded in or internal to process”; therefore, “it is impossible to disentangle space from time” (273). Considering aging as a process is an important insight in recent scholarship in aging studies, as it emphasizes a gradual becoming that allows us to account for individual subjective experience, but it is not until *House Mother Normal* that Johnson attempts to explore aging subjectivity more explicitly.

Architecture and Work

Johnson identified with architecture as demonstrating the endeavors of authorship.⁶⁵ He clarifies this relationship in the introduction to *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs*: “The architects can teach us something: their aesthetic / problems are combined with functional ones in a way / that dramatizes the crucial nature of their final actions” (16). Johnson relies on architecture as a metaphor to explain his theories about the novel form: “Subject matter

⁶⁵ For instance, Johnson’s admired and created a film about the work of “New Brutalist” architects Peter and Alison Smithson. Johnson admired the Smithsons for overcoming “‘a multiple problem: not only to overcome the opposition of reactionaries to a previous generation, but also to have ideas accepted which are an extension and development of those of that generation’” (qtd. in Coe 202). Jonathan Coe sees in Johnson’s analysis and admiration of the Smithson’s work a reflection of Johnson’s own position vis a vis the 1960s British literary scene (Coe 202).

is everywhere, general, is brick, concrete, / plastic; the ways of putting it together are particular, / are crucial” (16). Johnson particularly admired the type of architecture that openly showed the materials of which it was constructed (Coe 299), and this aesthetic philosophy carries over into his writing style. (In the posthumously published *See the Old Lady Decently*, for instance, he interrupts certain sections of the nominative narrative with descriptions of where he happens to be writing at the time.) He explains that his “experimental” writing is the result of finding the appropriate form to serve his particular truth-telling. The influence in his work, however, is more than merely formal or theoretical: the protagonist of *Albert Angelo* (1964) is an architect, and as Jonathan Coe, Johnson’s recent biographer, notes, Johnson’s description of Sioned Bowen’s former house in *House Mother Normal* is taken from Johnson’s temporary residence in Wales (Coe 300). But Johnson was not merely influenced by architecture in the subject matter and structure of his works. Despite what he himself claims are the reasons why he admires architecture—its methodological similarities to the process of writing—Johnson presents architecture, too, as an example of *embodied space*, including in the context of old age.

In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz urges theorists and practitioners of architecture to re-think their discipline’s commitment to the political by theorizing space and time as embodiment. Grosz wants to re-politicize architecture by emphasizing the “emergence and eruption” inherent to space and time as embodiment. In *Space, Time, and Perversion* (1995) she argues that “the exploration of conceptions of space and time [are] necessary correlates of the exploration of corporeality” (84). Architecture must be attentive to embodiment if it is to represent and use time and space in a politically aware way. Indeed, she is optimistic about the success of this endeavor, because bodies are the latent “unspoken condition” of architecture (14).

Johnson's use of architecture is also informed by the lived experience of the body, including the *aged* body.

In Johnson's "What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?", the narrator often begins his observations of the city by discussing its architecture, and in speculating about the space's history. These observations have the ability to trigger memories in the narrator/Johnson. At one point, observing some covered shopping arcades, "the best apparently also the oldest" (56), triggers the narrator's memory of a former girlfriend:

And one showcard that trips some trap of unbidden
memory, I had
*thought I did not know Bournemouth, but I do
not know what I know, nor when I shall know.
in this case it is Burley Manor for the friendly
drink in the New Forest. Was this the hotel that
she whom I have called all those names, Jenny,
Gwen, Wendy, work at all those summers
ago... (57)*

The switch to italics designates a shift from the more conventional narrative. In this case, it signals a movement away from the present moment of the narrative into a personal memory. In keeping with Johnson's commitment to "truth-telling" in writing, the narrator turns into Johnson-as-author at this moment, acknowledging his deployment of a particular figure—the former girlfriend—repeatedly in various works. The girl Johnson refers to in various guises as Jenny, Gwen, etc, refers to a former girlfriend who Johnson felt "betrayed" him, and he works through those feelings and memories in many of his fictional works. With Johnson peeking from behind the curtain, the narrator invites us to make an autobiographical reading. Enacted here is Grosz's process of "emergence and eruption;" the "unbidden memory" erupts from the narrator/Johnson's contemplation of the architecture of the building, and time and space merge as he thinks of the palimpsest that is this building and his memory. As in many of Johnson's

texts, the representations of interiority also represent the complex negotiations between cognitive processes, including memory, and physical and environmental context.

Immediately following this passage, we glimpse the latent “body” in architecture as theorized by Grosz. Johnson’s narrator describes other Bournemouth architectural features and their historical layering:

The stoneclad but steelframed department stores, banks, insurance offices indicate that Bournemouth’s most flourishing building period was during the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties: buildings not particularly good of their time, but certainly of their time, unmistakably. Now this architecture seems to serve nostalgic purposes for the retired, recalling the period of the Savoy, old ladies in touch again with the pleasure (or perhaps what they saw from a distance as the pleasures) of their youths: it means something that they again have them, although once more at a distance, ironically at another remove. (59)

In addition to working through the ambivalent nature of nostalgia (an act of remembrance that is fraught with questions of authenticity) as it relates to aging, this passage also problematically equates Bournemouth’s architectural history with that of an individual, in that both the city’s and a person’s highest achievements belong in the past, with the present and future in relative decline. However, the latent suggestion of embodied pleasure somewhat redeems this reductive stance. Johnson describes the elderly women as not simply recalling the past but as being “in touch again” with the “pleasures” of their memories, this figure of speech serving as a trace of the body suggested by Grosz. Furthermore, the narrator ascribes to the elderly of Bournemouth the very act of nostalgic remembrance that he experienced earlier with the memory of the ex-girlfriend. The memories are different, but the pattern of remembrance is the same.

The previous section suggested that Johnson’s denial of an aging identity speaks to a wider social anxiety about aging demographics and a vicious internalization of ageist stereotypes. It also speaks to a relationship between work, aging, and authorship that is the tangled legacy of mid-century Britain. Johnson breaks character at this moment of the essay, divorcing the essay’s narrator (who strongly resembles Johnson) and Johnson the author, who suddenly sees the

retirement community at Bournemouth as a threat to his productivity as a writer and an artist, not *despite* their similarities but perhaps because of them. This vulnerability echoes throughout the piece; in describing the elderly theater-goers, Johnson criticizes them for “sympathizing with and sighing over the poor starving artist, but what have they ever done to support any artist? Do they even know the difference between an artist and an artiste?” (61). Johnson critiques more than the residents’ seeming philistinism; he asks how creativity, art, and authorship can be integrated into a model of aging that seems to homogenize retirement as the end of (creative) work and productivity. But the real “philistines” are not elderly residents. Instead, Johnson displaces onto the retirement community his own feelings about what he called in his manifesto the “stultifying philistine” nature of contemporary British readership, reviewership, and even authorship.

One manifestation of what Johnson believed was a lack of appreciation for and recognition of what he felt was necessary innovative work by the contemporary literary scene, was seemingly inadequate compensation offered to writers and artists in general, which he railed against throughout his career. In his biography, Coe describes a vehement proposal made by Johnson to the Society of Authors arguing for the resignation of the society’s organizers, who Johnson felt were insufficiently proactive in helping improve authors’ remuneration (Coe 347). Indeed, Coe believes that Johnson’s infamously combative relationship with the literary establishment is more accurately a description of his relationship with various publishers and agents, those who represent the “commercial arm of the publishing industry” (Coe 144).

Thus the rejection of retirement in “What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?” functions on multiple levels, as a reflection of Johnson’s anxieties about growing old, his concerns about finding adequate financial support—and recognition in general—for his work,

and, finally implicit concern over his authorial identity as an author.⁶⁶ For Johnson, the question is not only of how he will continue to be a productive writer, but what that writing will look like, an anxiety that becomes more clear in several of Johnson's other texts. McGeough reads the old age of *House Mother Normal* as a metaphor for Johnson's literary and personal exhaustion at the end of his life (141). Likewise, Coe describes Johnson's last, incomplete project, *See the Old Lady Decently*, as depicting a writer "reaching the end of his artistic tether" (30).⁶⁷ In "What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?" the anxious encounter between the younger Johnson and the elderly community also speaks to a generational anxiety that is literary in nature; for Johnson, encountering the elderly Bournemouth pensioners begets a crisis of his literary identity, as compared to the work of his modernist predecessors.

Architecture, Aging, and Work in "Mean Point of Impact"

Johnson works through the problematic of aging, creative work, and architecture in another entry in the *Aren't You Rather Young...* collection, but with somewhat different results. The story "Mean Point of Impact," written in 1970, follows the "life" of a French cathedral from its planning and building in the Middle Ages to its destruction by bombing during one of the world wars. The text focuses particularly on the hard work and resourcefulness of John, the principal architect and planner, and Elias, the master builder, who dedicate their entire lives to the building of the cathedral. Johnson intersperses the history of these builders and then the centuries-long history of the cathedral with radio excerpts from a military airplane maneuvering

⁶⁶ In *Governing the Soul*, Nikolas Rose analyzes the changing nature of work as it relates to (and increasingly underlies) the ideological production of the "self" in the twentieth century.

⁶⁷ For Coe, Johnson at the end of his life and literary career was worried about his artistic identity as distinct aesthetically from either Joyce or Beckett, his most significant literary touchstones (31).

to bomb the cathedral during the war. A lifetime of dedication and centuries of history is destroyed in a moment of war.

“Mean Point of Impact” exemplifies Grosz’s call to embody space in architecture: the replacement Chapter House designed in a new style and “having a perfect echo that made the place like an extension of one’s skull” (46); the relics of the cathedral’s patron, St. Anselm, are placed at the top, while the builders at the consecration alternately grateful that the cathedral “had given him a living for twenty years” and resentful “that the cleric now acted as though the building belonged solely to them” (48). And most importantly, the elderly architect puts the finishing touches on the work he has spent his entire life building. Unlike both the Bournemouth architecture and the elderly residents of “What Did You Say,” the elderly master builders in “Mean Point of Impact” are able to maintain a creative productivity into old age, and the cathedral takes on a meaningful life of its own in the ensuing centuries, with future generations using it as a playground or meeting place, or redesigning the space to suit their own aesthetic visions.

Johnson’s view of aging in “Mean Point of Impact” is more forgiving than in “What Did You Say” because he imagines the profession of architect to unite creativity and tangible, physical evidence of productivity (even though that, too, is eventually destroyed) in a way that he is anxious that writing does not. However, even in “Mean Point of Impact,” the labor of the principle builders/architects that feels vital and personally meaningful is offset by the alienation and vindictiveness of the minor laborers and, ultimately, the bomber. Throughout the essay, Johnson intersperses descriptions of the building of the cathedral with a bomber’s instructions to target the cathedral; the piece ends with the command “FIRE!” (50). The binary structure of “Mean Point of Impact” pits the outside, “objective” military force of the bomber against the

more subjective, embodied space of the cathedral, with the fatalistic ending clearly indicting the former. Johnson's novel *House Mother Normal* explores a similar duality in the context of a residential care home, but the tension is less neatly conclusive.

The Unhomely *House Mother Normal*

"What Did You Say the Name of this Place Was?" shows Johnson enacting the "Siddhartha" moment, the moment of unrealizable recognition that puts Johnson as author and narrator in contact with the relational, embodied space of old age, in a moment that is both recognition and rejection of aging and age consciousness. Johnson's fifth novel, *House Mother Normal* considers what it means to *inhabit* this space of old age. In this novel, Johnson tries more fully to critique the institutionalized, disciplinary management of the elderly, and to explore the subjective, lived experienced of old age. The novel does this by parodying the space of domesticity and recognizing the complexity of institutions as relational spaces with ambivalent histories and purposes, especially as they relate to the elderly and the mentally ill.

House Mother Normal depicts its elderly characters as subject to an "objectifying" medical and sociological gaze and to the practices and ideologies of control at work in an "old people's home." Each character's chapter begins with a clinically detached "data" sheet recording the resident's age (all are in their 70s and 80s), marital status (many are widowed), their illnesses (they suffer from physical and cognitive impairments), the effectiveness of their senses (Sioned Bowen, for instance, scores only a 20% in movement, and 50% in sight), their pathologies, and their scores on an assessment rating.⁶⁸ The residents are figures of abject old

⁶⁸ Johnson had used a similar structure to begin his short story "Broad Thoughts from a Home." Written in 1960 and published in *Aren't You Rather Young*, the work is a strongly autobiographical but highly stylized recounting of Johnson's visit to Ireland in 1959. For a description of the trip, see Jonathan Coe's biography of Johnson, *Like a Fiery Elephant*.

age whose abjection is the result of this objectifying outsider's gaze but likewise internalized by the residents. Unlike the "Little Old Lady," however, Johnson also explores the subjective, embodied experiences of these characters, their psychology, emotional states, and memories, using a combination of first-person stream-of-consciousness and typography. In doing so, Johnson may be said to be "writing old age," a form of critical gerontology that has garnered considerable interest in recent decades.

Published in 1971, *House Mother Normal*'s unconventional narration, style, and subject matter is in keeping with Johnson's commitment to formal innovation. The novel narrates one evening in the lives of eight elderly patients and their caretaker, the "House Mother," who is so maliciously twisted as to be almost a caricature. In the introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* Johnson describes the novel as follows: "each of the old people was allotted a space of twenty-one pages, and each line on each page represented the same moment in each of the other accounts; this meant an unjustified right-hand margin and led more than one reviewer to imagine the book was in verse" (27). The result is that each of the characters' versions of the evening can be compared side-by-side; a typographical merging of space and time that invokes an even more literal Bakhtinian chronotope. The plot is repeated in all the book's chapters, except for the last one, the House Mother's, but each chapter is told from a different resident's point of view, with the patients' mental infirmities becoming more pronounced throughout the book, so that the last patient's chapter consists predominately of blank spaces sparsely interspersed with incomplete words (it is possible even that she has died). As in many of his other works, Johnson engineers innovative ways of rendering his characters' consciousness. Slowed mental processes are rendered in spaced-out characters, gaps in text, and

unusual capitalizations.⁶⁹ While contemporary reviewers and literary scholars acknowledge that such stylistic choices can seem gimmicky or coldly technical, Coe praises *House Mother Normal* for its underlying and deeply-felt empathy: “[Johnson’s] characteristic forthrightness, his inability to mask his emotions at any time...here guarantees that technical brilliance is never given precedence over a humane and proper response to the characters’ pitiable situation” (25).

The “house” of *House Mother Normal: A Geriatric Comedy* is a parody of domesticity, with the house mother a perversion of the maternal caretaker role. In her introductory chapter the House Mother invites the readers, who thereby double as visitors, to “join our Social Evening” in which we will see “our friends dining, first, and later singing, working, playing, traveling, competing, discussing, and finally being entertained” (5; 6). The House Mother pretends to convey the fulfillment of leisure activities, but they are a parody of domestic life. The patients, in fact, must eat an inadequate dinner, clear the dinner remains, sing the home’s ludicrous anthem, manufacture cheap goods for the House Mother’s profit in a twisted form of occupational therapy, fight each other with mops, and, finally, be “entertained” by the House Mother’s hostile sexual display. Johnson’s characters seem to play stereotypical gender roles, but these roles are undercut by the absurdity of their placement in this warped institutional “home.” For example, the women all talk about their families, but most do not have any family members left. Men like Charlie Edwards talk about their careers and their war service, and sex, but then Johnson mocks their masculinity with jibes at their dependency. The space of the institution upsets traditional domesticity, and thus, it is not well suited by a traditionally plotted and characterized novel.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Johnson had utilized similar conventions in other texts. In his first novel *Travelling People* (which he strongly disliked and refused to have reprinted), Johnson acknowledged a debt to Stern’s *Tristram Shandy* in using “random-pattern grey to indicate unconsciousness after [an elderly character’s] heart attack, then a regular-pattern grey to indicate sleep or recuperative unconsciousness; and subsequently black when he dies” (Introduction 22).

⁷⁰ Johnson’s critique of the idealization of the domestic space is not limited to institutions and their policies of control. In the section narrated by Sioned Bowen, for instance, Sioned recalls her work in service:

The house itself I love from the first moment I

This parody of the domestic within the institutional space of residential care homes has consequences even today. In their study of late 1990s century small residential homes, Sheila Peace and Caroline Holland argue that the “rhetoric of care policy has...for some time idealized the home,” an idealization with roots in the second half of twentieth century Britain, where owning one’s own home came a valued norm (394).⁷¹ They demonstrate that the valuation of home and personal space has important consequences for the nature of care (especially for the elderly and mentally ill) and available residential care facilities. They conclude, unfortunately, that the attempt to make residential care more “home” than “Home” is imperfect and partial at best. In another comparison of early 2000s homes to their 1950s’ counterparts (as originally surveyed by Peter Townsend in his study *The Last Refuge*), Julia Johnson, Sheena Rolph, and Randall Smith claim that although much has changed—more emphasis on risk management and aversion, less resident involvement in domestic tasks—much has also remained the same (“The Last Refuge”).⁷²

Institutional Spaces

Residential care first arose as holding spaces for an undifferentiated mass of the old, the ill, and the poor. *House Mother Normal* acknowledges the long, shared history of mental illness,

Saw it, though it meant servitude to me, it was
The people who made me a servant (125)

The description of the house is taken from Johnson’s fellowship at the University of Wales in Gregynog, a positive period in his life (Coe 299). The references to Wales in this section of the novel reflect Johnson’s affection for Gregynog and his sympathy with Welsh nationalism. This house is generated out of their social relationships (servitude as well as friendship) and Sioned’s interpolation into the domestic wage economy. Even the house’s architecture is inauthentic; what looks like wood on the house’s exterior is really plaster “or something like that” (125-6), though Sioned says she forgives its “cheating.”

⁷¹ As the conclusion demonstrates in its discussion of Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*, this ideal has serious consequences for the elderly.

⁷² In 2005, Johnson, Rolph, and Smith began a sociological study re-visiting the homes that Townsend had visited so many decades earlier, and discussing the state of residential care for the elderly today. Their research is published in *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting “The Last Refuge.”* A brief synopsis of their work appears on the British Society of Gerontology website.

old age, and poverty:⁷³ “even worse, people like these can be put away in mental wards and homes when they are perfectly sane, simply because they are old: they don’t stay perfectly sane long” (198). It acknowledges (in the distant and uncaring tones of the House Mother) that the removal to institutional care often has a detrimental effect on patients’ mental and physical health.

In *House Mother Normal*, the alienation and abjection felt by the elderly residents is complicated by the relatively recent universalization of retirement as well as by the much longer shadow of the workhouse. By having the House Mother exploit the elderly residents as cheap labor to make trinkets and dilute medicine, Johnson places the old age home and its model of aging within the longer genealogy of the workhouse or poorhouse. The House Mother explicitly justifies her own villainous behavior by evoking the popular imaginary of the workhouse, presumed to have been much worse: “...why therefore do they [the patients] expect treatment any different from that they would have received in the workhouse of the past?This may be a charitable institution, that may be the form of words, but it is as remote from what was known as a workhouse as my Ralphie is from adingo” (186).

In *The Politics of Pensions*, Ann Shola Orloff traces the origins of the welfare systems of Britain, the U.S., and Canada, and explains how the poor law policies began to fall by the wayside in the twentieth century as the welfare state took over elder management, resulting in new types of provisions for the elderly.⁷⁴ The poor law increasingly came under attack in the nineteenth century from reformers and politicians arguing for more humanitarian treatment of the “worthy” poor, but it was not until the changes to political structures in the twentieth century, namely the increasing centralization of government and expansion of governmental capacities

⁷³ The Victorian Poor Laws, for instance, equated these three categories almost indiscriminately.

⁷⁴ See also M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System: The History of an English Social Institution*.

embodied in the welfare state, as well as forces of capitalist industrialization, that the poor laws were eventually replaced. Orloff argues that the pension system for the elderly, officially mandated via the Old Age Pension Act of 1908, is a direct reformist reaction to the legacy of poor law policy (9). For the elderly, it removed some of the stigma of demeaning and reluctantly-given charity, but not all. In the 1930s, many of the workhouses came under council stewardship and were re-classified Public Assistance Institutions, while the poor law officially ended with the National Assistance Act in 1948, whereupon residential care for the elderly was divided between the new NHS system (established in 1946) and local councils (Townsend 28; Johnson, Rolph, Smith, *Residential* 24). Nevertheless, just as many of the physical workhouses remained in use (though re-named), so too much of the stigma of residential care for the elderly also remained.

The psychological and physical vestiges of the workhouse system remained in effect and thus became one of the targets of the deinstitutionalization movement of the mid-twentieth century and beyond. The laughably terrible conditions of the nursing home in *House Mother Normal* echo the deinstitutionalization movement afoot within psychiatry, medicine, sociology, and politics and society as a whole in the 1950s and 60s,⁷⁵ when the policies of institutions came under more public scrutiny (Peace and Holland 395). According to Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, institutionalized care for the elderly (as opposed to out-home or day care) remained the norm for residential care of the elderly throughout the two postwar decades (*Residential* 24). *House Mother Normal* sets itself the task of not only critiquing the genre of domestic fiction, but also rather pointedly criticizing institutions, yet with attention to its own unresolved complicity in the power structures and ideologies that support such institutions. The face of care for the mentally ill and elderly changed radically in the late 1950s, as the Mental Health Act of 1959 advocated a

⁷⁵ This occurred in North America and the UK, though this essay focuses almost solely on the latter. For a discussion of the literary representation of residential care in the 1990s, see Jill Manthorpe, "Ambivalence and Accommodation: The Fiction of Residential Care."

move toward an ideal of “care in the community,” and mental institutions were shut down. Added to this discourse in the 1960s and early 70s was civil rights activism that lobbied for increased attention to patients’ rights.

The House Mother reflects the general acknowledgement of the poor treatment of the elderly in institutions in her concluding chapter of the novel, saying “There are worse conditions and worse places, friend. / I have worked in geriatric wards where the stench of / urine and masturbation was relieved only by the odd gangrenous limb or advanced carcinoma. Where confused / patients ate each other’s puke” (197). Although we are suspicious of the House Mother’s descriptions, since she paints such a vividly horrifying portrait in order to make her own practices seem mild by comparison, she at least knowingly situates herself in the anti-institutional discourses of the times.

The changes made by the British government in the late 1950s received support from some surprising places: namely, academics such as Foucault, Goffman, and Szasz, causing a stir with their criticism of social power structures. The works of these academics coincided ideologically with the work being done in what was soon to be known as anti-psychiatry in Britain. Though their arguments differ, taken together these thinkers painted a picture of traditional psychiatry as oppressive and controlling, institutions as demeaning and demoralizing, and psychiatric diagnosis as segregationist and stigmatizing.⁷⁶ Though “anti-psychiatry” was never a single movement—it compromised various types of arguments and endorsed differing methodologies—its significance, according to Crossley, lies in the impact it made on larger intellectual, political, and cultural discourse more broadly: Indeed, “anti-psychiatry itself was only one element of a much larger wave of contention which involved a broad attack upon many of the key institutions of modern society” (Crossley 132).

⁷⁶ Alternative models to traditional psychiatry varied widely, however.

The result is a parallel trend of anti-institutionalism, which manifested as a wider scholarly and social discourse questioning the fundamental diagnostic methods of medicine and psychiatry, as well as those institutions, such as old age homes, asylums, and mental institutions that subscribed to them and treated patients accordingly. Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* participates in the anti-institutionalism discourse of the 60s and 70s. She offers a scathing criticism of healthcare institutions in France, based on published statistics as well as her own visit to an *assistance publique* institution in Paris. Despite the admirable grounds, conscientious doctors, and general cleanliness of the place, "I shall not easily forget the horror of that experience: I saw human beings reduced to a state of total abjection" (258). Of another institute, she concludes that "with the aged, any kind of uprooting may cause death. It is rather the fate of those that survive that should be deplored. In a great number of cases this fate may be summed up in a few words—abandonment, segregation, decay, dementia, death" (256). Beauvoir blames not physical cruelties or conditions on this abject state; the blame falls on the spiritual and psychological distress and stagnation created by the conditions of institutionalization in general.

House Mother Normal echoes many of the arguments made for deinstitutionalization, including those made by Goffman's paradigmatic 1961 study *Asylums*, which Andrew Scull calls the most famous and influential of the "veritable flood of social scientific research" (308), outlining the harmful effects of institutionalization. Goffman's *Asylums* introduces the concept of the "total institution," which fosters dependence in patients and controls their movements, their desires, and their very senses of self and identity. For Goffman, life in an institution is strictly regimented and centralized for all residents, who are forced to conduct "all aspects of life" communally under the supervision of "the same single authority" (6). The inhabitants of *House Mother Normal* are continually mortified by the actions that they must perform, and by the

humiliating debasements practiced upon them by the House Mother. Such is the pervasive and insidious nature of total institutions, according to Goffman: “In the accurate language of some of our oldest total institutions, [the inmate] begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified” (14). What Goffman describes as mortification we could also see as Kristeva’s abject. Upon opening the parcel during the “Pass the Parcel” game, Ron Lamson finds a nasty surprise awaiting him: “It’s stopped, / it’s me, I can get it undone, I’ll win, what is it? SHIT! It’s a parcel of shit!” (86). The House Mother, we find out later, had filled the parcel with her beloved dog’s feces.

The elderly residents of *House Mother Normal* are demeaned, demoralized, humiliated, infantilized, and controlled by an authority that exploits and abuses them. The novel is in some ways a comically exaggerated version of the critiques made by sociologist Peter Townsend in his 1962 study *The Last Refuge*. In the late 1950s, Townsend surveyed and evaluated 173 English and Welsh public and private residential homes providing elderly accommodation. His results showed that these care facilities were unsatisfactory, with shortages in nursing staff and specialist medical attention, under-trained staff, poor quality and quantity of institutional clothing and diet, and little effort made to engage residents in social activities. Moreover, despite the postwar work in building newly dedicated residential care facilities, many of these care homes were in fact the former public assistance institutions, merely refurbished (“As We”). The attitudes of some staff members were also a holdover from workhouse days; in a preliminary visit, Townsend witnessed “some staff regretting the passing of the Poor Law, and with it their power to control and punish” (Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential* 5).

Johnson's critique of the social welfare institution is in fact indicative of its largely ambivalent presence in the past few centuries of British care. This ambivalence is noted by Parrinder through the character of the House Mother, who Parrinder understands as a figure both repellent and reasonable (123). A longer view of the history of psychiatry and of institutionalization (of the mentally ill and of the elderly) in Britain demonstrates that the institutions are a necessary foil for emergence of the discourses of reform (such as anti-psychiatry). In Andrew Scull's words, "paradoxical as it may seem, any discussion of 'community care' for the mentally ill must begin by paying serious attention to the mental hospital" (302). Whereas proponents of the deinstitutionalization movement of the 60s sought reform by attacking institutions, reformers of a century earlier had worked with just as much zeal to *establish* them. The reformist zeal of these various philanthropists, politicians, and medics culminated in the British Lunatic Asylums Act of 1845 that mandated a system of public asylums. The irony of reform is that its attained object never quite matches the aspirations of its advocates. Nineteenth-century reformers had aimed to establish a public system of mental institutions in order to improve conditions for the mentally ill, but the reality of the public asylums of nineteenth-century Britain were far from the comforting, homey places they had imagined (Crossley 55).⁷⁷ Johnson alludes to this Victorian past when the House Mother compares her home with the types of terrible workhouses that the elderly and the mentally ill have had to inhabit in the past. Compared to places where "They were stripped of their spectacle, false teeth, everything personal to them. They are shut away, / visits are rare and discouraged anyway, no one cares; they are forgotten and wholly in the power of nurses..." (198), she calls her own home a "happy House."

⁷⁷ For a case study of the elderly poor in Victorian England, especially its underlying gender dynamics, see Nigel Goose, "Gender Perspectives on the Elderly in Town and Countryside in Victorian England."

The anti-institutionalists of the 1960s would have been similarly disappointed with the poor showing that “care in the community” has made in providing long-term care for the sick and elderly. After the passing of the 1959 Mental Health Act, the movement toward deinstitutionalization began, supported by the anti-psychiatrists and other figures of the counter-culture, and “the whole scene changed. In 1961, a new conservative Minister of Health, Enoch Powell, announced a policy of abolishing mental hospitals, and cutting psychiatric beds in half, with little promise of improvement in community services” (K. Jones 159). The problem, as Kathleen Jones points out, is that too little was done to provide community care. Though the deinstitutionalizations were perhaps well-intentioned, logistics of community care were never sufficiently put into place for the movement to be successful. Andrew Scull summarizes the past two centuries’ attitudes toward institutionalization in *Social Order / Mental Disorder* when he writes that “it is one of the ironies with which the history of psychiatry abounds that the emergence of the state-sponsored asylum system was itself the outcome of a vigorous campaign for reform; and that, as with the current drive to return the mentally ill to the community, their segregation in these places was urged as being vital on both humanitarian and therapeutic grounds” (Scull 303). Scull’s point is that the act of reform is never perfect; it always idealizes a bogeyman that is neither completely accurate nor never totally dismantled, so that, history being cyclical and people being forgetful, the same problems, arguments, and proposed solutions keep cropping up throughout history. The reason for these alternating yet cyclical changes in viewpoint is not inherent in the nature of institutions themselves. Instead, the fault lines in the imagined institutions, the idealized forms of the institutions—positive or negative—that reformers either desire for the future, or cannot wait to rid themselves of. The real institutions

never live up to these imagined institutions. The rhetoric of change and reform is rather easy to wield, but to use it responsibly one must be aware of its histories and possible future incarnations.

The novel's surprise ending indicts Johnson's own authorial presumption to voice profound distrust of institutions. Once again using the narrative strategy of the "almighty aposiopesis," Johnson-as-author disrupts the House Mother's monologue. On the last page of the novel, just as we are firmly convinced that the House Mother is the ultimate villain, her voice becomes the voice of the author as Johnson inserts himself, as author *and* authority, into the text:

And here you see, friend, I am about to step
outside the convention, the framework of twenty-
one pages per person. Thus you see I too am the
puppet or concoction of a writer (you always knew
there was a writer behind it all! Ah, there's
no fooling you readers!) (204)

In connecting the comically villainous House Mother with the acts of writing and reading, Johnson forces us to consider the role that institutions play in the formation of narratives in general. Institutions can be sites of "narrative production" (Sarris 43) as much as narrative *disruption*.⁷⁸ Instead of reading the novel purely as a disruptive send-up of institutional life, in which the lives of the characters are twisted and corrupted by disciplinary regimes, we can consider the ways their stories are generated by institutional settings. The House Mother expresses almost this exact sentiment near the end of the novel:

This is a happy House, friend, a holiday camp,
compared. Here I give them constant occupation, and,
most important, a framework within which to establish
—indeed, to possess—their own special personalities. (198)

⁷⁸ In "Telling Stories: Life Histories, Illness Narratives, and Institutional Landscapes," A. Jamie Saris examines the place of institutions within personalized narratives, "life histories," in particular life histories incorporating illness ("illness narratives"). Saris argues that "making a larger analytical place for a concept of 'institution' in our understanding of narratives of 'personal' experience is a strategy for knitting together the presence of agency, meaning, and power in the production of stories" (41-2).

When Johnson peels back the curtain at the very of the novel, revealing himself to be the author and the characters his construct, he is acknowledging his own complicity in imaginatively creating the institutional space—the literary “framework”—his novel has been criticizing.

In his essay on disability and dependence in the work of Beckett, Michael Davidson says of the end of *Endgame* that Hamm responds to the “absurdity of his dependent relationship with Clov” by “ventriloquizing the voice of rationality and exposing it as a voice of power” (25). Johnson does the opposite in *House Mother Normal*. When at the end of the book, the controlling, sadistic House Mother who represents the institution and who, like Hamm, speaks in the voice of “rationality,” is revealed to be a ventroliquization of the voice of the author, the send-up is not only of the abuses of power but rather of those who act too easily in exposing it. The voice of power is never so easily locatable, says Johnson, as to be able to expose it without at the same time revealing one’s own selfish, ambitious tendencies; in exposing the cruel institutional figure of the matron, Johnson also indicts himself as author as well as his readers.

Embodied Space of Old Age

Although Johnson stops short of imaging aging subjectivities completely outside the space of the institution (understood broadly as the forces that seek to manage, normalize, and homogenize the aging experience), he recognizes the potential for aging identities to disrupt these power structures or to seek new spaces of resistance inside them. The very format of the text creates such a space, a space of communal narrative in which each character contributes to some part of the overall event. For instance, though the characters all perform the same actions, they are individuated by the personal thoughts and memories that punctuate these trivial acts, and each character’s account fits together like so many pieces of a puzzle. It is only by comparing the

accounts, and by adding each successive account to the next, that we obtain a complete picture of the evening's activities. For instance, in the first character chapter we hear Sarah Lamson ask Charlie for a cigarette, and then hear her thoughts in reaction to Charlie's reply:

...Charlie have you got a fag?

Mean old sod. And

I know he smokes. (13-14) ⁷⁹

Here, the italics represent Sarah's words, and roman type her thoughts. The large gap in between lines signals the gap in time in which, presumably, Charlie responds. It is only in the next chapter, Charlie's, that we gain a complete picture of their interaction:

..what's she want? *No, Sarah, you know*

I haven't got a cigarette (36)

This interaction occurs on precisely the same lines in both Sarah and Charlie's separate accounts, each on the top of page 8, so that the material spaces of the book, its pagination and typography, visually depict the characters creating a space of shared collective consciousness.

The House Mother's introduction to the novel entices us to literally enter the characters' minds visually and physically: "you shall see into the minds of our eight old friends, and you shall see into my mind. You shall follow our Social Evening through nine different minds!" (5). Of course, at the very end of the novel, when Johnson is "revealed" as the author, we learn that these are all still the author's mind, after all; the entire novel is "a diagram / of certain aspects of the inside of his skull!" (204).

Each chapter mixes the character's present thoughts and words with memories from the past, often associating one with the other in a mixing of sensory perception and memory, as in

⁷⁹ Johnson uses two types of pagination: Each individual chapter begins as page 1, but there is also a cumulative page length as in a regular text. The pagination used for citing quotes is the cumulative page length.

the following passage ascribed to Ron Lamson, who associates his guilty acts from the past with his present physical pain. (The spacing of the words are meant to mimic the pace and timing of his thoughts.) Preoccupied with his incredibly painful hemorrhoids, Ron tries to distract himself by thinking of the sexual escapade he has arranged with Mrs. Ridge later that evening, but finds traumatic memories from his past intruding on his thoughts:

Ooooooooooh! aaOOh!
No, try to think of something to take my mind off
it, the feel, that's something to look forward to,
Ooooooh, but it's no help now,
What shall I do?

Started when I
Was fifty-two, it's a
Punishment for tossing off
That little boy when I was
In the Navy ... (90)

The precise juxtaposition also allows Johnson to make a commentary on experiences of the war; here comparing the degradation and humiliation of the war with that of the nursing home.

(Johnson himself often reflected on his difficult experiences as a child evacuee during the war.)⁸⁰

The memories recalled by the residents in *House Mother Normal* tend to be autobiographical in nature as well as involuntary, spurred by physical sensation or environmental stimuli. They also somewhat plausibly exhibit what studies in cognitive aging call the “reminiscence bump,” the tendency for people to remember events that occurred to them while they were young, age 10 to 30 years old” (Schlagman et al. 398).⁸¹

In his manifesto to *Aren't You Rather Young...*, Johnson claims that the lack of novelistic conventions in his work are meant to formally reflect the inevitability of “chaos” in everyday life. He advocates that, rather than attempting to impose order, we try to “embrace change as all there

⁸⁰ See Nick Hubble, “‘An evacuee for ever’: B. S. Johnson versus Ego Psychology.”

⁸¹ Though this phenomenon is contested in cognitive aging research, as some studies demonstrate that this effect is more noticeable for memories with positive emotional valences rather than disturbing or traumatic memories. See Joan T. Erber, “Memory: Remote.”

is,” as “the very process of life itself is growth and decay at an enormous variety of rates” (17). *House Mother Normal* represents aging as process of change (though one with decidedly more decay than growth, as per Johnson’s equation) but not one that Johnson unequivocally embraces. Indeed, as Johnson recognized, any writing will necessarily attempt to impose some form of order, despite the author’s intentions to the contrary. While the ending of *House Mother Normal* enacts this paradox, the novel also consists of Johnson’s most sustained attempts to inhabit the “dwelling space of old age,” the lived experience of aging. For Johnson, this means an interest in representing the workings of the mind and, also, though more indirectly, the workings of the body.

To some extent, *House Mother Normal* is uncomfortable with physical decline and with the aging human body. Charlie Edwards, for example, reflects on his declining ability to take care of his bodily needs as a function of his dependency on the nursing home.

...But I keep my feelings
to myself. It would not do to be seen to
revolt. I am in some ways revolting in myself.

Sometimes I have to be changed like a baby.

Is that revolting? (32)

Johnson uses the double meaning of “revolting” to suggest both disgust at the bodily changes undergone during aging (a function of lack of control) and a critique of the care home’s policies of subordination (it also foreshadows the House Mother’s bizarre final sexual display, which in turn disgusts the residents). At stake is the ambivalent nature of *control*: self control is laudable, but institutional control is deplorable. A few lines later, Charlie considers other signs of his old age.

I noticed it first with spitting, for sometimes
 I would spit when speaking. And not always when
 I spoke with some vehemence, either. Sometimes
 I would spit without any warning. Even without
 there seeming to be any reason for it, too. I found
 it disturbing, but it was as nothing compared with
 what there was to come I found myself
 not wanting to.... Not minding about spitting
 when I spoke. Is that
 worse? Sometimes I cannot worry about things
 like that. Yet there is always a worse.
 I have only to look at some of these poor old things
 here to know that. I am not as bad
 as some (32)

As in this example, the novel's emphasis on somatic and scatological excess—the disgusting food, the bodily fluids, and especially the “parcel of shit” game—is symptomatic of what Kristeva conceptualizes as the abject (especially when directed against a maternal figure, such as the House Mother, however nominally). According to Gilleard and Higgs, old age is depicted as abject when, in addition to these signifiers, there is evidence “of absence, absence of self consciousness, of self control, of corporeal ownership” (“Ageing” 139).

The representation of the aged body as “revolting” or “disgusting” points to Johnson's own ambivalence about aging and the elderly: personally anxious of the former, but sympathetic to the latter as a marginalized and ostracized group. Furthermore, the ambivalence of the “revolting” aged body in *House Mother Normal* enacts the problematic nature of emerging models of aging, models that will enter the social and scholarly discourse in the next decade. On the one hand, Johnson's depiction of the retirement community in Bournemouth in “What Did You Say the Name of the Place Was?” prefigures a Third Age vision of aging, wherein the universalization of retirement has created a dedicated cohort of pensioners who are now encouraged to view late life as a period of independence and self-fulfillment. Underlying this ideology of aging, however, is the presumption of good health, financial stability and a

consumer-based lifestyle. According to Gilleard and Higgs, the Third Age ideology is one based on the rejection of “true” old age (represented by the pre-war generation), and “a reluctance to identify with that which was ‘old’ or ‘aged’” (“Aging Without” 122). Johnson’s distancing of himself at the end of the Bournemouth story is a tangled creation of the ideological construction of the Third Age.

In contrast to the Bournemouth retirees, the elderly residents in *House Mother Normal*, like the “Little Old Lady,” more closely resemble what will become known as the Fourth Age, an ideological construction of the period of late life when physical frailty and ill health become inescapable. This ideological construction of aging has recently been identified and critiqued by, for instance, Gilleard and Higgs, who argue that such a dualistic cultural perception of aging does not overcome ageist stereotypes, but merely relocates and intensifies them onto a later age range, set of characteristics, or sub-set of the elderly population. In “Ageing Abjection and Embodiment in the Fourth Age,” Gilleard and Higgs argue that while bodily disgust or abjection is perceived as transgressive in an otherwise typical “Third Ager,” it comes only as a trade-off of the intensification of cultural distaste (and thus even greater devaluation and loss of agency) for those of the “Fourth Age.” Starkly marginalized and degraded by the old people’s home and the House Mother, the residents represent the ideology of the Fourth Age and are subject to what Gilleard and Higgs call, following Kristeva, the “idea of the abject as part of the objectification of the aged body” (“Ageing Abjection” 137).

Ambivalent Phenomenologies

Unlike the “Little Old Lady,” the elderly residents of *House Mother Normal* do have some recourse to “revolt” against this marginalizing ideology, precisely because Johnson’s

depiction of the lived space-time of these elderly characters also enables us to appreciate the centrality of the body in understanding the experience of aging. In contrast to the “Little Old Lady,” the novel demonstrates the value of an embodied (rather than reductively somatic) view of aging. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty takes seriously the primacy of the corporeal body as a necessary constitutive element in experience and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty argues, in contrast to Descartes, that the body is neither merely an object of study, nor simply a mental representation (199). Acknowledging the centrality of the body in generating “the soul” (which includes such varied elements as consciousness and perception), Merleau-Ponty writes: “[t]he union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence” (88-9). Because having a body organizes how we perceive the world,⁸² any account of perception must take into account bodily experience.

In positioning the body as central to perception, consciousness, and experience, Merleau-Ponty also necessarily reconceptualizes our definition of space. Precisely *because* our bodies are so central to experience and perception, body image always operates in relational space; it is intentional, and task-orientated. Like Harvey and Massey, though starting with a definition of the body rather than space, Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes a hybrid *space-time* wherein “my body combines with them [space and time] and includes them” (140). The concept of space, for instance, is not pre-given to us; according to Merleau-Ponty, the movement of one’s body is precisely how we come to know what space is. Whereas Harvey and Massey use the evidence of

⁸² In speaking of patients who have been stung by insects and move automatically to soothe the sting, for instance, Merleau-Ponty writes that “in the concrete movement [of swatting away the insect] the patient has a positing awareness neither of the stimulus nor of his reaction; quite simply he is his body and his body is the potentiality of a certain world” (106).

social relations to illustrate space-time, Merleau-Ponty shows us that the corporeal body also performs the function of complicating our notions of space and time: “We must therefore avoid saying that our body is *in* space, or *in* time. It *inhabits* space and time” (139). Applying this concept to the *aging* body suggests that the aging body does not merely *react* to pre-established categories of space and time, but rather can *create* these very space-times and thus individual, embodied subjectivities.

Yet these experiences are shaped by the realities of the institutional space, a consistent tension throughout *House Mother Normal*. As Dale Dannefer and Casey Miklowski remind us in their analysis of changing models of the life course, however, to recognize structural limitations in the practice of agency is not to acknowledge defeat. They caution that “in reality, agency cannot be expressed outside of the structure of institutions” (37). In her examination of institution housing for the elderly, Pia C. Kontos argues that old age homes are spaces that reflect this kind of negotiation. Kontos argues that the degree to which residents can resist the “institutional” aspects of this space and embrace it as “home” is crucial to a meaningful sense of identity (“Resisting” 255).

House Mother Normal recognizes the embodied nature of consciousness and subjectivity, not despite the aches, pains, and degradations experienced by its old characters, but precisely because of them. Rom Lamson, for instance, is continually subject to the pain of his hemorrhages; it is a pain that alters his mental states: “Still hurts to glue, I still have to move even / ever so slightly. How can I think about any- / thing else, it’s constant, the pain, what else / is there to think about, it goes round and round in circles, my mind, of it, on it, not very often off it” (82). But neither is this the simple division of the mind and the body, or the slavish subservience of the mind to the body’s experiences. Just a few lines later, Ron demonstrates the way that the

body can be shown to “know.” Remembering a dentist extracting a tooth, he thinks: “Out, / out, he said, and out he took it, left a gap / at the back of my mouth, felt like a bomb / crater, kept poking my tongue in it, all salty / blood, you can’t help it, can you?” (82). Here the body—the poking tongue—creates an entire new world for Ron, reminding him of the war. Like the bloody gap left in Ron’s mouth, the body also contains the possibility to be disruptive, to create new experiences and forge new connections.

Johnson’s depictions of old age reflect his own preoccupations with the body and with bodily decay, a frequent trope of his writing and of his own personal reflections. What Jonathan Coe calls Johnson’s “unshakeable preoccupations with death, decay and futility” (138) are obvious in not only *House Mother Normal*, but in the earlier *Unfortunates* (1969) as well as Johnson’s last published work, *See the Old Lady Decently* (1975). *The Unfortunates* is Johnson’s most formally experimental novel; the book is unbound, published instead as a box containing separate (bound) short chapters. Except for the first and last sections, the chapters are unnumbered and can be read (should be read, according to Johnson) in any order. This largely autobiographical work is a tribute to a friend of Johnson’s who had succumbed to cancer at a young age, but it is more fundamentally and solipsistically about Johnson himself, the effect of his friend’s death and Johnson’s process of working through those painful memories whilst reporting on a soccer match in Nottingham. Writing this work after having also just lost his mother, we see in it all of Johnson’s preoccupations with death and bodily disintegration. In one section, reacting to the progression of Tony’s cancer, Johnson sees his own fears reflected in his friend: “[Tony] himself wanted to be taken out of that now alien body, which was not himself, which was no longer under his control, the cells multiplying without reference to his will,

destroying him and themselves (1).⁸³ The underlying anxiety is again one of bodily chaos, of losing unity and control. The sharpness of Tony's mind is particularly painfully contrasted with the gradual disintegration of his body.

While *The Unfortunates* is uncomfortable with bodily chaos, it is much more comfortable with the "messy" workings of the mind, as Johnson understands them. In the authorial manifesto in *Aren't You Rather Young To Be Writing Your Memoirs*, Johnson describes this process as recursive and random: "...the memories of Tony and the routine football reporting, the past and the present, interwove in a completely random manner, without chronology. This is the way the mind works, my mind anyway..." (25). While Johnson fears the chaos of Tony's body, he accepts failures or inaccuracies of memory as endemic to the cognitive process and thus to the writing process. "I fail to remember, the mind has fuses" (5)⁸⁴ writes Johnson, failing to remember the order of a series of events. Indeed, the unusual unbound structure of the work is designed to embrace randomness, and to mirror the randomness of life and memory. Within the past decade, literary scholarship has frequently looked to the research and theories of neuroscientists and cognitive science to articulate how novels and narratives understand the mind and brain, the workings of consciousness, memory, affect, attention, and other cognitive processes, as well as the embodied and social aspects of cognition. Stream of consciousness novels are particularly ripe for this neuroscientific gaze, for they are designed to allow readers seemingly privileged access to the patterns of characters' thoughts, memories, and consciousness. Johnson insisted that his works did the same; indeed, he believed the representation of his own consciousness as central to his artistic mission and identity.

⁸³ Because most of the sections use unique images in place of numbers or conventional titles, citation is more challenging. This section begins with the phrase "Sometimes that summer, during the first recuperation..."

⁸⁴ This section begins with the phrase "Then they had moved to a house of their own..."

What, then, does Johnson's interest in the workings of the mind tell us about his representation of *aging*? While a discussion of Johnson's reading of aging minds in light of recent neuroscientific and cognitive science theory is beyond the scope of this chapter, Johnson's decision to use cognitive processes as the organizing principle of *House Mother Normal* speaks to a sophisticated perception about the changes in contemporary understanding of aging. According to Gilleard and Higgs, post-1960s gerontology and geriatric medicine began to focus on the alleviation of disabilities and distinguishing "normal features of old age from the unnecessary and abnormal accompaniments of agedness" ("Ageing Without" 124), such as physical and cognitive disabilities. *House Mother Normal* is Johnson's refusal to participate in the pathologization of disability, especially cognitive disability, in old age. By progressing the mental confusion in each chapter, Johnson emphasizes the slow, progressive nature of the loss of cognitive function over time; there is no sudden break between "healthy" and "diseased." Furthermore, Johnson emphasizes the continuity between these characters and his own consciousness, as he depicts it in his other works. He writes in *The Unfortunates* that the "mind has fuses," and suggests that memory loss, for instance, is endemic to all minds, aged or otherwise, while also acknowledging the reality of age-related memory loss.

While the elderly residents maintain social engagement and affective embodiment in advanced age despite physical and cognitive losses,⁸⁵ and despite the internalization of abject stereotypes of old age, Johnson's usurpation of the House Mother's voice on the last page of the novel threatens to undo much of the novel's work in depicting the "inside" of old age. On the last page, Johnson steps "outside the convention" of the novel and seems to speak through his character's voice. In an earlier section I suggested that this is an ambivalent example of

⁸⁵ For a discussion of affect and aging from the perspective of cognitive aging studies, see Kessler and Staudinger, "Affective Experience in Adulthood and Old Age: The Role of Affective Arousal and Perceived Affect Regulation."

Johnson's self-indictment of narrative and institutional order. As Parrinder argues, Johnson sees himself as fulfilling a similar role to that of the House Mother, who uses "her fantasies as a means of subduing and imposing on others" (124) so this functions as a de facto confession on Johnson's part of contributing to that imposition.

It also functions to remind readers that the seemingly privileged access to the pattern of characters' thoughts, memories, and consciousness is an authorial illusion that has important real-world consequences. Even as we sympathize with the residents' poor treatment and connect with the stories of their lives, Johnson undercuts this sentiment by reminding us that the House Mother performs the gate-keeping function, she "admits" us into these mental spaces. At the very beginning of the novel, in the House Mother's introduction, Johnson frames this as an invitation into the "minds" of the characters: "You shall see into the minds of our / eight old friends, and you shall see into my / mind" (5). By the very end of the novel, when the House Mother's section is suddenly usurped by the "author," the language of "minds" has taken on a more alienating and dehumanizing form, from "minds" to "skull." The House Mother says: "So you see this is from his [the author's] skull. It is a diagram of certain aspects of the inside of his skull! What a laugh!" (204). What initially seems like a promise of privileged access to subjective experience ends with a negation of that very act, or reveals its fundamental solipsism. On the one hand, Johnson explores how fictional theory of mind, or the authorial act of "inhabiting other minds" and all that entails—domesticating them, spatializing them, reading them—is ultimately impossible. As William James writes, "Neither contemporaneity, nor proximity in space, nor similarity of quality and content are able to fuse thoughts together which are sundered by this barrier of belonging to different personal minds. The breaches between such thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature."

Johnson-as-author continues to speak through the House Mother's voice, using her place within the institution to issue this caveat about aging:

Still, I'll finish off for him, about the sadness,
the need to go farther better to appreciate the
nearer, what you have now: if you are not like
our friends, friend, laugh now, prepare, accept
worse times are a-coming, nothing is more sure. (204)

The platitude about growing older coupled with the alarmist rhetoric implying the inevitability of an unsuccessful old age (an abject Fourth Age existence) are complicated by the act of narrative ventriloquism. While in general these moments of narrative aposiopesis are meant to ensure readers of the sincerity—the narrative “truth-telling”—of Johnson's work by revealing the hand of the author, here Johnson's breaking of the fourth wall destabilizes the simultaneously sentimental and alarmist message. Johnson reminds us that both he himself as author as well as the House Mother are not yet members of the abject fourth age, and neither, he implies, are his readers. As in Beauvoir's *Siddhartha* parable, Johnson launches his critique most poignantly using a representational and ontological gap between age generations. Johnson is voluntarily opening *House Mother Normal* to the kind of critique one reviewer made of Peter Townsend's *The Last Refuge* in 1962. Reviewing Townsend's condemnation of residential care homes, the reviewer wrote of Townsend's work that “This is not really a book about old people, for their attitudes, emotions and reactions are judged entirely by middle class, young middle aged standards. It is a book about the author's belief that institutional living is undesirable” (qtd in Johnson, Rolph, Smith, *Residential* 10). The excesses and unresolved tensions in *House Mother Normal* stem in part from this concern of Johnson's, that despite his sincere suspicion of institutional power

structure and the aging ideologies they support, he is nonetheless ill-equipped to step completely outside them; at least part of this critique implies a self-imposed subjective understanding of epistemology. The next two chapters of this project explore more extreme limits of this problem, when the problem of speaking for others encompasses not just an age gap but a cognitive gap. When cognitive impairments such as dementia are seen as the epitome of powerlessness because they expose the fantasy of consumer “choice,” the problem of representation is co-opted, Gilleard and Higgs argue, by the structures of capitalism and individualism. What Gilleard and Higgs criticize as the “‘pretence’ of a voice” (“Old People” 247) in institutions of medicine and care in the twenty-first century, Johnson exposes in the figure of House-Mother-as-Johnson at the end of the novel. For Johnson, however, this recognition of the inescapability of the narrative and institutional structures that define (both shape and limit) aging represents a personal failure rather than fault of the system, which explains why he speaks in the voice of the “villain” in the last chapter of the novel, one who urges us to “accept” rather than revolt.

The Charioteer

The seeming return of Johnson’s anxiety about aging at the end of *House Mother Normal* signals more than alarmist ageist rhetoric or mere post-modern self-reflexive posturing. Johnson’s complex representation of old age, as well as his narratively enacted difficulties with accepting an age identity, reveal some of the fault lines along which models of aging were and would continue to split in the 1970s and beyond. Both Johnson and Simone de Beauvoir, in their separate ways, were demanding that attention be paid to a segment of the population that was ignored, marginalized, or underserved, yet nonetheless continually growing and which, when viewed from the perspective of not-yet old—a default position for both—represented an

existential, social, and, particularly in Johnson's case, artistic challenge. As life expectancies continue to climb, and as welfare backing of retirement recedes and gives way to a private, consumer-based and more individuated plan for the life course, the picture of the life course begins to fragment, in part into a Third Age vision of post-working life that deliberately rejects aging and focuses around productive leisure and good health, while "true" old age becomes the residual imaginary category for those who experience physical and cognitive disability or illness or require long-term care. Gilleard and Higgs theorize these "shadowlands of disability, diminishment, or death" in spatial terms, not applicable to a specific part of life course or a particular group of individuals, but rather as a culturally imagined "kind of terminal destination—a location stripped of the social and cultural capital that is most valued and which allows for the articulation of choice, autonomy, self-expression, and pleasure in later life" ("Aging" 126; 123). Third Age agency comes at the cost of Fourth Age abjection.

Beauvoir and especially Johnson witness the beginnings of such fragmentation (the terms themselves come a decade later⁸⁶), and it informs their struggles to define the received meanings of old age and their own relationships with growing older. While Beauvoir imagines in the Siddhartha parable an existential transcendence never fully realized in *The Coming of Age*, Johnson's works reflect a tenuous position vis a vis the aging self that is futilely mocking and self-deprecating. "Laugh now," urges the Johnsonian House Mother at the end of the novel, in a command aimed at both the (younger) self and the (aging) other in its attempt to reconcile the two. The title of Johnson's story collection, *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs*, reveals Johnson's attempt to simultaneously deny aging identity (he is, after all, still "rather young") while still adopting the attitude of the abrasive, confrontational breaker of

⁸⁶ By the 1980s. In Kingsley Amis's 1987 novel *The Old Devils*, for instance, the 61-year-old Gwen Cellan-Davies is described as "young-elderly" (5), another term for the Third Age.

narrative age conventions. He never answers the question, which is projected onto an imagined interlocutor, just as the charioteer in Beauvoir's parable, in telling the prince "just what it meant to be old," stops short of articulating the same to readers. These are not errors or omissions; they are historical fault lines and contemporary limitations in articulating age consciousness.

CHAPTER 3

MURIEL SPARK AND THE ETHICAL VIOLENCE OF NARRATING AGE

“There is an ethics of narrating age” (12), writes aging and cultural studies scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette in *Declining to Decline* (1997), in which she calls for the development of new ways to narrate both the aging subject and the subject of age. For Gullette, and for the many writers, artists, and age scholars who have responded to the call to “narrate age” or “write old age” over the past several decades, the *ethics* of doing so appear self-explanatory, and they form two basic camps: The first emphasizes a *therapeutic* benefit, in which forms of life review, reminiscence, or autobiography help aging and elderly subjects cope psychologically with mortality or with the changes pertaining to growing older, whether that means atoning for perceived wrongs, creating a legacy, or finding enjoyment in creative self-expression. As explained in *The Ageless Self*, Sharon Kaufman’s 1994 study argues that elderly people who find meaningful patterns in their lives, often expressed in the telling of life stories, are able to “create continuity of self,” a process which “enables them to cope with demands for change, and thus, is a critical resource for remaining healthy” (6). The individuals Kaufman worked with found meaning in the past rather than in the future, now often a source of anxiety instead (111). The therapeutic aspects often overlap with new models of productivity, coinciding with the increasing interest in (productive) creativity in later life.

Frequently echoing the principles of ethical reading, a second argument for self-reflective life-writing emphasizes the benefit of representation and social advocacy, defending fiction’s potential, as Martha Nussbaum does, to “[stimulate] us to think empathetically about the possibilities of people in many different nations and of groups within nations.” She cautions, however, that such a call to action based on empathy and compassion may not be heeded; its

success “will depend on our judgements of seriousness, responsibility, and appropriate concern” (440). Age activists and scholars of aging have frequently evoked this potential to claim that such texts or exchanges can change readers’ perspectives about aging and about the elderly, and, as Barbara Frey Waxman writes, to give voice to the multiplicity of generations and ages (*To Live* 12) rather than privileging youth or youth-centered perspectives.⁸⁷

Gullette further implies that seeking alternative narratives of aging is an ethical responsibility. Whereas in the passage cited above she uses ethics to refer to why she chose some personal examples over others, in an earlier work on gender and creativity she stresses the responsibility of scholars to reverse the myth that equates women’s aging, in particular, to decline in creativity and artistic quality: “Thus, as feminists and life-course theorists interested in age as a socially constructed category, we have an *obligation*, voluntarily assumed, to demolish [such stereotypes] (“Creativity” 19, emphasis mine).⁸⁸ For Gullette, attention to the “ethics” of narrating age means acknowledging how the idiosyncrasies of sociology and psychology nuance the internalization of the “decline” narrative, while also keeping in mind the larger socio-political task of giving a voice to an often de-valued human condition.

The movement to “narrate age” (a general term I use to refer to the acts of autobiography and life-writing, especially as they are undertaken in later life or relate to growing older)⁸⁹ has been gaining ground for the past several decades, as part of a larger “age of memoir.” However, the ethical consequences of the memoir trend as it pertains to aging have generally been under-explored. This is the case within aging studies even as postmodernism and deconstruction have

⁸⁷ Sally Chivers, for instance, claims that positive representations of aging can create “forms of profound thinking and social practice that extend beyond engagement with the text” (*From* xxxix).

⁸⁸ Gullette warns of the difficulties involved in the work of demolishing such cultural scripts of decline in a historically sensitive way, while avoiding the extremes of a progress/decline binary.

⁸⁹ Scholars of autobiography and related forms make highly nuanced distinctions between different forms of “life narratives” or “writing the self.” Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson offer clear definitions of these various forms in *Reading Autobiography*, while Kate de Medeiros does the same for aging studies in particular, in *Narrative Gerontology in Research and Practice*.

complicated the connection between narrative and selfhood, and the ethics of narrative have become increasingly subject to debate. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, a comparative analysis of moral philosophers, Judith Butler questions the assumption that the “narrated self” is a prerequisite for ethics. Instead of expecting or demanding agency and accountability through narrative coherence, Butler suggests that failing to “narrate fully may well indicate the way in which we are, from the start, ethically implicated in the lives of others” (64). For Butler, on the contrary, ethical action and accountability arise from a necessary opacity of the self, rather than its seemingly legible articulation in narrative.

Most recently, Helen Small has suggested de-emphasizing the ontological connection between narrative and aging, writing that “there may be good reasons for downgrading, or even rejecting altogether, a narrative view of lives as an appropriate structure for thinking about old age” (9). Amelia DeFalco echoes this concern in *Uncanny Subjects* as part of her larger project showcasing ways that aging can productively disrupt many of our assumptions about narrative and identity. She argues that representations of aging and the “life review” process in fiction and film actually serve to complicate a straightforward equivalence between self and (singular, coherent) narrative, with old age providing the focalizing lens through which the multiplicity, dynamism, and productive instability of identity is revealed (27-30).

Taking seriously the concerns of Butler, Small, and DeFalco, among others, regarding the implications of narrative for understanding aging, this chapter shows how the work of Scottish writer Muriel Spark issues a necessary caveat to the “narrative imperative” that clings to representations of old age in the work of many of Spark’s contemporaries as well as subsequent and current generations of writers, including Doris Lessing. Spark’s fiction, published starting in the late 1950s to the first years of the twenty-first century, is not predominately known for

extensively featuring old age, with the exception of her 1959 novel *Memento Mori*. However, her satirical demonstration of the necessary limits to the “narrated” self forces us to consider the potential ethical violence, to use Judith Butler’s formulation, that can be inflicted by an overly emphatic insistence on narrating age. On the one hand, Spark’s work has much in common with many of her contemporary novelists writing about aging in that she values the aging process and the agential work of narrative. Her work is interested in narrative ethics in the sense that, as Adam Zachary Newton argues, ethics is articulated within and through narrative structure. In Newton’s definition, ethics occurs within “recursive, contingent, and interactive acts of encounter and recognition, the sort which prose fiction both crystallizes and recirculates in acts of interpretive engagement” (12). On the other hand, Spark’s formulation of such ethical narratives refuses what has become a cornerstone of age studies, the assumption of a Ricoerian connection of narrative to time, and, ultimately, to the nature of self and identity. The focus on ethics and narrative within discourses of aging has been on the necessity of narrative to selfhood, the expression of identity, and self-understanding, thus generating “a causal relationship that becomes increasingly obvious as subjects age” (DeFalco 22). Gullette succinctly encapsulates this fundamental assumption as follows: “Identity is a life story, a long tale in the telling” (*Declining* 213). My reading of Doris Lessing’s *Jane Somers* novels, which illustrate this equation of (age) identity and narrative, argues that the expectation of coherent age autobiography slips easily into an economically motivated demand, in a transactional economy that exchanges coherent narrative for recognition and care. By contrast, Spark’s work deliberately counteracts this late-twentieth century tendency to require a coherently narrated, legible self either as the grounds for ethical recognition of an Other (including an elderly Other), or as a therapeutic, compensatory gesture for establishing meaning in later life. In doing so,

Spark's novels divorce the process of empathy from obligation and care, a connection that is frequently used to patrol age activism; Spark is determined, as Patricia Waugh writes, that "her readers should be disturbed and not consoled" ("Muriel" 90). For Spark, the seemingly logical step between an act of narrative accounting and an act of ethical recognition—while in themselves both important and possible—remains necessarily unknowable.

While this may open up Spark to allegations of cynicism or hard-luck realism, or of the kind of apoliticism often aimed at modernists, neither is warranted. In fact, this description of Spark's ethical poetics resonates with recent critical analyses of modernist fiction. In her analysis of the "pervasive sense of unknowability" in *Jacob's Room*, Rachel Hollander argues that Virginia Woolf's novel delineates an ethics of modernism based on an encounter with Levinasian alterity, wherein "the asymmetry and radical passivity that is entailed in the responsibility for the absolute otherness of the other" (52). Such a modernist ethics stands in contrast, Hollander explains, to the ethical pedagogy espoused in Victorian literature, both of the "didactic, moralistic" variety and the more nuanced version of George Eliot's, who believed in fiction's potential to prompt sympathy in readers (40-41). Another way to frame this ethical stance, as Jessica Berman does in her reading of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in Woolf's work, is as a concern for feminist thinkers who seek to validate the expression of personal experience while avoiding the reductivism of the "feminine 'ethos of care'" (Berman 152). My comparison of Muriel Spark to her contemporary Doris Lessing places the two authors within a similar dialectic with respect to the representation of aging and old age. While my reading of Spark's fiction likewise emphasizes the limits of knowledge of the other and the impossibility of unified selfhood, it contextualizes these limitations as necessary rejoinders to the

call of narrating the (aging) self, a call that is all the more potentially violent because it is so seductive.

Alternately labeled a “Catholic” writer and a presciently postmodern one, Muriel Spark’s fiction, which spans roughly the entire second half of the twentieth century, both encourages and rejects an autobiographical reading of self. Her work often incorporates many elements of her own life, and her characters frequently write or plan to write memoirs, novels, or both, perhaps most famously in her 1961 novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Yet her own autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), for instance, refuses the kind of intimacy and sharing of “inner life” that readers often expect of autobiographies, and the novel *Loitering with Intent* (1981), although itself semi-autobiographical, shows the sinister side of memoir writing. Her protagonist in the latter novel, aspiring novelist Fleur Talbot, says of her authorial style: “I didn’t go in for motives, I never have” (83).⁹⁰ Spark works to balance an esteem for art and the creative impulse to write with a suspicion of narrative authority and of the efficacy of narrative in reflecting a coherent or legible self. This ambivalence manifests in her uneasy depiction of (auto)biography and of the act of self-authorship, repeated motifs of spying and surveillance, mystery and detection, as well as in her well-known use of prolepsis and obsession with “endings,” what Patricia Waugh calls the “anticipation of retrospection” (“Muriel” 88).

Spark’s ambivalence about life-writing in general, and her own in particular, resonates in her aesthetic and formal style. For Ruth Whittaker, Spark’s personal reticence “seems related to her thrift as a writer” (qtd in Page 3), an autobiographical “hoarding” that expresses itself as and is transfigured into stylistic refinement. In his analysis of a frequently repeated anecdote in Spark’s work, the story of her single-night stay in the house of poet Louis MacNiece, McQuillan

⁹⁰ Malcolm Bradbury terms her unsentimental technique a “detachment from life” (270); the title of his well-known essay on Spark’s work mentions her “fingernails” in reference to indifferent God and God-like authors who permeate her novels.

argues that rather than being miserly with autobiographical detail, Spark is, on the contrary, singularly excessive. It is an excess in the Derridean sense, however; McQuillan analyzes four iterations of this particular tale, four accounts that vary in their details and their claims to be fiction or biographical fact. He argues that their ““exemplary iterability”” (82), in Derrida’s words, functions as a tangible, material stand-in for Spark’s story of how she became a writer. Beyond merely demonstrating the unreliability of (autobiographical) memory, the repeated versions of the story of the poet’s house function as a smokescreen origin story, one that re-works the complicated biographical factors that contributed to Spark’s becoming a writer—her troubled married years in Rhodesia, her intelligence work during World War II, for instance—into a continual process of writerly self-fashioning (85).

Such a procedure results in a transfiguration (a very Sparkian word) of autobiographical material rather than its mimesis; one possible exception is her long, most personal, and least favorite novel, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, after which, Bryan Cheyette writes, “Spark was never again to place herself in a position where she was unable to convert her life-history into a transfigured narrative” (*Muriel* 70). Her process also results in a work wherein a surfeit of narrative and of material details stands in for a deeper absence, in much the same way as the anecdotes of the poet’s house, as McQuillan claims, stand in for the unnarrativizable real that encompasses her religious conversion, her authorial origins, and beyond.

Placing a new emphasis on Gullette’s original construction, this chapter considers the “ethics” of narrating age and the “obligation” to do so as worked through in the literary representations of age and aging of the past few decades. I focus on women writers in part because at least one important branch of aging studies and anti-ageism advocacy shares a theoretical history with feminism; well-known feminist writers of the 1970s who wrote about

aging and their personal experience of aging include Simone de Beauvoir and Susan Sontag. Interest in autobiography as a form of anti-ageist advocacy frequently aligned with feminist issues.⁹¹ The works of several woman authors share the characteristics of what Amelia DeFalco terms the “evaluative backward glance.” Of particular interest to scholars of aging studies is the work of Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Penelope Lively, Barbara Pym, Elizabeth Taylor, and Pat Barker, among many others. Novels of aging written by these authors vary in form, style, and in their commitment to conventional narrative structures; in Penelope Lively’s *Moon Tiger*, for instance, the narrator re-tells certain stories from her past from different perspectives. Some texts use aging narrators, either in mid-life (as in Lessing’s *The Summer Before Dark*) or in late life (as in *Moon Tiger*), while others represent the encounter between older and younger characters (such as Marina Lewycka’s more recent *We Are All Made of Glue*), portraying a growing understanding or at least companionship between generations. Some works more deliberately portray aging as an issue of social consciousness and justice (including the work of May Sarton and Pat Barker). Others operate more quietly, for instance by showing how the challenges of being a female author are compounded by ageism (as in Elizabeth Taylor’s *Angel*) or by gendered expectations of domestic care (as in Taylor’s *A View of the Harbour* and Lively’s *Family Album*). This chapter argues that Muriel Spark deserves a place among the many important challenges to the *status quo* issued by these authors. In particular, it places her work in productive tension with that of Doris Lessing, whose work on aging actively portrays the life review process and emphasizes its psychological and social benefits.

Furthermore, and following Bruce Robbins, who creates in *Upward Mobility and the Common Good* a genre of upward mobility narratives that reveal the complex moral “anatomy”

⁹¹ This chapter focuses on literature written by women for several reasons: In *Beyond Nostalgia*, Ruth E. Ray claims that feminists are “best positioned to ‘read difference’ in old age” (5) and to anchor age studies empirically thereby. Feminism and anti-ageism activism also overlap historically.

of welfare, I use Spark and Lessing as examples to argue that the degree to which authors privilege life-writing in their fictional accounts of aging or representations of old age reflects their complex negotiations between individual and collective good, and the social responsibility for elder care. Concerns that, for Robbins, lie at the heart of the tension between individual success stories and action for the social good, also apply to issues of aging: institutionalism, surveillance, “benevolent” intervention, dependency, self-reliance, social interdependence, class politics, and care.

Narrating Age and *Memento Mori*

In her attempt to reverse what she identifies as the pernicious cultural scripting of the contemporary life course, Margaret Gullette identifies the “master narrative of decline” (*Declining* 202) as chief culprit, a cultural construct that equates growing older with loss and body-based deficits and that we internalize at ever-earlier points in our lives. This ideology both perpetuates the social and cultural de-valuation of the elderly and creates anxiety about growing older, especially during our middle years. In an earlier work, Gullette uses the example of William Butler Yeats’s 1934 Steinach operation to suggest that Yeats assumed a medicalized version of the decline narrative (the then-popular association between “vitality” and hormones) to explain what he perceived as a loss in his creative and physical prowess (“Creativity” 21).

For Gullette, the midlife provides a point from which to launch alternative age narratives, ones which avoid merely rehearsing an internalized cultural script, or speciously countering it with an equally simplistic story of progress. She thus looks to works of literature and performance for models, such as those provided by Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, that “it feels better to be older than younger” (*Declining* 86), and to examples of age autobiography (including her

own) to show how we can make “change and choice and enlightenment seem accessible *via*—not in spite of—aging” (90). Gullette’s call is to “narrate age” in a new, better way.

One body of literary aging scholarship identifies narratives depicting aging and older characters—especially those written by and about women—as part of a growing subgenre of fiction that accomplishes precisely that. Both Barbara Frey Waxman’s and Constance Rooke’s particular terms for these subgenres, *Reifungsroman* (novel of “ripening” or “maturing”) and *Vollendungsroman* (novel of “winding up”), respectively, tend to emphasize the therapeutic and social work performed by these works and serve as an antidote, or at least a complement, to the youth-centered *Buildungsroman*. In her analysis of Doris Lessing’s major “age” novels, Waxman stresses Lessing’s optimism about entering middle age and old age. For Waxman, “Lessing’s protagonists hearteningly suggest that a woman’s old age can bring a reintegration or a total reshaping of the self” (“From” 333) as opposed to condemning these stages of life as inevitable diminishment. Rooke’s concept of a *Vollendungsroman* likewise stresses optimism and the search for “some kind of affirmation in the face of loss” (248), often featuring the structure of a life review. For Waxman and Rooke, this genre’s value is in its effect on readers: these texts work to inspire readers to critically re-evaluate their own assumptions about the elderly and late life and recognize their communality and common fates.

Fictional representations of late life do valuable work in promoting empathy and recognition and overturning pernicious cultural age scripts and stereotypes, but attempts to give a voice to a marginalized “grey” demographic is never straightforward. As we saw in the previous chapter on the work of English novelist B. S. Johnson, even works of literature that attempt to depict the “inside” of aging are often complicated by their own historical context and rhetorical expression. In Johnson’s case, his attempt at radical transparency had an unwitting tendency to

either re-organize aging into a decline narrative (as implied structurally by the order of the chapters in *House Mother Normal* chapters), or into an expression of (male) mid-life and/or authorial anxiety instead. However, as the work of Muriel Spark demonstrates, these generic and historical influences on the project of empathy need not be limitations; on the contrary, they offer opportunities to explore new avenues of ethically narrating age.

Published in 1959, *Memento Mori*, one of Spark's earlier novels and the one best known for representing late life, demonstrates the historical significance of narrative as a mode of age representation. The novel follows the reactions of a group of elderly people, affiliated with each other through bonds of family, friendship, marriage, or employment, as they begin to receive anonymous phone calls cautioning them to "Remember that they must die" (the eponymous "memento mori"). The death of an acquaintance also destabilizes the group's dynamic, as the former husbands, lovers, relatives, employees, and protégées of the wealthy Lisa Brook squabble over her will, shift alliances, and maneuver to keep or reveal long-held secrets.

In "How I Became a Novelist," an essay in which Spark gives a characteristically shallow description of her first few novels' origins, and both admits and performs her ambivalence with such an endeavor, Spark recalls accompanying her mother on visits to a geriatric ward in Edinburgh: "When I saw them I was impressed by the power and persistence of the human spirit. They were paralysed or crippled in body, yet were still exerting characteristic influences on those around them and in the world outside" (45). Spark's description of her encounter with aging is conventional to the point of banality. It articulates the typical split subject of old age, wherein the decline of one's body and physical capacities stands in contrast to an unchanging essential self—one that desires to speak and be recognized. Simone de Beauvoir calls this split the identification of the "stranger within us" (qtd in Woodward, *Aging* 62) while in *Aging and Its Discontents*

Kathleen Woodward uses it to anchor her psychological theory of the mirror stage of old age, the phenomenon wherein “we increasingly separate what we take to be our real selves from our bodies. We say that our real selves—that is, our youthful selves, are hidden inside our bodies. Our *bodies* are old, *we* are not” (62). More contemporary theories of embodied aging have attempted to re-integrate this “uncanny” division between an essential, authentic self and an unruly body. Woodward even faults Spark for reiterating such a split in her 1988 novel *Far Cry from Kensington*. When the 90-year-old landlord Milly is described by the protagonist as “still very much Milly,” Woodward faults Spark for “in effect denying that age is a distinct period in our lives. The point is that Milly is defined in terms of her character, which is understood as the continuity of the personality (already fully forged) over the years, not in terms of her age” (20). Despite the seemingly innocuous—even affirming—nature of such a formulation, the convention of the split subject is problematic, according to Woodward, because it not only promulgates society’s fear of old age and thus of the elderly but also may, in Lacanian terms, “precipitate the loss of the imaginary” (69), in a reverse of the Lacanian mirror stage of development.

Certain aspects of *Memento Mori* do place Spark within this convention. Spark reserves the sharpest level of satire for those characters who are least self-reflective and most obsessive about certain aspects of growing older. There is Godfrey Colston, for instance, with his constant evaluation of his own and other’s “faculties;” Alec Warner’s over ten-year gerontological research project, a more quantitative evaluation of the physiological capacities of people over seventy that yields a preponderance of data with no overarching analysis (a wry take on gerontology’s difficult road to legitimacy and its status of being “data rich but theory poor”); Dame Lettie’s meddlesome officiousness results increasing paranoia and an ironic realization of her own fears. These characters’ vigilant patrolling of the effects of aging on themselves and on

others reflects their internalization of the twentieth-century program of age surveillance, by which aging increasingly becomes the object of disciplinary scrutiny, as by medicine, science, or state involvement.

By contrast, the novel's most sympathetic characters are the author Charmian Colston and her former companion-maid Jean Taylor, both in their eighties and both Catholic. The latter is significant because the metaphysics of aging in the novel are certainly inflected by religious teachings (the novel ends with Jean Taylor meditating on "Death, the first of the four last things to be ever remembered" (232)), one of the reasons why critics such as Bryan Cheyette call the novel *Spark* "at her most didactic and orthodox" (*Muriel* 36). Charmian suffers from encroaching age-related memory deficiencies caused by a stroke, but remains "perfectly sensible when she discussed the books she had written" (10), while Miss Taylor, recently moved to a hospital nursing ward, faces the indignities of infantilization or even blatant ageist vitriol from the hospital staff and surroundings, as well as the physical sufferings of her severe arthritis.

Playing the role of an outsider perspective (in part because she is less privileged than the other, more well-to-do characters), Jean Taylor is the novel's moral center. Her thinking on her own current situation appears least motivated by unresolved jealousies or fears: "Miss Jean Taylor mused upon her condition and upon old age in general. Why do some people lose their memories, some their hearing? Why do some talk of their youth and others of their wills?" (9). *Spark* shifts the focalization to different characters to depict the effects these different losses of capacity and of the coping mechanisms employed by the characters. Jean Taylor's coping mechanism most closely resembles the classical philosophical tradition of stoicism. In *The Long Life*, Helen Small analyzes Cicero's stoic philosophy in the context of aging, wherein she explains that "being stoical about old age is gritting one's teeth in the face of dire circumstances"

(12). Spark places Jean's physical pains and psychological stress in the hospital's geriatric wing within this tradition: "After the first year she resolved to make her suffering a voluntary affair. If this is God's will then it is mine. She gained from this state of mind a decided and visible dignity, at the same time as she lost her stoical resistance to pain. She complained more, called often for the bed-pan...(10). Here again Spark stresses the division between physical frailty and spiritual strength. This stoicism also underlies Jean Taylor's decision to go to a state-run hospital rather than into the private nursing care that Charmian offers to provide. As Woodward explains, part of stoic aging means that "one does not *impose* one's old age on others in particular, or on society in general" (39); Spark frames Jean's experience of late life as one of hard-won stability (a respite from the emotional turbulence of middle age) and of moral superiority that stems from a stoic independence.

If this were all to *Memento Mori*, then reviewers of the novel might be correct to relegate it to a vision of bleak realism and acceptance of aging as a period of coping with inevitable decline. Malcolm Bradbury's reading coincides with such an assessment; he sees the characters as "desperately seeking to hold onto the manners of the young and maintain the pathetic significance of their lives, only to be constantly reminded of the facts of mortality" (270). Interpretations of aging in the novel are also subject to historical trends in gerontology; a 1977 review sees the novel as naturalistically documenting the "inevitable process of degeneration and decay" (Loughman 79) as well as the gradual process of social "disengagement," a theory of psychosocial aging that has since fallen into disfavor.

Does *Memento Mori* indulge only in gerontophobia, or is it rather, as Nicholas Royle suggests, "gerontophobic satire" (201)? Supporting the latter interpretation is Spark's inclusion of the supernatural element of the anonymous telephone caller, a caller who is never identified

and leaves no material trace, and whom each interlocutor describes differently. The caller may be Death personified; he may be a malicious hoax; he may be mass hysteria; all are possibilities suggested by different character and by Spark scholars. Nicholas Royle suggests that that the mystery of the phantom telephone caller “explores the notion of presentiment...déjà vu...telepathy” (192), an uncanny structuring of thought and experience that amounts to a satire of narrative omniscience.

Rather than simply endorsing its stoically inflected gerontophobia, Spark throws into question the entire enterprise of ethically narrating old age by structuring the experience through the device of the anonymous caller. The anonymous caller functions as a stand-in for what Stephen Katz identifies as the disciplinary forces of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in the postwar period, that shaped and problematized aging, including the creation of gerontology as a field of study and research. In *Disciplining Old Age*, Katz explores the historical forces that created elderly subjects *as* subjects—that “configured the elderly as a special kind of people” (24)—and thus transformed them into epistemological objects. Spark’s anonymous caller adds to Katz’s list of disciplinary forces that of *narrative*, vocalized in what Royle calls the “strange time” (197) of the memento mori phrase, functioning in both past and future registers. In telling his elderly interlocutors to “remember you must die,” the caller demands that the characters *give an account of themselves*, to reconcile the events of the past (“remember”) with an inevitable future termination (“must die”). The caller’s lack of corporeality or defining characteristics (or rather, their extreme subjectivity) suggests that the disciplinary force of this narrative demand has no easily locatable origin or headquarters; the source of their power remains discursive, diffuse, networked, and untraceable.

We witness the effects of this disciplinary regime of the postwar period more than its true nature. The caller merely reinforces the disciplinary lessons that have already been internalized by the characters: for instance, there is the ongoing motif of turning seventy as an initiation into a select group. Charmian asks her housekeeper Mrs. Anthony when she will turn seventy and thus “be one of us” (7). Seventy marks an arbitrary turning point (especially because some characters, notably Mrs. Pettigrew, conceal their true age), that is nonetheless significant; it is the creation of a line of division that marks entry into what is now a special category of human existence, and that seems to offer some stability. As Jean Taylor reiterates, “How nerve-racking it is to be getting old, how much better to be old!” (41). Her hard-worn, stoic calm is not shared by other characters. Guy Leet, for instance, questions seemingly accepted cultural assumptions about the nature of late life. He asks whether the “sense of calm and freedom” that is supposed to characterize late life in fact exists: “How could one know at any particular moment what one’s old age finally amounted to?” (199).

Spark takes her satirical aim at the regulation of aging by means of Alec Warner’s meticulous gathering of sociological data regarding his friends and acquaintances. Alec repeatedly requests that his subjects take their blood pressure and temperature, observe their psychological and physiological states, all in the name of a seeming endless and unresolved data-gathering of elderly subjects, the hollowness of which Spark emphasizes by its destruction in flames after a house fire. Alec’s sociological study is framed as a personal, intellectual project as well as his own coping mechanism: Jean Taylor observes that “he is a student of the subject but he is in many ways the same as the rest. How we all watch each other for signs of failure!” (65). Jean Taylor’s comment shows the easy slippage between the disciplinary processes of knowledge production and those of surveillance. The internalization of such a project of self-

monitoring and its subsequent project into one of surveillance are examples of Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, which Stephen Katz argues effectively describe how knowledge of what it meant to be old came to be constructed in the twentieth century.

Memento Mori thus complicates elements of its own gerontophobia by contextualizing it within the postwar disciplinary articulation of gerontological knowledge and the regulatory forces structuring the experience of late life, forces vocalized (if not embodied) by the anonymous telephone caller. The caller's imposition to narrate the self (which, I argue, is the effect of its rejoinder to "remember you must die") in the context of old age is the directive that many of Spark's later works seek to address. Many of her novels, including *Loitering with Intent*, will revisit the 1950s to note the potentially violent effects of this directive. After all, appeals to narrative within age studies or gerontology do have their disciplinary origins in the postwar moment. Gerontologist Robert Butler's 1963 study, an early example, identifies a process of evaluation in late life, one that goes beyond reminiscence, nostalgia, or pathology and which he terms "life review," citing Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* as one example. Calling on psychologist Erik Erikson's model of life-long development, Butler argues for the importance of late-life psychological processes such as these to understanding the full life course. Since then, narrative gerontology, as this area of inquiry has come to be known, has gained ground in theory and practice; in their collected work outlining the field's key tenets, Gary Kenyon, Phillip Clark, and Brian de Vries suggest that narrative be understood as a "root metaphor, or heuristic, to guide us in our thinking about aging" (3).

As part of a wider interdisciplinary interest in age studies and the humanities, scholars have also looked to literature to examine the "inside" of aging; William Randall and Elizabeth McKim, for instance, propose a "poetics of aging" that "can build on thinking about biographical

aging to nuance our understanding of the complex relationship between narrative and experience” (236). Other literary scholars, including Gullette, have argued for the importance of the autobiography of aging (or “age autobiography”) as a means of countering ageism, a variation of the “personal as political” form of rhetorical advocacy, as Barbara Frey Waxman writes in *To Live in the Center of the Moment*.

What these various versions of “narrating” or “writing” age share is an interest in navigating between the individual and particular, and the collective and universal, finding ways to move between the aging self and the aging population, and between the subjective experience of aging and the more objectivizing stances of theory and research. Furthermore, and more importantly, their shared fundamental assumption is a Ricoerian connection of narrative to time, and, ultimately, to the nature of self and identity. Narrative becomes necessary to selfhood, the expression of identity, and, as Amelia DeFalco writes, self-understanding, generating “a causal relationship that becomes increasingly obvious as subjects age” (22). Gullette succinctly encapsulates this fundamental assumption, writing “Identity is a life story, a long tale in the telling” (*Declining* 213). Thus, “narrative” functions within differing layers of conceptual metaphor: it encompasses larger cultural scripts for the life course, both non-fictional autobiography, memoir, and life-writing as well as the self-consciously fictional works that use these genres, as well as more broadly-defined discursive practices that generate what Gullette calls age identity, the “substantial sense of self-over-time” (2). According to this formulation, this sustained sense of self is, to varying degrees, articulated, understood, or even formed by narrative structures—whether traditional and chronological, or fragmented and hybrid, reflecting more nuanced understanding of the plurality of subject positions.

Proponents of narrative gerontology stress not only its theoretical and clinical possibilities, but also its therapeutic value to both older individuals, especially those suffering from increasing cognitive deficits, as well as to their caregivers. In a recent, comprehensive explanation of narrative gerontology, Kate de Medeiros emphasizes the empowering potential of feeling “listened to” (148). Within this field of study, narrative is understood as an emphasis on first-person narrative and chronological organization that either reflects (though not simply mimetically) or itself constructs the author’s sense of self. The fundamental assumption of narrative gerontology is that humans “not only *have* stories but *are stories too*”(4). Because lives are “storied,” so too are people “storied”; “They are biographical beings and, indeed, aesthetic compositions” (4). The “narrative” part of the theory typically refers to autobiography, memoir, and life-writing, though it can (as Kate de Medeiros points out), encompass other genres and mediums. This area of study and practice sees a double therapeutic significance in narrative: the very act of creative expression is valuable, and the acting of narrating our lives imposes a structure, unity, and meaning on our understanding of ourselves.

Compared to its original articulation, narrative gerontology has become more nuanced, more attentive to the idea that selves have no simply identifiable core or authenticity – they are multiple and changing, influenced by environment of telling, for instance, as well as variously interpretable by the audiences who we encourage to hear our stories.⁹² Despite the disciplinary support for narrative gerontology, some of its tenants have recently come under scrutiny. In *The Long Life*, Helen Small is critical of what she understands as the tendency to define a well-lived life as a unified, complete narrative; it is not only the teleological logic of progress implicit to such life stories that is harmful, she argues, but also the direct mapping of narrative onto “self” in

⁹² Ray explains this latter phenomenon as a Bakhtinian view of the self as a discursive construct, “a multiplicity of selves or ‘I positions’ interacting in both real and imaginary conversations” (22).

general. She writes that “there may be good reasons for downgrading, or even rejecting altogether, a narrative view of lives as an appropriate structure for thinking about old age” (90). One reason may be that the view of narrative in these theories is too deterministic; another is that it marginalizes those with severe loss of cognitive capacity. Galen Strawson’s critique is that while understanding one’s life as a narrative may describe the majority of human psyches, not everyone finds narrative meaningful or applicable to their sense of self (Small 94).

Scholars of literary gerontology are well-positioned to complicate straightforward applications of narrative to formations of selfhood, and to explore what is at stake in prioritizing the legible, narrativizing self as central to identity in late life. Fiction adds a level of artifact, highlighting the stylistic and formal manipulation present in all narrative, but making it difficult to maintain the concept of transparency or singular equivalence (one self, one narrative). In *Uncanny Subjects*, Amelia DeFalco calls attention to fictional and filmed “narratives” of old age that reveal the dynamism of life narratives, their “ambiguities and contradictions...interpretive blind spots, frustrating ellipses” (20) rather than fixed teleology or imposed rationality. The “uncanny” nature of aging is precisely what destabilizes the implied fixity of narrative, according to DeFalco. The uncanny temporality of old age “moves the subject into the space of alterity and back again,” creating an encounter with otherness that both is and is not one’s recognizable self (41). The result is a “blurred self” (40), a term DeFalco coins from her reading of John Banville’s novel *Shroud*. If old age, like narrative, is a process of gradual addition, then concepts like the uncanny of aging or the “blurred self” disrupt a clear-cut (and consoling) equation of narrative and self.

Accounting for Oneself: Obligation and Old Age in Muriel Spark

The Comforters (1957), and *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) do not principally foreground late life or elderly characters. Nevertheless, I argue that their interest in determining questions of identity through, respectively, the meta-fictional distance of authorship or at a proto-colonialist distance to Britain, are representative of the moral economy of old age in Spark's *oeuvre* more generally. It is one that stands in significant contrast to that practiced by other contemporary and more recent trends in the *Vollendungsroman* as a developing literary genre, one that relies heavily on narrative as a structuring metaphor for selfhood.

Set in a partitioned post-Palestine Mandate Jerusalem in 1961, Muriel Spark's seventh novel, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, explores the nature of identity and allegiance in the ironic guise of an unwitting spy novel. Barbara Vaughn is an English woman visiting Jerusalem for reasons of religious and romantic pilgrimage. While she visits the sacred sites of the Holy Land, she awaits news from her fiancé Harry Clegg, an archeologist working in Jordan, who is attempting to obtain an annulment from the Vatican of his previous marriage so that Barbara can marry him in compliance with the strictures of her faith. Like Spark herself, Barbara is a Catholic convert and is of half Jewish heritage (though Spark is Scottish where Barbara is English). Spark uses Barbara's divided religious heritage to embody the nature of identity and cultural belonging, and to drive the characters' escapades in romance and (usually unwitting) espionage. Though Spark herself later disparaged this work as her sole foray into the long, serious novel, John Glavin has argued for the novel's centrality to Spark's work, calling it the gate "through which she transforms her practice of fiction," from the emerging postmodern texts of the 50s to the shorter, "weird, elliptical, opaque, derisive, mysterious, utterly unclassifiable" (153; 154) work of the 1960s through to the early twenty-first century.

Barbara Vaughn's exasperated reflection in the following passage exemplifies how Spark values the process of self-definition amidst often competing ideologies and the "whole paradoxical lark" (206) of heritage, while emphasizing that such a process represents an obligation to oneself, not to others. The following encounter occurs early in the novel, when Barbara is still on the Israeli side of Jerusalem and is touring holy sites with an unpleasantly inquisitive guide. She responds to the guide's insistent questions as to the reasons for her conversion to Catholicism as follows:

Barbara knew then that the essential thing about herself remained unspoken, uncategorized and unlocated. She was agitated, and felt a compelling need to find some definition that would accurately explain herself to this man. He was demanding a definition. By the long habit of her life, and by temperament, she held as a vital principle that the human mind was bound in duty to continuous acts of definition. Mystery was acceptable to her, but only under the aspect of a crown of thorns. She found no rest in mysterious truths like "I am who I am"; *they were all right for death-bed definitions, when one's mental obligations were at an end*. Meantime, she thought, the man wants to know who I am, that is, what category of person. (29; emphasis mine)

Through Barbara, Spark articulates her commitment to a lifelong questioning of pre-determined identity categories and her dissatisfaction with the social imperative of categoric reduction, here represented by the guide, himself tied down to a historic singularity. Such a reduction, Spark suggests, is spiritually and intellectually lazy, as well as politically dangerous, as the novel's setting suggests (Cheyette, *Muriel* 66).

Rather than reductively choosing one identity category, Barbara expresses contentment and ease only when embodying discontinuity and the embrace of opposite ideologies, which she acknowledges when British civil servant Freddy Hamilton, fearing for Barbara's safety, engineers her "escape" from the Jordanian convent where she is staying. At that moment—buoyed by Freddy's uncharacteristic boldness—Barbara feels "all of a piece; Gentile Jewess, a private-judging Catholic, a shy adventuress" (207). For Spark scholar Bryan Cheyette, such

moments show Spark's ambivalent relationship to her own hybridity, veering from a desire to find unity and orthodoxy while valuing individual difference and heterodoxy. Indeed, in "Writing Against Conversion: Muriel Spark the Gentile Jewess," Cheyette argues that Spark's work is characterized by a constant push-and-pull between hybrid forms of identity that seek to regulate, and those tending to fluidity.

As in this passage, the question of religious conversion functions as a point of narrative contention in Spark's novels (as is the contentious question of whether or not to classify her as a "Catholic" novelist). Spark converted to Catholicism in 1954 following a difficult period in her life, but the connection between autobiography and the process of religious conversion has strong generic ties that go beyond Spark's personal investment in the process. According to Patrick Riley, "the history of autobiography, from its origins to contemporary times, bears witness to the abiding influence of the *structure* and the *rhetoric* of conversion" (1); both autobiography and conversion, for instance, share an insistent interest in mapping interiority and inner life. As Riley notes, this mapping is never literal or straightforward. On the contrary, he points out what is already clear to us from the work of Muriel Spark, that even as conversion strives to make autobiographical narrative coherent and legible, it also impedes fixed definitions of self (3).⁹³ *The Comforters*' Caroline Rose, another character-turned-author hybrid, spends the entire novel both refusing to explain the "story" of her conversion (to the moral blackmailer Mrs. Hogg, for instance) and negotiating its effects on her life, work, and relationships, as well as resisting those who would impose singular, coherent meaning on her religious identity. Caroline demonstrates what Riley calls the secular transformation of conversion, in which the search for meaning through God is replaced (in keeping with the secularization of the self in Western

⁹³ Bryan Cheyette writes that Spark's version of conversion resists a simple binary or temporality; it does not simply or unproblematically "[split] the self into old and new, before and after, inner and outer" (97).

consciousness) by a sense of the “author’s *intellectual, philosophical, or authorial* vocation” (2).⁹⁴ It is not merely that Caroline becomes a writer after her conversion; rather, the story of her coming to writing takes the place of the “missing” narratives of conversion.

In *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Barbara is inconsistent in her reactions to the pressure of others to articulate a clear identity category, to say who she is (Jewish or Catholic) and why. Her conflicted response to the tour guide in this case suggests that while she values personal reflection, she also recognizes that identity categories are used situationally, as a tool on a need-to-know-basis, one dependent on context. In her encounter with the tour guide, she continues to reflect, for instance, on the multiplicity of institutions and ideologies that could have formed her identity and that could account for her conversion and for her finding herself at this juncture: “I should explain to him the Gentile-Jewish situation in the West, and next, the independence of British education, and peculiar independence of the Gentile Jew whose very existence occurs through a nonconforming alliance. And next, the probabilities of the Catholic claim, she thought” (29). Spark alternates between Barbara’s struggle to articulate an identity category and her frustration at others’ insistence that she do so, ultimately endorsing an uncomfortable but productive destabilization.

In other parts of *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Spark expresses this frustration as a misplaced sense of obligation, one engendered by the act of confession, as when her fellow schoolteacher friend Ricky follows her to Jerusalem. Learning (from Freddy Hamilton’s mother) about Barbara’s romance with Harry Clegg and her determination to marry, the disappointed Ricky writes a letter to Barbara to give her “the full account” of her distress. Unsettled by Ricky’s seeming obsessive anxiety, Barbara asks: “But this uncharacteristic outpouring, this confession,

⁹⁴ For more on this topic, see Gerald Peters, *The Mutilating God: Authorship and Authority in the Narrative of Conversion*.

almost—what had it come to?...Who am I to Ricky and who is she to me? She’s only a friend. I’ve taken no vows” (197). Echoing Caroline Rose’s disgust with Mrs. Hogg’s violation of her privacy (a reading of a letter) in *The Comforters*, Barbara is sensitive to the ethical ties, the sense of duty or obligation, that the act of confession and the demand for accountability can create.

This discomforting sense of obligation created by naked confession or telling of life story echoes throughout Spark’s work, and also forms her unusual take on old age. If Barbara’s journey in *Mandelbaum Gate* is partly in search of resolving her fragmented identity, then old age performs the imaginary endpoint of that journey. The religious mysticism of the Hebrew verse she considers acceptable only “for death-bed definitions, when one’s mental obligations were at an end” (29). To picture old age as an end of “mental obligations” is not, however, the dire critique or bleak realism that it may initially seem. Rather, Spark seeks to position the work of self-reflection and self-fashioning as a life-long process, not one relegated to extreme old age and the fears of impending demise.⁹⁵ Barbara posits the end of one’s life not as an unraveling of mystery (an answer to the question, “Who am I?”) but the acceptance of mystery; mystery is the provenance of religious belief and for the end of one’s life, and thus the peace that Barbara seeks—to be “all of a piece,” unified—is continually deferred and placed upon this future moment.

The acceptance of mystery, as opposed to its revelation, is a key feature of Spark’s understanding of the end of life and the extremes of old age. It also plays the central structural role in *Memento Mori*, where Spark deliberately leaves the novel’s central mystery, the

⁹⁵ In *The Long Life*, Helen Small demonstrates how imagined old age can be an important organizing principle of art and life. Small reads Thomas Mann’s novella *Death in Venice* as an attempt by the author to write himself through the challenges of artistic output in part by imaging old age as the liberating endpoint of those challenges; thus, for Mann, “the labour of art seemed to be made possible, its object graspable, only through the sustaining idea that there would be an end to labour” (49). For *Mandelbaum Gate*’s Barbara, extreme old age, and death, also functions as an imagined respite from the ongoing challenges of self-knowledge and of self-fashioning through writing.

anonymous telephone calls to the elderly inhabitants, with no tangible solution other than metaphysics, psychology, or religious belief. Even the novel's secondary mystery, the existence of Lisa Brook's husband and thus the inheritor of her wealth, resists easy satisfaction and offers only ironic closure, as Lisa's "secret" husband turns out to be a mentally ill patient who believes he is God (another ironic send-up of omniscience).⁹⁶

Much has been made of Spark's unusual use of prolepsis, the revelation of the ends or deaths of characters' stories in advance of the narrative's plot-ending, as in, perhaps most famously, the revelation that Sandy Stranger becomes a nun and betrays her former teacher in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In "Muriel Spark's Fingernails," Malcolm Bradbury calls this technique "novels of ending," thereby emphasizing the parallel between lives and narratives: "If endings give meaning to stories, the ending of lives gives meaning to those too, and often they are not the meanings we expect..." (273). While this is the case for many novels of the *Vollendungsroman*, Spark's use of the proleptic "ending" serves a purpose more akin to Judith Butler's analysis of ethical recognition in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. The logistical problem of narrating the self, Butler argues, is that "the account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries this living self" (36). The temporality of the lived self is preceded and surrounded by another temporality, that of societal and historic discursive norms. Barbara Vaughn's beleaguered response to the Israeli guide's insistence that she give an account of her identity and her conversion performs the temporal dissonance, or "interruption," that Butler describes: "so, in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical

⁹⁶ By contrast, novels such as Marina Lewycka's more recent *We Are All Made of Glue* (2009) are structured around the revelation of secrets, as in the elderly Mrs. Shapiro's "real" identity. For another example of the relationship between life writing and the discovery of secrets, see Sarah Herbe, "Memory, Reliability and Old Age in Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture*: A Reading of the Novel as Fictional Life Writing."

temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained” (35).

Barbara’s encounter with the guide sets off these differing temporal horizons, with her imagined death providing a kind of respite from the demand for recognition by the other.

Nonetheless—and this is Butler’s crucial point—this form of “interruption” is necessary for ethical orientation. It is here that framing this problematic within the context of late life or old age—as Barbara does, and as we will see Freddy Hamilton do in another important part of the novel—takes on a critical importance, for it highlights what Butler calls the “ethical violence” created by “the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence” (42). This demand that others give complete, coherent narratives of themselves is impossible for us, for “subjects who invariably live within a temporal horizon” (42), that is, subjects of time and thus of aging.

Many of Spark’s characters register distress and disgust when (through an act of ethical violence) a coherent narrative account, or a confession, is demanded of them: Barbara’s discomfort with the guide’s questioning, like her discomfort with her friend Ricky’s possessive involvement in her Jerusalem trip; Caroline’s disgust with Mrs. Hogg in *The Comforters*, when the latter demands, “‘Why won’t you talk about your conversion?...It’s not *Catholic* not to talk about it’” (34); Fleur’s personal and editorial critiques of the members of the Autobiographical Association in *Loitering with Intent*. In the latter case, Fleur’s evaluation of the members’ memoirs rings closely with Butler’s critique of a narrative account of a life:

Since the story of my own life is just as much constituted of the secrets of my craft as it is of other events, I might well remark here that to make a character ring true it needs must be in some way contradictory, somewhere a paradox. And I’d already seen that where the self-portraits of Sir Quentin’s ten testifiers were going all wrong, where they sounded

stiff and false, occurred at points where they strained themselves into a constancy and steadiness that they evidently wished to possess but didn't. (41)

Like Spark, Butler acknowledges a practical need for a baseline narrative structure, but to demand complete faithfulness to coherence in narratives of self is to “foreclose an ethical resource—namely, an acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and others,” and doing so requires “a falsification of that life” (63). The strain of such a demand for constancy results not only in a “false” memoir, but also in the unhappiness and death of some members.

Age and Interruption in *The Mandelbaum Gate*

Spark's figurative use of late life in *The Mandelbaum Gate* rejects the demand to provide a coherent narrative account of oneself, but it also provokes questions about how to respond ethically and responsibly toward an other that *is* an Other. While the previous section demonstrated how Spark identifies narrative's tendency to ethical violence, this section will focus on the second half of Judith Butler's formula, the promotion of ethical *non*violence. If the desire for “master and unity” inscribes violence, then “nonviolence may well follow from living the persistent challenge to egoic mastery that our obligations to others induce and require” (64). Thus, if demands for narrative coherence are aimed at subjective mastery, and do violence because they require some degree of falsification, then the “truth of a person,” according to Butler, “might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness—in enigmatic articulations that cannot easily be translated into narrative form” (64). Middle-aged British Foreign Service employee Freddy Hamilton embodies such an enigmatic articulation in *The Mandelbaum Gate*.

Spark introduces us to Freddy as a figure of political and cultural privilege and thus seemingly lacking in moral seriousness; because “every place east of Europe or west of the Atlantic ocean was more or less one of the colonies to Freddy” (207), he crosses the border into Jordan-held Jerusalem at the titular gate casually and frequently to visit friends, his ease of movement later contrasted by Barbara’s dangerous predicament in re-crossing the border. Freddy befriends Barbara and entangles himself in the web of subterfuges that she unwittingly sets in motion, although their connections are more entangled in the web of coincidences that Spark often employs; Freddy’s mother gossips to Barbara’s friend Ricky back in England. Freddy initially lacks Barbara’s drive to self-examination; Abdul Ramdez, one of the characters who occupy a more marginal (or deliberately ambivalent) place in this proto-colonialist space, describes Freddy as belonging “to that total category of the human race known...as the System” (98). If he embodies an unreflexive bureaucracy underpinning western colonial ideology, wherein can we locate his ethical center? The question of ethics and bureaucracy takes on special poignancy when the novel covers, albeit somewhat obliquely, the 1961 Eichmann trial.⁹⁷

Freddy’s broken narrative performs Spark’s most provocative theory of ethical relations precisely because he “learns” ethical responsibility through a diffuse rather than direct process of care and engagement. At the core of this process is the narrative’s most prominent absence: Freddy’s elderly mother and her lifelong servant and companion (and eventual murderer), Miss Bennett, known as Benny. The saga of Mrs. Hamilton and her eventual death off-stage, “back home” in England in a hotel in Harrogate, is revealed mostly through the letters Freddy receives and writes, and it serves as the tragic projection of the religious, cultural, and political divisions at work in Palestine, as Freddy comes to realize. Spark’s treatment of the death of Freddy’s

⁹⁷ For a discussion of Spark’s novelistic treatment of the Eichmann trial, see, for instance, John Glavin, “*The Mandelbaum Gate*: Muriel Spark’s Apocalyptic Gag.”

mother at the hands of Benny, who Spark suggests has been suffering from increasing paranoia manifested in religious mania, exemplifies what Ian Gregson has described as the essential structure of Spark's satire: namely, that "what should be central is peripheral, and what should be marginal becomes central" (16).

Like Barbara, Freddy is drawn to mystery, but unlike her, he cannot psychologically cope with the stress occasioned by Barbara's entry into Jordan, doubled as it is by his family's troubles. The novel's structure breaks up midway when Freddy finds that he has "obliterated...from his memory" (210) the four crucial days that encompass Barbara's crossing over and the romantic, adventurous role he played therein; those uncharacteristically carefree days were simply "too memorable to remember" (361). The novel thus begins to operate on different narrative time streams, with Spark filling in readers on those four days and beyond, as well as on Freddy's attempts to deal with his amnesia and the repercussions of unknown actions, including the uncovering of a spy in the British consulate as well as the revelation of his mother's death. Freddy Hamilton's spell of amnesia—or "madness" (207)—is one of many such spells of psychological distress or illness in Spark's work, many with roots in Spark's own nervous breakdown. As Bryan Cheyette notes, moments of mental breakdown in *Mandelbaum Gate*, as in much of Spark's work, marks the "thin line between madness and prophecy" (*Muriel* 67), or else moments of emotional freedom from social restrictions.

Notwithstanding the problematic nature of equating illness or mental instability, albeit temporary, with libidinal freedom, what is most remarkable about Freddy's amnesia is that it is entirely structured around a rejection of the obligations imposed by his mother, a figure encapsulating the aging, the maternal, and the domestic and colonial "back home," in England. Spark shows us "Ma" Hamilton only second-hand, through snippets of letters or through others'

descriptions of her. These descriptions paint a picture of a selfish and self-absorbed, and demanding woman, who has “ruined” Freddy (215). Focalized through Freddy, Spark’s description of Ma Hamilton combines the language of extreme obligation with the language of narrative: “she wanted a solver of problems, and no one would suffice but Freddy himself. Benny was to some extent a participant in the unspoken plot to get unattached Freddy to resign his job and come and live with them. It was an old story to Freddy, who had no intention of laying himself, a human sacrifice, on the altar at Harrogate” (163). The religious rhetoric hints at Benny’s growing religion-fueled paranoia, which Freddy admits had recently caused him some alarm. In this passage, Spark refuses to allow the apparatus of narrative control (the “unspoken plot,” the “old story”) to create bonds of obligation and care, while acknowledging that in some hands they can carry the means to do so. The push-and-pull of their seductive power is a returning theme in Spark’s works.

Early in the novel Spark establishes Freddy’s frequent and repetitive correspondence with his mother and Benny regarding their squabbles, Ma Hamilton’s paranoid suspicions of theft, and Benny’s increasingly paranoid “religious excess” (165). It is this correspondence that initiates the gap in Freddy’s narrative and triggers his amnesia break. After writing three letters—to his mother, to Benny, and to a doctor—in response to their correspondence, Freddy leaves the Cartwrights,’ disposes of all the correspondence by burning and flushing it, and begins a four-day adventure. Spark offers no tangible explanation for Freddy’s sudden break: “It did not occur to Freddy that there was something irrational in this notion. But as if he recalled a decision already reached by a form of reasoning, he returned to the Cartwrights’ house and packed his clothes into his zipper-bag” (168-9). Spark uses Freddy’s action to suggest the knot of opacity at the center of any questioning about motives, intentions, or motivations. The four subsequent

days show a side of Freddy that is “carefree and full-hearted” (210), but ultimately unsustainable: “they were, to him, stolen days, and not for many years could he come to think of them with total pleasure” (210). Freddy emerges from these forgotten few days of adventure having uncovered an espionage plot involving another member of the British foreign service, but also learning that, back in England, the mentally unstable Benny has killed Freddy’s mother.

How are we to make ethical sense of Freddy’s temporary abdication of responsibility? For one, Freddy’s amnesiac spell occurs during a moment of keen awareness of lived temporality, more specifically, of his mother as an elderly subject and of his own awareness of aging. Twice in the letters he writes he mentions aging: To Benny his tone is inclusive when he asks for forbearance for his mother, who is “getting old, you know, like all of us.” By contrast, he writes to his mother’s doctor that “I’m afraid these old people are apt to let their imaginations run away from them” (166), excluding himself from an aged state. This temporal ambivalence is not merely rhetorical, but rather is brought into sharp relief when Freddy then goes to the home of his friend and antiquities dealer Alexandros. By destroying the letters at Alexandros’s, Freddy performs a rejection of aging; he tells Alexandros that he feels “quite young” and they discuss the uncomfortable constraints of middle age. Judith Butler describes the difficulty of giving an account of oneself in terms of “interruption,” in which “Paradoxically, it is this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective of my life, this instance of an indifference in sociality, that nevertheless sustains my living” (35). Freddy’s destruction of the correspondence in the context of this troubled encounter illustrates precisely the experience of this interruption, wherein the limitations of a personal, human timeline are forced to confront the limitations of the discursive norms that precede and shape it—but that ultimately cannot save it.

Freddy is not moved to a sense of ethical obligation by any specific act of empathy or recognition, but rather by an act whose meaning is opaque even to him. Another significant imaginative encounter occurs between Freddy's writing of the letters and his destruction of them at Alexandros's: he imagines a soothing, wordless conversation with the "ancient, frail monk" at the Greek Orthodox shrine near the Cartwrights' residence, who Spark describes as "sublimely unaware of anything in the world around him except his hen-coop and God" (167). Freddy's imagined communion with the spiritual, benevolent, silent monk reinforces the break with discourse and socially-dictated norms of obligation that Freddy is about to perform through the destruction of the letters.

Upon his return to Israel, still unable to remember his missing time, Freddy feels a source of guilt and a premonition of disaster that he cannot place: He says that he "'can't help feeling...as if I've already been told. It's as if someone had sent me a letter or a message by word of mouth, warning me to prevent this bloodshed that's impending'"(375). Answering the questions of an unknown interlocutor during his recovery, Freddy's guilty musings echo ours: Is it true that if Freddy had posted the letters instead of destroying them, "this wouldn't have happened" (292)? In John Glavin's reading of the novel, Freddy's "vicious mother and her pathetic servant Benny" represent the destructive forces of history, and in the characters' liberating few days of adventure he sees them coping with these "burdens of history and memory" (156) by fleeing into a space of apocalypse, slipping out of history and "into mystery" (160; 155). Glavin characterizes the freeing agency they find therein as a transfigurative encounter with the theological practice of "Unknowing" (162). While Glavin's emphasis is on the theological origins of this practice rather than their ethical repercussions, the concept of "Unknowing" suggests another productive way of characterizing what we have been calling

Spark's resistance to a completely legible "account" of oneself. Certainly, such a space is not moral in any traditional sense; on the contrary, in Spark's *The Abbess of Crewe* it forms a part of the eponymous Abbess's program of plausible deniability, as she insists on remaining "in the region of unknowing" (65) to avoid direct information regarding the unfolding of her psychologically oppressive and dictatorial schemes. While Freddy's motivations are opaque even to himself, his actions clearly belie the notion that actions of care or obligation can result in any direct or logically predictable way from imaginary encounters with elderly "others" such as the monk (a clear rejoinder to argument of ethical reading, as all encounters with literary others must indeed be imagined).

Unlike Doris Lessing, for instance, Spark's novels are rarely structured around psychological or emotional growth or even change. Thus, although it cannot be said that Freddy learns a lesson here, Spark suggests that Freddy's seeming abdication of assistance does have an ethical component. For instance, he now remains the only one concerned for what happens to Benny in the aftermath of the violent act. In a moment exposing her own hypocrisy, the "do-gooder" Joanna Cartwright tells Freddy to remove himself from the situation, saying "There's nothing you can do now. Let your sisters cope," then suggests that the "Welfare State" (390) will take care of her. Freddy says "I must see about her. I can't have her locked up in some lunatic asylum without seeing the actual place, at least (368). Spark marks the change in Freddy near the end of the novel, during Freddy's last encounter with the antiques dealer Alexandros. Having long admired an expensive twelfth-century icon—a symbolically overdetermined figure of Madonna and child—Freddy's inheritance from his mother now enables him to purchase it: "Before he left Jordan Freddy bought the icon from Alexandros, who condoled with him formally, in Lebanese French, over the death of his mother, and, in Arab English, assured Freddy

that there was no obligation for him to buy the icon” (390). On par with the theme of unexpected inheritances in Spark’s work, Freddy’s purchase overlaps his mother’s death with his own idiosyncratic performance of obligation, minimal though it is.

The ethics of narrative and aging in Spark’s work are part of her larger disenchantment with humanity’s ability to change or improve; “There is no great taking in of impressions, no learning from experience” (274), Malcolm Bradbury writes of Spark’s characters. Despite Spark’s belief in this fundamental inadequacy, what Ian Gregson describes as Spark’s belief in an “actual paucity about the human” (106), there is a possibility of an ethical relationship that does not rely on traditional humanistic values and traits or of a rational discourse of obligation,⁹⁸ but which rather stems from the ultimate opacity of our intentions and motivations. Furthermore, for Spark, old age (where life endings and narrative endings can meet) helps structure a template for just such an ethical relationship.

Doris Lessing

In an oft-cited essay, first delivered as a lecture in New York in 1970, Spark explains her dissatisfaction with the “marvellous tradition of socially-conscious art” of the twentieth century. With its deliberately provocative title, “The Desegregation of Art” argues that literature of sentimentality and emotion provides a release-valve for social action instead of an impetus to activate meaningful change: “I only say that the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, however stirring in its depiction of actuality, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality it is a segregated activity” (80). Valuing intelligence and the “arts of satire and of ridicule” over sentiment and emotion, Spark’s

⁹⁸ Adam Zachary Newton describes this definition of ethics as stemming from the philosophical tradition of Aristotle, Kant, Hume, and Habermas (12).

depiction of aging and the elderly—of human nature in general—offers an alternative ethical position to that of many of her contemporaries as well as more recent forays into the deliberate novelistic representation of late life. In particular, her work offers a productive counterpoint to the novels of aging that rely on the forms of memoir or autobiography to produce ethical action based on recognition and empathy.

While Doris Lessing's major "age novels" offer perhaps the most visible target for Spark's rebuke, they nonetheless comprise the starting point and indeed the literary touchstone for many discussions of feminist age narratives in contemporary authorship (alongside works by Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Penelope Lively, and Barbara Pym, among others). Barbara Waxman uses Lessing's work to define a new literary subgenre: the *Reifungsroman*, the novel of "ripening and maturing," wherein middle-aged or elderly heroines are "forging new identities or reintegrating fragmented old ones and...acquiring the self-confidence, self-respect, and courage to live the remainder of their lives fully and joyously." Waxman deliberately positions works in this subgenre as providing the emotionally "stirring" element that Spark critiques: they "act like a tonic for the middle-aged or older woman, reader and critic," who has been socially and culturally conditioned to equate late life with the end of social value and self-worth. In addition to this personal therapeutic value, which Waxman explicitly says "elicits readers' increased sympathy for the old," these works also "perform an invaluable social service: they make society question the stereotypes and challenge its misconceptions about aging" ("From" 320). As this project has suggested, the rise of such a genre reflects the overall demographic aging of the population (and thus of the readership) and, more particularly, the increased attention to the plight of the elderly made possible by the postwar welfare state and, in the case of Lessing, the historical conjunction of feminist and age activism.

However Spark may critique novelists' manipulation of emotion, so in turn does Lessing offer a critique of the kind of hard surfaces and cynicism that typify Spark's style. For one, these examples of Lessing's work embrace the complexities of psychology and the workings of memory, often borrowing from the narrative forms of memoir or autobiography to do so.

The Summer Before Dark, published in 1973, narrates an anxious summer in the life of 45-year-old Kate Brown as she struggles to find a new identity apart from the one of domestically and maternally orientated femininity, as an "intelligent and fluent parrot with maternal inclinations" (31), that she has performed for most of her (younger) life. Trying various new residences, jobs, lovers and acquaintances, even clothes and hairstyles, Kate sheds successive layers of that old identity until the "light that is the desire to please had gone out" (242). By the end of the summer, and the novel, "she was saying *no*: no, no, no, NO" (244), and finding new, non-verbal ways to express resistance to the social constraints on self-definition, which Lessing depicts in part through descriptions of Kate's reoccurring dreams.

Written almost a decade later when Lessing was in her sixties, *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) uses an explicitly biographical structure to demonstrate the transformative potential of empathy and care for the elderly. While its sequel, *If the Old Could...* (1984), abandons the strict diary format, it also emphasizes the formation of meaningful intra-generational relationships. Lessing used the Jane Somers pseudonym for *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (as the two novels are collectively known and often published) for the purpose of what she later termed "a little experiment" (Preface vii) in publishing and reader reception. As the first novel's title suggests, *Diary* takes the form of a personal journal purportedly written by Jane (or Janna) Somers, a successful forty-nine-year-old women's magazine editor, whose life dramatically changes when she befriends the poor and elderly Maudie Fowler. Unlike Kate

Brown, Janna only gradually learns to become a nurturing friend and caretaker, “a human being and not a little girl” (11), after a self-described lifetime of selfishness and emotional avoidance.

Using the faux-diary form to chart Janna’s changing perspective, Lessing emphasizes the degree to which Janna’s emotional growth depends on the act of empathy, particularly with the abject Maudie. This empathy leads to a sense of obligation to keep caring for Maudie and, in the subsequent novel, for other elderly people. In her comparative analysis of the politics of empathy in the work of mid-century women writers, Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that such gendered intergenerational relationships (especially those centered around mother/daughter dyads) are a means of configuring female identity. For Gardiner, empathy is not necessarily a natural function or a morally righteous one, but rather a rhetorical tool learned and adapted by women writers in particular—Lessing among them—as a means for engaging readers “across difference” and thus prompting “social and cultural transformations” (6). *The Diary* focuses on Janna’s individual growth. Realizing how much Maudie values their time together, Janna feels “defensive and guilty about her, as if *I* am responsible for all the awful things that have happened” (87). As in *Mandelbaum Gate*, feelings of unlocalized and unlocalizable guilt influence the nature of the relationship, but unlike Spark’s Freddy Hamilton, for instance, Janna’s feelings of guilt arise from knowing and understanding Maudie’s situation. Lessing takes pains to emphasize the humanistic origins of Janna’s sense of obligation. In the beginning of their relationship, Janna must reiterate to the suspicious Maudie that her attention is neither bureaucratic nor transactional, that she “was not an official, paid person, but just a human being who likes her” (18). Ultimately, Lessing seeks to show us not only Janna’s increasingly emotional openness but also her more optimistic outlook on aging. She loses her fear and denial of old age, instead recognizing the pedagogical value of her new elderly acquaintances, from whom she could “learn real slow full

enjoyment” (166). Lessing reinforces this new valuation of the elderly (and of their female caretakers as well) through the metaphor of visibility. However, as Diana Wallace suggests, “seeing” the elderly through the middle-aged Janna’s eyes means that the “text speaks *for* old people rather than giving them a voice directly” (50). It is a problem that Lessing was herself aware of, and addresses by focalizing several parts of the novel through characters other than Janna (including Maudie and the Home Help, Bridget), as a way of seemingly testing Janna’s empathic powers.

Lessing forces her readers to recognize an often marginalized or ignored segment of the population by insisting on women’s, especially elderly women’s, materiality; too often is the “aged woman present most frequently through absence” (Tiger 4). Virginia Tiger argues that Lessing’s work is an attempt to overturn a literary history overwhelming chronicled by male voices, in which “old bodies are dead bodies” and “[d]isallowed is the wise old woman” (3). By focusing on the materiality of women’s aging bodies, Lessing not only seeks to re-present what has been socially rendered absent but also reinforces the transformative power of the empathic connection. Janna not only “writes” what she imagines is Maudie’s experience, but also wants us to intimately “inhabit an aging, indeed dying (Maudie has cancer) body” (D. Wallace 52). Diana Wallace argues that Janna’s coping with Maudie’s extreme abjection—Janna bathes her, cleans her soiled clothes—is also an act of reclamation of what the social body had previously excluded (53). According to Tiger, it is a reclamation of that which society has deemed revolting, the aged female body (3).

Narrative also functions as one of the primary vehicles for empathy. In what becomes a hallmark of this subgenre,⁹⁹ the intergenerational nature of the relationship is negotiated through

⁹⁹ For other examples, see, for instance, Pat Barker’s *Liza’s England* and Marina Lewycka’s *We Are All Made of Glue*.

the exchange of memories and stories of the past, but mostly on Maudie's part. As Barbara Waxman notes, the novel's memoir format allows Lessing to chart Janna's emotional growth and to structure her transformation as a self-imposed "journey of self-discovery" ("From" 331). The memoir structure carries additional weight in this novel because of noted similarities between Lessing and the fictional Somers. Many scholars of Lessing's work have noted how Maudie Fowler, even Janna herself at times, recall Lessing's own difficult relationship with her mother: Via the novel, Lessing "has the opportunity, as she never did in life, to teach her, to remold her and make her more sympathetic" (Sizemore 137), or to atone for moments of real-life inattention during the course of their relationship. Thus, the *Diaries* use doubles or foils not just to highlight the characters' function as autobiographical surrogates but also as stand-ins for intergenerational connections. Maudie embodies Janna's future, a pessimistic "Fourth Age" future of physical debility and dependency of which Janna is afraid, but she also embodies the local, cultural history of a previous generation—and then *performs* that identity by sharing those cultural memories with Janna.¹⁰⁰

Although Lessing is anxious to highlight the humanistic rather than transactional nature of Janna and Maudie's relationship, the two forces remain in tension with one another throughout the novel. For one, while Lessing works hard to emphasize Janna's attempts at empathy, the two women's current experiences of aging are vastly different. To use Andrew Blaikie's terms, whereas Janna has the luxury of seeking "self-actualisation" in aging, Maudie is stuck "constrainedly [eking] out strategies for survival" (170). Another source of tension occurs on the economic backdrop of their relationship. Janna must frequently repeat that she receives no financial remuneration for her work, yet the novel ends after Maudie's funeral with Maudie's ungrateful, unpleasant family making the familiar charge that caring for Maudie had been

¹⁰⁰ For more on collective memory and intergenerational relations, see Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture*.

Janna's "little job" (252). The other side of this charge is the charge of dilettantism, which would lump Janna into an earlier tradition of genteel charity. This charge Lessing consciously addresses when she describes the Victorian romance novel Janna is planning, in which Janna describes the protagonist, other caretakers of Maudie, and herself as "in fact the legitimate descendants of the Victorian philanthropist lady" who have "taken her place" (151) in a world lacking in committed, competent care for the elderly.

Despite Janna's protestations, there remains a sense in which Maudie's stories of her past constitute Janna's compensation.¹⁰¹ Maudie suggests as much when she asks Janna, before launching into yet another tale: "'You do so much for me, and all I can do for you is to tell you my little stories, because you like that, don't you?'" (87). The social expectation of remaining "productive" extends even to someone so systemically disadvantaged as Maudie. If Maudie's stories are compensation for contact with Janna's elegant, privileged, modern world, and for Janna's attention and physical care, they also provide Janna with more tangible rewards: Maudie's experiences fuel Janna's newly prolific authorial ventures, including a sociological study and a romantic history. Part of Janna's emotional transformation is thus a meditation on the nature of aging and commercially successful authorship.

Susan Watkins makes an important claim about the nature of the literary ruse that Lessing used when seeking to publish under the Jane Somers pseudonym. She argues that Lessing's "hoax" reveals the gendered ageism at the heart of the literary marketplace, especially directed toward women writers, and that in using the memoir format—with its heightened faux-realism—Lessing attempts to elevate a form of minor or middle-brow literature typically associated with

¹⁰¹ Christine Wick Sizemore describes their relationship as one of "reciprocity" (128).

female authorship and readership.¹⁰² The irony, perhaps, is that while Watkins understands Lessing to be “rethinking realism” (88)¹⁰³ and what it may mean for women writers representing the aging process, Lessing’s version of the age narrative has in the succeeding decades become almost the default mode of age narrative.

In her analysis of philosophy’s take on aging, Helen Small suggests that Simone de Beauvoir’s 1970 *La Vieillesse* (*The Coming of Age*), a pioneering study in intersectional aging studies, explains why age activism may not necessarily yield profound results:

Beauvoir concludes...by refusing, or at best giving lukewarm support to, political activism on behalf of the old. To pursue better old age policies (better pensions, housing, leisure provision), she argues, may alleviate the ills of the old, but it is not the answer we need. Such efforts intervene too late in a systemic problem. The situation of the old is the outcome of fundamental failures in our social relations, above all of an economic system that deprives everyone but the Ciceronian elite of the means (intellectual, financial, social) to define projects for themselves which would give their lives value. (15)

Small’s unusual interpretation of Beauvoir’s work contrasts it to the “blunt moral causalism” of Cicero’s *De Senectute*, with its stoic, individualist mantra of “live well, age well; live badly, age badly” (9). This critique could be leveled at Lessing’s *Diaries*: Whereas Lessing actively depicts Janna’s privilege in contrast to Maudie’s lifelong poverty and current state of abjection, railing at the injustice, she provides few suggestions as to how to solve the larger systemic problem that Small and Beauvoir identify. We see this contrast at work when Janna takes on the care—and the story-telling—of Maudie Fowler. While there is a sense in the *Diary* that the social system has

¹⁰² In *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, Devoney Looser considers how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers fared in the literary marketplace and publishing industry when they grew older.

¹⁰³ Judith Kegan Gardiner also considers Lessing’s re-thinking of realism: “Even the return to realism in the Jane Somers novels sometimes seems perfunctory, as though old-fashioned humanistic characterization has been cryogenically interred and not wholly resuscitated” (110).

failed Maudie throughout her lifetime, and that only now, at the end of her life, has help arrived in the form of Janna, Lessing's interest lies more strongly in the *human* failures; the family who misunderstood and deserted her, the everyday people who ignore or reject her. To put it another way, it is up to the individual humans to make up for the broken system. Some, like Maudie's estranged family members, are not up to the challenge. Janna finds that she is, or learns that she can be, the one to assume this role; however, she is one of the privileged members of Small's "Ciceronian elite" who, unlike Maudie, can choose to take on these emotionally meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and morally gratifying projects at this relatively earlier juncture in her life.

Janna's emotional growth in age consciousness depends not only her own relatively privileged *individual* class position but also her historically situation *generational* position. The limitation of Lessing's depiction of age relations in the *Diaries* is that posits an ethical position as universal humanistic certainty when it is in fact a historically specific effect of ageing's political economy. As Blaikie explains, the 1980s (the time-period of the *Diaries*) witnessed the beginnings of individualization and privatization of many elder support services previously sponsored by the state. The result is an ideological push to explain such re-organization:

If the development of pensions in the earlier twentieth century saw the state coming to play a larger role in provision...the pendulum has swung back to a higher proportion of private responsibility. The 1980s promotion of 'Victorian values'—private and voluntary charity, self-help, and the 'return' to a system of informal care and unpaid support—meant that, defined against the artificiality of institutions, family care was regarded as 'natural,' with women the 'natural' carers. (*Ageing* 44-5)

Acting as Maudie's unpaid caretaker and carefully charting her own emotional growth, Lessing's Janna fits remarkably well into the ideologically necessary niche that Blaikie describes. My historical reading does not seek to detract from the important advocacy work that Lessing's novels promote, but it does seek to call attention to the under-theorized connection between a certain genre of "novels of aging" and the politically and economically motivated models of late life (and of elder care) that they may support.

Ultimately, Lessing's use of age memoir is a project of self-determination, one that relies on emotional self-knowledge that translates to, and relies on, a certain degree of narrative transparency, layered and ironic as that may be (and is, as Susan Watkins argues). As Janna rationalizes to an imagined "objective" interlocutor in *The Diary*, explaining her continuing assistance of her elderly friends, "But I do take on this responsibility, and I am a friend of Eliza's and of Annie's and I am a friend...of Maudie's, only because it was something I decided to do. I did it. Therefore it works. If you undertake to do something, then it is not absurd, at least to you" (221). For Spark, on the other hand, such a level of self-knowledge cannot be accessed so directly or straightforwardly. As Judith Butler asks, "Do I need to know myself in order to act responsibly in social relations? Surely, to a certain extent, yes. But is there an ethical valence to my unknowingness?" (84). Spark suggests that there is.

Seventy Years and the Cicerian Elite

Spark cautions in "The Desegregation of Art" that the performance of moral outrage or of duty, such as that voiced by Janna Somers, can function as a stand-in for readers rather than motivation to perform similar actions; she suspects that "a great number of the audience or of the readers feel that their moral responsibilities are sufficiently fulfilled by the emotions they have

been induced to feel” (79). Importantly, she does not absolve herself from such a critique. In the fictionalized quasi-memoir that is her 1981 novel *Loitering with Intent*, Spark extends to herself as a writer the same disavowal of pretense described by narrator and protagonist Fleur Talbot, an aspiring novelist: “No matter what is described it seems to me a sort of hypocrisy for a writer to pretend to be undergoing tragic experiences when obviously one is sitting in relative comfort with a pen and paper or before a typewriter” (81). In place of emotional outrage at social justice, in the “Desegregation of Art” Spark urges “a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what is wrong” (80). While Lessing’s narrative model of justice for the elderly issues a valuable challenge to readers based on empathy, typically enacted through interpersonal connection, Spark’s is able to hint at the possibility of a larger systemic problem by making readers complicit with the potential violence generated by narrative.¹⁰⁴

What is the “wrong” that Spark seeks to show us? Examined together, Spark’s and Lessing’s fiction establish an important dialectic regarding the ethics of narrating age. Where Lessing’s characters undergo transformation, Spark’s characters are transfigured; these two terms, transformation and transfiguration, notably dominate critical analyses of both writers’ texts.¹⁰⁵ If Lessing suggests that giving an account of oneself can make people more generous with their approach to aging and the elderly, then Spark shows how obligation and ethical action lack such easily defined narrative origins. Where Lessing’s novels seek to evoke anger, if they are, as Diana Wallace writes, “an expression of moral outrage at the failure of our civilization to care for the old” (44), then Spark’s characters operate in a world where emotion and action never

¹⁰⁴ Peter Robert Brown demonstrates how this complicity works in his essay on narrative and ethics in Spark’s first novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Brown argues that Spark forces readers to “victimize” the character Mary Macgregor, the scapegoat of the group of schoolgirls being mentored by Miss Brodie. In making her own narrator perpetuate the victimization, Spark reinforces the potential dangers of narrative authority.

¹⁰⁵ The best known example of the use of “transfiguration” in Spark’s works is Sandy’s book in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

line up completely, and where people's moral centers cannot be counted on to shift. If Lessing is keen to re-appropriate "minor" literary forms, like memoir, to resist the regulation of women's bodies by age-, gender-, and class-based cultural scripts, then Spark uses old age to reveal the ethical violence that can adhere to these narrative forms.

Loitering with Intent is one of Spark's most sustained and nuanced explorations of this ethical violence. Published only a few years before Lessing's *Diaries* and likewise written in the form of a fictionalized memoir, the novel looks back at the beginning of narrator and protagonist Fleur Talbot's literary career in the "middle of the twentieth century" (9), with Spark once again returning to the postwar period, the social particularities of which resonate in the novel's material details. On the cusp of publishing her first major work, Fleur works as a secretary to the novel's villain, the blackmailing snob Sir Quentin, who heads a select organization ostensibly helping notable society figures write their memoirs. Fleur's job is to edit the memoirs for a publication date set seventy years in the future, at which point "all the living people mentioned therein shall be living no longer" (20). As in *Memento Mori*'s use of "seventy" as a line in the sand, *Loitering's* use of the seventy years creates the illusion of safety and stability—an escape from time and history that in fact turns out to illustrate just the opposite.

When Fleur decides instead to make substantial changes to her clients' memoirs to add dramatic and salacious details, their authors accept the changes easily: "I hit on the method of making them [the memoirs] expertly worse; and everyone concerned was delighted with the results" (31). Instead of assisting the organization's members, Sir Quentin uses the memoirs as a sophisticated form of psychological manipulation that results in characters' deterioration or death; the main plot of the novel consists of Fleur trying to extricate her own (fictional) text, the first novel she is writing, from his control. This novel is Spark's most consistent critique of memoir

writing, as she urges us to consider carefully who has access to our memoirs, and for what purpose they are being solicited. As in other works, Spark establishes necessary limits to “knowing” another person, as when she says of her friend Solly that “there was always something about [him] into which no real friend of his could intrude” (143). Spark considers the possibility that a person or institution, like Sir Quentin’s nefarious Autobiographical Association, could abuse these memoirs. This is the case even though Fleur herself “colors them up” egregiously, greatly esteems the autobiographies of Newman and Cellini, and eventually writes her own memoirs (the book which, in fact, readers of Spark’s novel presumably are now reading).

Although it does not purport to combat or even realistically represent societal ills, *Loitering with Intent* does at least implicate its protagonist Fleur in the problem of the “Cicerian elite.” The older Fleur who presumably writes this memoir, the one who at the end of the novel describes herself as “having entered the fullness of my years” (217), does not always show the young Fleur in a favorable light, though she writes the young Fleur as relatively unaware of the negative effects of her own intellectual snobbery and artistic solipsism. In his reading of the political and aesthetic implications of the tropes of information-gathering and surveillance in Spark’s work, Lewis MacLeod seeks to overturn the critical consensus on *Loitering*, namely, that Fleur’s desire for narrative control (both figurative and literal, in the case of the manuscript of her novel *Warrender Chase*) is on the side of good while Sir Quentin’s on the side of evil. He argues that the novel goes beyond a “simple celebration and/or condemnation of the basic concept of omniscience” (204), and that the novel’s overall trope of surveillance and information-gathering explores the continuum between data-accumulation and narrative processing, with the author-artist (i.e., Fleur) exerting the supremacy of the latter. For MacLeod, this explains Fleur’s dismissal of the memoirs written by the Association members. In addition to

these memoirs' lapses in aesthetic style and to their authors' desire for superficial narrative coherence and their "transparent craving...to be found likeable" (31), Fleur believes that the writing of a memoir requires significant achievement. She herself determines, quoting Cellini's autobiography, to write a memoir if she has achieved something of "merit" (196) in her life. She acknowledges she has saved letters from this time period in her life, though they "aren't very interesting in themselves" (12), with eye toward a future publication. According to MacLeod, where Fleur differentiates herself from the Association members is that she is "capable of observing and narrating the world" (213).

Spark also draws on the types of authorial privileges more available to *male* authors in describing Fleur's single-minded dedication to her work and her relative eschewing of culturally prescribed gendered social roles. The more traditional Dottie responds to her friend Fleur's work in *Loitering* by saying "'There's something a bit harsh about you, Fleur. You're not really womanly, are you?'" (73). While male voices are certainly concerned about productivity and creativity in late life (W. B. Yeats, B. S. Johnson, Julian Barnes), mid-century narratives of female authorship in middle and late life often must filter those anxieties through the performance (or expectation of) traditional domestic roles.¹⁰⁶ In seeming to eschew the latter, Fleur appropriates the privilege not only of authorship but of *male* authorship and its more forgiving age expectations.

Spark puts Fleur in a difficult ethical position, perilously close to assigning value to human lives, and privileging those of the artist-author. Indeed, MacLeod draws an important distinction between *control* and *care* in his censure of Fleur's position: "The message here, quite clearly, is that non-artists ought to be watched over by the artist. What is less clear, to me at least,

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel* is one example of such a tension between artistic creativity and productivity in late life, wherein the titular character, an idiosyncratic, single-minded, even obsessive author is punished for unfeminine traits as her career and fortunes face the ups and downs of productivity and of popular opinion.

is whether the artist is caring for, or attempting to control, those s/he observes” (214). That Spark’s novel demonstrates the too-easy equation/slippage between narrative *care* and narrative *control* is what differentiates her use of the memoir-writing format from Lessing’s in the *Diaries*. In the latter case, narrative serves the purposes of both the story-teller (Maudie), a disempowered woman with few other resources for recognition, and the stories’ hearer (Janna). Within Lessing’s poetic economy of aging, the story-telling entwines both women in a network of caring, wherein Janna becomes a caretaker as well as recipient (and then re-teller) of Maudie’s stories, and Maudie achieves the comforts of friendship, attention, and recognition, all while legitimating the receipt of care by trading it for her culturally rich memories, thus making her dependency upon Janna active and productive instead of passive.

Crucially, Spark’s *Loitering* does not wholly endorse Fleur’s privileging of the artistic experience. Working within a different context than Lessing but on the same continuum between narrative control and care, as MacLeod terms it, *Loitering* shows Fleur often slipping into the realm of control rather than care. After all, she introduces Dottie to the Autobiographical Association and encourages her to join, describing it as a place “where the members write their true life stories and have them put away for seventy years so that no living person will be offended. You might find it a relief” (56). Fleur recognizes the therapeutic lure of memoir writing, bolstered by the Biblical-sounding promise of the “seventy years” of security. Here Fleur slips between a superficial care for Dottie’s current distress and a desire to gain additional information on the doings of the Association for the purposes of her own artistic project.

That we are occasionally suspicious of Fleur, that, as Bran Nicol writes, Spark “depicts the novelist as a figure who has the whiff of something criminal about her” (119), is one way in which Spark allows us to critique Fleur as a member of the Cicerian elite. If narrative can carry

the potential for exclusion, ethical violence, or even criminality in its purporting to bestow care, recognition, and value on others, then what alternative paths exist for ethical action and responsibility? One way that Spark redeems Fleur from her own artistic privilege is by providing her with a relationship to her own aging self. *Loitering* provides a rare glimpse into the act of narrative aging. For instance, in describing her publisher Revisson Doe, the older narrating Fleur comments on the inexperience of the younger Fleur: “I got on the bus calculating that he was sixty-six. It seemed older to me in those days than it does now” (133). Another relationship that allows Fleur some ethical perspective is her relationship with the elderly Lady Edwina, Sir Quentin’s eccentric mother, who befriends Fleur and acts as her ally in thwarting Sir Quentin’s machinations. Members of her household, including her son Sir Quentin and the housekeeper Beryl Tims, describe Lady Edwina as horrible (an ironic mirror of Freddy’s mother in *Mandelbaum Gate*), embarrassed by her extreme appearance and resentful of having to take care of her. Sir Quentin, for instance, frequently labels his mother “a problem” (116). In contrast, Fleur describes her friendship with Edwina and the occasional outings they share as natural and easy: Taking Edwina out on weekend afternoons “solved the problem of what to do with her when the nurse wasn’t on duty and Mrs. Tims was off to the country with Sir Quentin. It suited me quite well because in the first place I liked her and secondly she fitted in so easily with my life” (76). Fleur sacrifices little in occasionally befriending and acting as a substitute for Edwina’s other caretakers, who include a full-time nurse plus the housekeeper (and Fleur’s antagonist) Beryl Tims, but such a minimal exertion of effort on Fleur’s part is in keeping with both what we know of Fleur’s solipsism and of what Spark expects of humanity in general.

Characters’ reactions to Edwina are the novel’s clearest ethical marker. Fleur’s friend Solly receives Spark’s mark of approval because he calls Edwina a sport, while Fleur’s former

lover Leslie falls out of favor when he fails to find a connection with the elderly Edwina: “Leslie just sat there and let himself be interviewed, unable to forget himself and his own concerns, with his young face and good health contrasting with Edwina’s dotty shrewdness, her scarlet nails, her bright avid eyes” (52). Leslie’s failure to appreciate the significance of Edwina’s contradictions (her “dotty shrewdness”) and her incongruity (the “scarlet nails”) diminishes his credence as an artist. Unable to aesthetically appreciate Edwina at all, Sir Quentin and Mrs. Tims remain furthest from Spark’s sympathies.

Spark distinguishes Lady Edwina by suggesting that among all the characters she is most able to resist the disciplinary forces of narrative manipulation. Speaking of the resemblance of her own novel *Warrender Chase* to current events (an act requiring peeling back several metafictional layers), she tells Dottie that “I could have invented all of them—the lot. I said Edwina was the only real person out of the whole collection” (105). What distinguishes Edwina is her sense of the performative. Lady Edwina interrupts a meeting of the Autobiographical Association to the chagrin of her son and the housekeeper, but Fleur admires her for it: “She took over the meeting as if it were a drawing-room tea party, holding up the proceedings with the blackmail of her very great age and of her newly revealed charm. I was greatly impressed by the performance” (45). Lady Edwina even uses what would normally be considered (and are considered by her son and housekeeper) as signifiers of abjection—her occasional incontinence—as a performative act of defiance, as when she wets the floor to distract her “captors” in an effort to help Fleur. Edwina consistently confounds others’ expectations of her, including others’ assumptions of her wealth (when in fact she has relatively little) and of what an “old woman” would act like. She perceives the truth of her son’s intentions and tries to speak out against them, insisting that ““They want to hush me up but I’m damned if they will hush me up””

(33). Spark frequently frames Edwina's appearances in the novel as literal interruptions of the status quo; Fleur "...looked forward to her interruptions as she came waving her red talons and croaking that Sir Quentin was a snob" (24). Even Edwina's appearance is designed with an eye for dramatic impact and disruption: what others perceive as Edwina's grotesque (on account of her age) masquerade of femininity, such as her painted nails and garish make-up, Fleur understands in the context as part of the adroit dramatic timing of a performer.¹⁰⁷

Lady Edwina shares much in common with several other elderly female characters in Spark's work, characters who are among her most celebratory. These other characters include the enterprising smuggler Louisa Jepp in *The Comforters* and the more directly biographical figure of the grandmother in the short story "The Gentile Jewesses," on whom the character of Louisa is modeled (Cheyette, *Muriel* 26). One characteristic that unites these older female characters is the rejection of many of the social *and* narrative conventions ascribed to women, especially older women; Louisa Jepp, who Spark describes as "a perpetual surprise" (15), assumes the role typically ascribed to both the younger protagonist (Caroline, in this case) by marrying at the end of the novel. "The Gentile Jewesses" begins with Spark's grandmother fending off the threat of male violence—an escaped madman—and becomes a meditation on acts of imagination (the young Muriel as author-in-the-making) and a celebration of intergenerational female connection based on the hybrid identities of three generations of Spark women. While not as socially conscious or well-developed as Doris Lessing's, for instance, Spark's celebration of these elderly characters, including Lady Edwina, nonetheless provides an important ethical counterpoint to the admittedly privileged and solipsistic artist-narrators.

¹⁰⁷ Spark's description of Edwina's dramatized appearance shares some characteristics with what Sharon R. Wilson identifies as the trope of the "crone" in fictional representations of old women in the works of Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood, among others.

As in many of Spark's works, the action of autobiographically informed story-telling in "The Gentile Jewesses" becomes a transfigured story of Spark's conversion; the story ends with Spark commenting on her family's casual reactions—it "was no great shock" (316)—to her conversion to Catholicism. For Spark, an encounter with an elderly figure may inspire a narrative (Spark's later recounting of a tale that happened before she was born, though she claims it is "as clear as a memory to me" (310)) but never a straightforward one; the conversion trope functions here to disrupt any easy identification between selves or between oneself and one's story.

Age, Ethics, Welfare

The task of "accounting for oneself," in Judith Butler's words, takes on a particular valence for the narrating or narrated subject in late life for at least two important reasons. First, finding alternatives to the imperative for coherent narrative as a measure of selfhood and/or of social value is important to those whose capacity for self-narration is limited, either by disposition or by disability or illnesses such as Alzheimer's. The next chapter extends this conversation to consider those ontological circumstances. Secondly, a comparative analysis of the kind performed in this chapter is historically urgent because "narrating age" performs ideological and ethical work relating to shifting obligations of care and welfare. Thus, this last section seeks to contextualize this literary trope within the framework of the ultimate obligation machine of the second half of the twentieth century: the welfare state.

For instance, Estella Tincknell has recently demonstrated that representations of women in late life speak to more than constructions of aging femininity (often the primary analytical lens of women's writing about age). Tincknell argues that the portrayal of older women in British "heritage" television performs the ideological work of the welfare state, or, more specifically, the

ideological work of the conservative coalition government that was formed in 2010. She argues that popular nostalgia-driven television programs *Call the Midwife* and *Downton Abbey* create a Gramscian “conjunctural moment,” easing or re-directing tensions stemming from the government’s anti-welfare programs in the midst of economic recession. Both television programs showcase the “moral and social power of older women,” but while the latter (via the Dowager Countess, for instance) does so in support of patriarchy, feudalism, and social and class inequality, the former does so (via figures such as the nuns) to portray the state as the site of compassionate care, albeit in a sentimentalized way (60; 65).

The connection between life-writing and welfare can be demonstrated in a brief comparison of two scholars’ readings of Carolyn Kay Steedman’s *Landscape for a Good Woman*, in which she discusses her working-class upbringing in 1950s England, and which functions as both a biography of her mother and her own autobiography. For Paul John Eakin, Steedman’s text demonstrates the concept of a “relational life,” as previously mentioned, in which “the story and self of the author are shown to be intimately and inextricably linked to the story and self of another person” (168), that is, a repudiation of the autonomous individual; in this case, the relationality exists between Steedman and her representation of her mother. In a complementary reading, Bruce Robbins interprets Steedman’s ambivalence about her mother (insofar as she represents her working-class roots and the injustices of class inequality), as an ambivalence about the welfare state of the 1950s: an intrusive, subsistence-level, “now diminished thing” (164) to which Steedman’s narrative—origin story, success story—is nonetheless intricately tied. She is now, in a sense, a representative of the welfare state herself, albeit in another form (158-65). Taken together, Eakin’s and Robbins’s readings of Steedman’s memoir demonstrate how relational life-writing, because of its interest in relationships of care and obligation between

selves, may reflect those patterns on the wider stage of social welfare. If selves are relational, it is relatively easy to see how responsibility is “shared and systemic” (189), as Robbins characterizes the welfare state, despite the system’s deficits.

One of the principal challenges in discussing the ethics of narrating age in Muriel Spark’s work concerns the issue of privilege. Most of the characters in Spark’s novels, either those who are elderly or who reflect on the aging process, are members of what we termed the “Cicerian elite”; less disadvantaged from systemic inequities than women like Doris Lessing’s Maudie Fowler, they have some measure of artistic or economic freedom that leaves them less vulnerable in late life, or allows them to pursue meaningful “projects” earlier in life. Even what Fleur Talbot calls her then-penniless state appears in hindsight in an attractively bohemian light; it is, moreover, temporary. Although Spark is sensitive to socioeconomic inequities, readers rarely see Spark’s characters facing the extreme social marginalization and abjection of someone like Maudie Fowler. Thus, if Spark’s works are able to be more suspicious of the therapeutic or consolatory effect of life review or memoir writing, as is *Loitering with Intent*, then it is in part because her elderly characters are privileged to afford other outlets, such as writing or wealth.¹⁰⁸

One superficial response to the problem of the “Cicerian elite” is to suggest that those who are systematically marginalized, like Maudie, be able to speak for themselves instead of

¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the more generalized critique, put forth by theorists of identity and narrativity, is that even autobiography is never an individual, isolated process, and thus that there is ultimately not degree zero from which someone like Maudie Fowler could ever speak entirely for herself. Stories are always told to someone: Janna and Maudie, Caroline Rose and her unknown typewriting echo, Barbara Vaughn and the Israeli tour guide, Fleur and her readers in *Loitering with Intent*. These pairings exhibit what Paul John Eakin terms the “relational concept of self” (161) typical of recent autobiographical work, and which extends to the fictional use of autobiographical tropes. Eakin defines the relational self as one which “stresses the extent to which the self is defined by—and lives in terms of—its relations with others” (161). According to Judith Butler, these “others” do not need to be explicit; she writes that “no account takes place outside the structure of address, even if the addressee remains implicit and unnamed, anonymous and unspecified” (36). In “Autobiography as De-facement,” Paul de Man describes the “autobiographical moment” as occurring “between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution” (921). Both Lessing and Muriel Spark depict reminiscence and life review as acts that takes place within this structure of relationality.

being spoken for (by Janna) or narrated by (by Janna and Lessing), a tactic that Lessing does indeed employ in those sections where Janna imagines a day in the life of Maudie. As previously suggested, however, portraying the “inside” of aging has its own limitations in a fictional context. In the *Diaries*’ case, for instance, the work done by Janna’s account of hearing Maudie’s remembered stories is related to Lessing’s own position as a woman aging into later life (Lessing was in her 60s when writing the *Diaries*), a woman writer at that, with its own particular subset of obstacles.

Neither Spark nor Lessing portray the welfare state favorably. For both, the welfare state is impersonal and often dehumanizing, stripping people of their individuality while working as a disciplinary force of containment and intrusion. In *Memento Mori*, for instance, Jean imagines a future in which all the elderly will be subsumed under the patronizing and universalizing title of “granny”: “She...was sorry for the youngest generation now being born into the world, who in their old age, whether of good family or no, educated or no, would be forced by law into Chronic Wards; she dared say every citizen in the Kingdom would take it for granted; and the time would surely come for everyone to be a government granny or grandpa, unless they were mercifully laid to rest in their prime” (11). For Lessing, the welfare state represents either a demoralizing, officious interference that fails to consider the idiosyncrasies of individual circumstances (such as Maudie’s), even as individual members are well-meaning, or else a bloated bureaucratic machine that works mainly to perpetuate itself while ignoring the plight of women like Maudie.

Both Lessing and Spark are also critical of philanthropic hypocrisy, of “good works” and charity performed under the flag of humane care but that in fact is superficial or perfunctory. In *The Mandelbaum Gate*, for instance, the affable Joanna Cartwright, Freddy’s friend, takes “bundles” to those less fortunate: “Freddy had seen many such bundles of groceries being borne

out of houses, at home and abroad, by many such busy Englishwomen, killers of two birds to the stone, all through his life” (161-2). Joanna’s charitable ventures or “habits” (162) do not constitute real care, however, for they do not extend to women like Benny. After they learn of the murder, Joanna urges Freddy to leave Benny to his sisters or to the auspices of the Welfare State (390). In *Memento Mori*, for instance, Dame Lettie promotes herself as a committee woman and “welfare worker,” but cares little for the suffering of Jean Taylor, whose choice of the “public” state-run hospital over private care funded by the Charmian demonstrates Spark’s underlying satire of her stoic approach to late life; it is, for Spark, the ultimate evidence of an internalization of the discourses that tell us how to age “well.”

Where Spark and Lessing differ is in how they issue corrections to the deficiencies of a system that stays in the background of their works. As we have seen, for Lessing the answer is a turn (or an idealized return) to a humanistic model of personalized care, one based on empathy and recognition. It is also a model that reverts responsibility for care—for oneself and for the other—on the individual rather than on the state (Blaikie, *Ageing* 45). It is no surprise, then, that the life-writing model of Lessing’s *Diaries* has become the more ubiquitous model of fictional representations of aging in the past several decades, for it corresponds to the recent dismantling of state-sponsored welfare programs and the increased pressure on the individual to manage his or her own care into old age—or to assume care of an elderly Other under the auspices of humanity, ethics, and the common good. It is an imagined solution to the perceived “problem” of population aging that is in part, as Blaikie writes, “being defused through an increasingly hegemonic therapeutic sensibility” (206), as evidenced by the popularity of such models in the literary aging. The logic of capitalism still underlies such projects, for both the act of care and its

reception must be active, i.e. productive, and in fictional texts, the currency is narrative, the production of texts as well as the telling of stories.

Muriel Spark's form of obligation is less amenable to increasing individualization and privatization of welfare. Whereas in Lessing's work human contact is necessary because the "system" cannot be counted on, Spark's work necessitates a minimum level of systematic care because it is *people* who cannot be counted on, at least to act predictably or consistently in the face of an encounter with an Other. For instance, Godfrey Colston, Charmian's husband in *Memento Mori*, exhibits constant impatience with his wife's frailty and lapses in memory, an empathetic lack that corresponds to his own obsession with the maintenance and constant surveillance of his own "capacities": "'Why can't one be kind to her?' he asked himself as he drove to Lettie's house in Hampstead. 'Why can't one be more gentle?' He himself was eighty-seven, and in charge of all his faculties. Whenever he considered his own behavior he thought of himself not as 'I' but as 'one'" (3). The example of Godfrey suggests how increased "disciplinarity" of age, with its increased project of individuation and of internalized surveillance leads to *less* care, not more. Thus, the work of Muriel Spark issues us with a necessary corrective as age is increasingly represented and problematized in the fiction of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 4
IAN MCEWAN AND THE ALZHEIMERIZATION OF OLD AGE

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

Philip Larkin, from "Aubade"

In 1986, David Snowdon and other U.S. researchers began what has become known as the Nun Study, a longitudinal study of aging, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease that uses as its subjects a large group of Catholic sisters. The nuns were nearly ideal as a study group because of the relative uniformity of their adult lifestyles and environments. One study derived from this large group of participants examined autobiographies handwritten by a subset of 74 sisters; in 1930, the head of their convent had asked the sisters, who were in their late teens, twenties, or early thirties at the time, to "write a short sketch of her life and include parentage, interesting and edifying childhood events, schools attended, and influences that led her to the convent" (Snowdon 35). Snowdon's group examined the brains of this subset of the nun group after their deaths to determine the relationship between "linguistic ability" in early life, as demonstrated in the autobiographies, and the development of Alzheimer's disease in late life.

The researchers did, indeed, find a correlation: They suggested that low linguistic ability in early life indicates the kind of suboptimal neurological and cognitive development that may lead to Alzheimer's later in life. While the nuns' autobiographies contribute greatly to research about aging and health, and work well as objects of study for neurologists, both the form of the

original text and its rhetorical impulse (life story structured around a spiritual turning point), and the material conditions under which the texts were written and then under which they were examined (both controlled, disciplined spaces; the former a convent and the latter a research lab), suggest that they inhabit the ideologically knotty intersection of aging, life-writing (or autobiography), narrative, and disciplinarity that has been of recent interest in literary aging studies.

The previous chapter examined the ethics of life writing within the context of narrative gerontology, an emergent subgenre of narratives of late life, and novelist Muriel Spark's disruption of both. For Spark, for instance, the trope of religious conversion frequently functions to configure autobiographical projects as sites of "unknowing" rather than transparent legibility, spiritual or diagnostic revelation, or coherent identity formation. By contrast, this chapter puts more pressure on how neuroscience and related cognitive disciplines shape contemporary age identities. Using Ian McEwan's 2005 novel *Saturday* as its primary example, it demonstrates how hard contemporary fiction must work to manage the challenges that late-life dementia—Alzheimer's and related disorders—poses to contemporary age identity when it is heavily invested in neuroscientifically informed definitions of selfhood.

If, as Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs argue, the demographic aging of the population that began with the twentieth century corresponds with the "working through of the modernist project" (*Cultures* 7), then the aim of this dissertation has been to show how such a correspondence has made its mark on literature, including the role of narrative in shaping the "reflexive project" of the *aging* self in late modernity—to borrow a phrase from Anthony Giddens's *Modernity and Self-Identity*. While the previous chapter focused on the ethics of making narrative the cornerstone of identity in late life, this chapter demonstrates how

contemporary fiction of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries negotiates several challenges and contradictions to age identity related to what Gilleard and Higgs have termed the “alzheimerization of old age.” This phenomenon describes a process developing within approximately the past half-century wherein late-life dementia—newly coded in discourses of medicine and neuroscience—becomes the unique signifier of true “old age,” and the individual (rather than the state) is prompted to assume the risks and manage the anxieties caused by such signification. Gilleard and Higgs identify this change in signification as a “re-branding” effort starting in the postwar period and continuing through the end of the century, an effort aided by two changes: first, a shift in research toward neurology and neuroscience, resulting in the “reframing of dementia as a neurological disorder,” i.e. Alzheimer’s; and, second, a shift from “an epidemiology of need to one that is based on an epidemiology of risk” (*Cultures* 179; 172), whereby the “various risks attached to the life course” (Phillipson, “Ageing” 202)—to aging, that is—are privatized and individually managed rather than socially supported. This chapter argues that McEwan’s *Saturday*, and to a certain degree his 2001 novel *Atonement*, enact the historical trajectory of dementia in the twentieth century and strain to make sense of the challenges it poses to the modernist project, including literature, and to aging identity in the late twentieth century.

Alzheimer’s Anxiety

In *Saturday*, the protagonist Henry Perowne calls his mother’s vascular dementia a form of death, “[m]ental death” (169), and determines at all costs to avoid the same fate. Certainly, fear of dementia-causing illnesses, which often entail loss of memory, language, and other higher-order cognitive processes, the most culturally visible by far being Alzheimer’s, are a frequent source of both personal and social anxiety today. Pia C. Kontos notes the ubiquity of

Alzheimer's within (frequently apocalyptic) discourses about aging: "Alzheimer's disease is considered to be the most frightening condition that faces the aging population in the twenty-first century, a much-feared stigmatizing label that carries with it a sentence of social death" ("Alzheimer" 1). As dementia has become the "primary source of the overriding dread of old age" (DeFalco 54), and as narratives either about the experience of having dementia or for caring for those with dementia have proliferated in recent decades, scholars of aging have sought to determine narrative's role in either constructing or countering this frequently fearful rhetoric. For Amelia DeFalco, for instance, such narratives—while often hampered by gendered norms of behavior especially vis a vis care—can be ethically and narratively revelatory; as the capacity of a dementia sufferer for self-understanding through storytelling decreases or vanishes, "understanding becomes increasingly collaborative for sufferers of dementia" (58). Within this newfound potential for collaboration, caretakers become witnesses of and participants in the patient's narrative, thus opening up new avenues for ethical connection, interpersonal responsibility, and care, even as it explores their limits (DeFalco 59).

While works such as Alice Munro's short story "The Bear Went Over the Mountain," one of the texts analyzed by DeFalco, actively engage with the challenges of dementia and dementia representation, it is more difficult to contextualize this "dementia dread" in texts that relegate it to unexamined corners, where it participates in a more complex chain of signification. One such example includes Ian McEwan's 1997 novel *Enduring Love*. Although the majority of *Enduring Love* is written through the first-person perspective of narrator/protagonist Joe Rose, a writer of popular science journalism, halfway through the novel McEwan includes a chapter written from the third-person perspective of Joe's long-term partner Clarissa. "It would make more sense of Clarissa's return to tell it from her point of view. Or at least from that point as I later construed

it” (85), explains Joe. At this point in the narrative, Joe is being increasingly harassed by Jed Parry, who mistakenly and irrationally believes Joe is in love with him based on a moment of shared emotional affinity during their recent involvement in a tragic accident. So far, readers have been unable to separate themselves from Joe’s perspective on recent events, and so his increasingly odd and anxious reactions to Parry’s attentions have not raised many red flags. However, in this chapter, recounting events from Clarissa’s point of view forces us to consider that Joe’s reactions are likewise potentially deluded, odd, and paranoid. Although Clarissa does not know the full extent of Parry’s harassment, and cannot appreciate Joe’s escalating anxiety about it, McEwan’s shift in perspective underscores the parallel between the two men.

The Clarissa chapter serves several functions in *Enduring Love*. It makes explicit McEwan’s point about the mutual entanglement of not only “obsession” (or love) but also of mental illness and the construction of “normality” versus pathology. Though Jed Parry may be diagnosed with a psychological illness (de Clerambault’s syndrome), McEwan implicates Joe Rose and the masculine medical-scientific discourse that he represents in constructing a version of “normality” that enables both to maintain authority. Jago Morrison claims that through the construction of Jed Parry’s syndrome “the novel identifies the power of medical-scientific discourse as a guarantor of temporal and epistemological security” (259). Morrison also demonstrates how McEwan’s work, including *Enduring Love*, reveals the underlying psychological similarities between “the urges of narrativization and those of obsession” (260). The Clarissa chapter, in its deliberate echoing of *Mrs. Dalloway*, likewise teaches us to be suspicious of narrative and its simulation of objectivity. As in many of McEwan’s texts, including the Virginia Woolf-ian *Atonement*, narrative is as capable of obscuring and deluding (and colluding with other discourses, such as science) as it is of revealing. The difference

between Joe's version of events and Clarissa's version highlights this narrative ambiguity, although McEwan questions if Clarissa's "version" of events can even definitively be attributed to her.

The fact that Clarissa's chapter is narratively compromised is consistent with McEwan's overall questioning of such pretensions to objectivity (in science, in journalism, in narrative), but it also suggests another "failure" of both narrative *and* rationality: Alzheimer's disease. After Joe tells Clarissa that he has erased all 33 answering machine messages, thereby erasing his corroborating evidence, Clarissa reacts with her first hint of suspicion: "He wiped them [the messages], he insists, at which Clarissa sits up in the water and takes another look at him and he returns her stare full on. When she was twelve, her father died of Alzheimer's, and it's always been a fear that she'll live with someone who goes crazy. That's why she chose rational Joe" (89-90). As readers, we are unsure of the narrative accuracy or even source of this evaluation; it can easily come from Joe, "construing" Clarissa's perspective, and retroactively making sense of Clarissa's disbelief. Because Joe and Clarissa eventually reconcile, it is plausible to assume that Joe would want to retroactively justify Clarissa's earlier doubts. Nevertheless, McEwan's facile equivalence between Alzheimer's and going "crazy," both set in opposition to rationality and itself deployed as a rationalization of Clarissa's motives, inscribes Alzheimer's within the heart of the novel's performance of narrative instability and as the "panic" of the "privileged professional male as the standard of psychosexual normalcy" (Morrison 255; 256).¹⁰⁹

This description applies to several standard "neuronovel" protagonists, including *Saturday's* Perowne and a central character in Mark Haddon's recent novel *The Red House* (2012). A more traditional domestic comedy from the author perhaps best known for his first-

¹⁰⁹ For more on the relationship between narrative and consciousness in *Enduring Love*, see Andrew Gaedtke, "Cognitive Investigations: The Problems of Qualia and Style in the Contemporary Neuronovel."

person autism novel (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*), *The Red House* features an estranged extended family reconnecting on holiday. One character resembles Perowne, a middle-aged consultant neuroradiologist named Richard. When asked by his young nephew what was the “most horrible way to die,” Richard responds with a description of Huntington’s: “*You go insane and lose control of your body slowly over many years. You can’t sleep, you can’t swallow, you can’t speak, you suffer from epileptic fits and there’s no cure*” (105). His grim answer is also informed by the recent death of his mother, a dementia sufferer, which Richard also considers a “[g]hastly way to go... *Your mind dying, your body left behind for other people to look after*” (56). Richard’s fears of dying are constructed around two poles; first, an abject lack of bodily control, and second, the fear of being a “burden” in late life. These aspects of aging identity both reflect related ideologies of the late twentieth century.

Is late-life dementia a new fear, or is it “a special way of being afraid,” in the words of the speaker of “Aubade,” Philip Larkin’s poetic articulation of the fear of dying? On the one hand, recent research on Alzheimer’s disease has concluded that simply living longer increases the chances that a person will develop late-life dementia; despite investigations into other contributing factors, including genetic, environmental, and social risk factors, the age of an individual remains a key factor in determining whether he or she will develop dementia (Gilleard 102-4). On the other hand, the changes in cognitive abilities and affect that develop in later life have, until fairly recently, been considered a “normal” part of the aging process. Alzheimer’s as a disease category was only born “in the middle of the ‘mind-brain problem’” (Dillman 130) starting in the postwar period. McEwan captures this historical shift in *Atonement*, when the elderly Briony, recently diagnosed with vascular dementia, a neurodegenerative disease similar to Alzheimer’s, reflects on her reaction to the news of her very modern diagnosis: “I’m going

mad, I told myself. Let me not be mad. But I couldn't really believe it. Perhaps I was nothing more than a victim of modern diagnostics; in another century it would have been said of me that I was old and therefore losing my mind. What else would I expect? I'm only dying then, I'm fading into unknowing" (335). Though McEwan notes that Briony's condition would have been familiar to pre-modern populations, the suggestion of continuity only serves to highlight the particularity of aging's current construction. For Briony, this relinquishing of control over her future comes partly as relief because of her guilt over past actions, an absolution of narrative guilt that occurs through narrative erasure: the fading of "herself" and the secrecy of her last work.

Recent work in gerontology attempts to reverse negative stereotypes about aging by emphasizing the importance of narrative, biography, and story-telling in the construction of a "successful" image of aging. In turning to agency and identity as ways of understanding and representing old age, critical gerontologists of the past few decades have been trying to "disconnect ageing and old age from the processes of ill health and physical frailty" (*Cultures* 14), according to Gilleard and Higgs. However, this laudable goal can have unintended consequences for how old age is represented in a risk society and in the language of neuroscience, both of which have very specific criteria for understanding identity. Stephen Post has called this phenomenon the "hypercognitive" society. He argues that in such a society, "in which nothing is as fearful as [Alzheimer's] because it violates the spirit (*geist*) of self-control, independence, economic productivity, and cognitive enhancement that defines our dominant image of human fulfillment. Deep forgetfulness represents such a violation of this spirit that all those with dementia are imperiled" (245). The rising prominence of the cognitive and neurosciences thus exacerbate the very problem that it then sets itself the task of fixing.

In a recent special issue of *Occasion* dedicated to exploring the connection between aging, memory, and aesthetics, Stephen Katz argues that “cognitive culture”—which, though dominated by the neurosciences extends also to business, arts, medicine, and beyond—has a pernicious effect on our contemporary understanding of aging and the elderly (“Embodied”). In Katz’s view, the influence of this cognitive field has been to elevate memory to the status of key signifier of successful aging; an aging mind suffering from Alzheimer’s or other memory impairments or cognitive deficits thus marks a “non-person” (Post 249). The notion that dementia entails a kind of “loss” of the person is a common rhetorical position; Elizabeth Herskovits attributes it to the “current Alzheimer’s construct,” in which “cognitive function is a central and definitive characteristic of the self that is especially vulnerable to attack by the disease” (159). In her study of patients with dementia in institutional care, Sharon Kaufman demonstrates how dementia appears to “[obscure] the distinction between life and death,” appearing to outsiders inhabiting an ambiguous plane as both “death-in-life” and “life-in-death” (“Dementia” 23). This definition of personhood is a legacy going back as far as the classical period in Western society, but memorably encapsulated by John Locke’s notion that “memory was the guarantor of rational personhood” (Katz, “Embodied” 3). Fernando Vidal likewise focuses on the Enlightenment as the originator of what he calls “brainhood”: the defining of human selfhood by virtue of being (and not just having) a (working) brain. Though the “cerebral subject” is not an ideology exclusively created by the neurosciences, according to Vidal, the past few decades of increased attention to and popularity of its discourses have garnered more credence for the notion of a “cerebral self” (6).

Although the process by which consciousness is enacted may be fragment, diachronic, or even illusory (depending on the theory), the illusion of continuity is preserved and essential to a

stable sense of identity. “Consciousness feels continuous,” William James wrote more than a century ago, thus constituting a sense of self. Indeed, consciousness itself is often presented via a narrative metaphor; it is compared to the process of ‘telling a story,’ foregrounding continuity and the gradual unfolding of information. However, the equation of selfhood with what Kontos calls the “exclusive privilege of the sphere of conscious will” (“Alzheimer” 11) has also been called into question. In a 2004 article in the *Time Literary Supplement*, philosopher Galen Strawson criticizes what he terms the psychological narrativity thesis, that is, the near-ubiquitous description of subject experience of selfhood in terms of a “story,” for being one of the “fallacies of our age.” Aging studies scholars, among them Helen Small and Amelia DeFalco, have recently questioned the usefulness or even fairness of this description for meaningfully organizing aging identity or the particular challenges that come with old age. For DeFalco, the limits of this paradigm are thrown into sharpest relief for “those who are alienated from narrative and narration by illness and disability” (53), particularly those afflicted with dementia, for whom the physiological losses of memory, language, and higher-order cognitive processing, as typified by Alzheimer’s, bring profound reorientations of identity and care. DeFalco argues that dementia magnifies the metaphysics of aging; whereas narratives of aging always reveal the underlying uncanniness of selfhood, dementia explores its existential and ethical limits. Likewise, the recent resurgence in interest in phenomenology has suggested new ways of theorizing selfhood that emphasize embodied practices and corporeal expression in order to, as Pia Kontos does in a recent essay on embodied selfhood, broaden our understanding of the range of self-expression possible even in cases of Alzheimer’s (“Alzheimer” 3).

The Aging Neuronovel

In a 2009 article in the literary journal *n+1*, Marco Roth outlines the potential emergence of a new novelistic genre that takes as its subject matter the scientific study of the brain and the rising prominence of the discipline of neuroscience. Within literary criticism, *Saturday* has quickly become a cornerstone of the genre; its neurosurgeon protagonist Henry Perowne both practices his specialty and contemplates the metaphysical and ethical ramifications of that practice. McEwan stages recent debates about consciousness—its purpose, origins, materiality—and the scientific examination of cognitive processes via Perowne, whom McEwan’s narrator describes as a meta-conscious “habitual observer of his own moods” (4). In particular, Roth labels *Saturday* a neuronovel of the “hard” variety, in that it causally links mental function to neurochemistry, and ultimately to evolution and heredity (145). Such a neurological explanation of the mind is not only reductive, Roth claims, but also unsympathetic to the “neurologically abnormal” characters that serve as narrative foils to the “normals” (145).¹¹⁰ *Saturday* focuses on two examples of the former character, both important foils triangulating each other and Perowne: his assailant and the novel’s villain Baxter, a young man suffering from Huntington’s with whom Perowne has violent altercations throughout the day, and Perowne’s elderly mother Lily, a dementia patient in a nursing home whom he visits once on this Saturday.

McEwan means to cast Perowne in the role of “the professional reductionist” (281) by *Saturday*’s own admission, though there is less critical consensus, though much debate, about how sincerely or ironically McEwan supports his protagonist’s confidence in rationalism and “neuroscientism.” Frances Ferguson and Richard Brown, among others, have argued against such a hard assessment of McEwan’s novel, claiming that McEwan challenges his protagonist’s

¹¹⁰ Roth defines the “soft” neuronovel, by contrast, as more sympathetic in its attempts to inhabit the space of the “cognitively anomalous or abnormal” (145).

reductivism and imparts instead an ethical lesson about the importance of alternative (i.e. humanities-based) roads to understanding. For Elaine Hadley, on the other hand, McEwan's novel comes too close to uncritically performing a toothless "Victorian fantasy of liberal agency" (93), albeit one draped in the ahistorical cognitive discourse of today. Despite these debates, *Saturday*'s status as the prototypical "hard neuronovel" has become sufficiently entrenched, more than ten years after its publication and thirty since the launch of the "Decade of the Brain" in the 1990s, that a reconsideration of its place as the prototype of the neuroscientific novel is in order. Reading *Saturday* today forces us to reevaluate not only the historical specificity of the debates about the mind and brain that it stages, but, even more importantly, the negotiation of aging identities that it also stages and often overshadows.

In fact, it is one of the underlying theses of this chapter that a "neuronovel" is always already a novel about aging. The genealogy of studies of old age and of the mind and brain share more than merely their similar twentieth-century trajectories of increasing medicalization. To give one example of this pairing, the nineteenth-century French physician Jean-Martin Charcot is known as one of the founders of modern neurology, but he also wrote one of the landmark texts of modern gerontology. His patients and neurological research subjects in the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris were overwhelming poor, elderly women, women who Stephen Katz calls the "missing bodies" ("Charcot's" 114) of gerontological study precisely because their age, gender, and low socioeconomic status subjected them to Charcot's clinical gaze but simultaneously made them invisible in the resulting geriatric research.¹¹¹ These invisible women's bodies formed the basis of Charcot's performance of "disciplined medical knowledge" (116) and the power of scientific

¹¹¹ One result, Katz argues, is that Charcot's research characterizes bodily aging as pathologically female while normalizing the adult (i.e., not aged) male body ("Charcot's" 120). For a more detailed analysis of the contribution of Charcot and his successors to the formation of geriatrics and gerontology, see Lawrence Cohen, *No Aging in India*, and Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age*.

positivism. Thinking through the novel's representations of old age also helps us to partially uncover what Melissa Littlefield and Jenell Johnson term the "black box" of neuroscience, by showing how its origins are rooted, at best, in interdisciplinary efforts and alternative disciplinary genealogies, and, at worst, in the social and gender inequalities at work in institutionalized spaces and on aging bodies.¹¹²

In *Saturday*, women tend to represent the thorny biomedical and epistemological history by which dementia came to be defined and "disciplined" in the twentieth century, while men—including Perowne and Baxter—tend to be the characters who negotiate the individualization of surveillance and risk within the context of professional identities. Among the many errands that Perowne must complete on his busy Saturday before the family's reunion in the evening is a visit to his 77-year-old mother in her nursing home. The thought of the visit had been troubling him all day; because he highly values cognitive fitness, he internalizes Lily Perowne's condition as a personal and professional threat. Not trying to make meaning of what he perceives as her discontinuous talk and mixed recollections, Perowne explains Lily's condition neurologically as one of progressive decline: "The disease proceeds by tiny unnoticed strokes in small blood vessels in the brain. Cumulatively, the infarcts cause cognitive decline by disrupting the neural nets. She unravels in little steps" (165). His medical and neurological explanations ultimately culminate in his use of metaphor for selfhood; Lily's "unraveling," as he puts it, suggests how crucial he considers biographical, narrative coherence and unity for meaningful selfhood. It is

¹¹² That neuronovels, including *Saturday*, can often read like Oliver Sacks-like case histories of neurological conditions has recently been explored and theorized as itself a "syndrome syndrome," wherein the biomedicalization of the mind and of mental illness should be both a topic of ideological scrutiny *and* a critical re-thinking of the connection between science and the humanities, particularly as it is narrativized in literary texts and theorized by literary scholars (Lustig and Peacock 4). The prominence of neuroscience and cognitive science in the past few decades has also encouraged the use of these theories as methodologies for literary criticism. For an example of cognitive theory used to analyze *Saturday*, for instance, see Susan Green, "Consciousness and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: 'What Henry Knows.'"

clear that in describing his mother's condition as "mental death" (169), *Saturday* refers to both Lily's increasing cognitive impairments as well as to her loss of "selfhood."

Despite the biomedical specificity of McEwan's vision of the ailing mind, including his description of Lily's neurological symptoms, and his rapid diagnosis of Baxter's Huntington's earlier in the novel, a different version of Lily also haunts the text. In the opening scene of the novel, Perowne gazes out of his bedroom window into the sleeping London square below his feet. He imagines the usual bustle of activity that the daylight will bring to this space. In addition to the "cheerful lunchtime office crowds" and the "crepuscular drug dealers," there will appear the "ruined old lady with her wild, haunting calls. Go away! She'll shout for hours at a time, and squawk harshly, sounding like some marsh bird or zoo creature" (3). The "ruined old lady" so casually dehumanized, exoticized, and imprisoned by spectacle in this passage is described not in the biomedical, neurological, or genetic terms that Perowne would favor, but rather in the pre-diagnostic and pre-scientific language of senility. In tracing the twentieth-century route by which "senility" became re-framed as "Alzheimer's disease," Gilleard and Higgs argue that the distinction between the third age (the "young" old) and the fourth age ("old" old) is expressed as a loss of "self-mastery and self-control" (*Cultures* 169). They use sociologist Norbert Elias's concept of the "civilized body" to explain how senility threatens to disrupt the perceived progress of the social. Senility

represents the ultimate failure of the modernist project, the failure of what Elias terms 'the civilized body'. The body rendered mindless by senility can no longer sustain its claim to an identity based on personal and social agency. Those behaviours most associated with self-care....become eroded. A body the mind has lost control of becomes instead the *de-civilized* body. (168)

This relative acceptance of senility as an unfortunate but normal part of the aging process, one capable of being encompassed by traditional modes of care (such as families and charitable institutions), was rendered unacceptable in the twentieth century upon the advent of the “new form of welfare capitalism” (170). According to Gilleard and Higgs, the newly individualized and commodified form of welfare consists of re-positioning citizens “not as the recipients of welfare but as consumers of health and social care products” (170). The abject “ruined old lady” on Perowne’s street has no place (literally) within commodity welfare and lifestyle capitalism; by contrast, Perowne’s visit with his mother in her nursing home emphasizes her personal space (they go to find Lily’s room), the care taken of her appearance, and his consumption (he brings her an expensive flower), all trappings of the process of re-civilizing within this new ideological frame.

The increase in pathological and biomedicalization of aging also contributed to this process of “re-civilization,” as it functioned to provide a form of agency to those suffering from decreased cognitive function in late life. Though dementia had already been recognized as a clinically differentiated form of cognitive impairment for several decades, when Alois Alzheimer wrote his original 1907 case study describing the disorder that would later be given his name, dementia was understood as typical and even expected of decline in old age (Kaufman, “Dementia” 25). Alzheimer’s initial case studied a 51-year-old woman, and his colleague Emil Kraepelin made the decision in his influential psychiatry textbook to classify Alzheimer’s (for the first time) as a type of *presenile dementia*, emphasizing its difference from “normal,” expected mental signs of aging based on chronological age (Gubrium 4). Alzheimer himself was not convinced of the accuracy of this distinction. He and others questioned, first, the very distinction between disease and “normal” aging, and second, the clinical distinguishability of

presenile and senile forms of dementia, as Kraepelin wanted. Furthermore, Kraepelin's categorization of Alzheimer's was strongly influenced by his interest in neuropsychiatry and in identifying the organic basis of mental disorders (or at least their clinical markers), and his presumption that there was a "law-like" relationship (though he could not describe what it was) between the mind and the brain, with the latter influencing the former (Dillman 135-36).

The classification of Alzheimer's as a separate disease category marked a significant transition, one that further differentiated "normal" aging from "abnormal" aging. Gilleard and Higgs trace the beginnings of this separation in part within the postwar re-organization of hospital systems and infirmaries under the 1948 National Health Service Act, as well as the institutionalization of the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology and their application to geriatrics (*Cultures* 174). As the medical and biological bases of dementia-causing illnesses were studied and theorized, the concept of "senility" was decried as outmoded and imprecise; in its place came senile dementia, and, finally, Alzheimer's disease (176). The distinction between presenile and senile dementia was collapsing by the 1960s and 1970s, as new research methods generated a resurgence of interest around Alzheimer's, this time more strongly and scientifically correlated to brain pathology and biochemistry and, later, genetics (Katzman and Bick 105). It was hoped that defining Alzheimer's as a recognizable (and potentially treatable or preventable) disease, separate and distinct from "normal" aging, and rationalized and disciplined by the discourses of biology and medicine, would remove the stigma of senility from aging itself.

The removal of stigma is and was a laudable goal, but its success is unclear. Rather, Jesse Ballenger, among others, argues that Alzheimer's today "seems to create at least as much public fear and loathing about old age as did the expansive concept of senility out of which it was carved" (98). In *Saturday*, Perowne's reaction to his mother's condition and the palimpsest of

multiple versions of senility/dementia shows us that medicalization of Alzheimer's, as Ballenger suggests, has merely displaced anxiety about aging, not removed it.

Medical anthropologist Lawrence Cohen urges scholars to re-think the significance of senility, in contrast to merely its contemporary particularization in disease like Alzheimer's or vascular dementia, as a way of understanding the "critical stakes in persistent and emergent forms of reason, memory, care, aging, medicine, and life itself," but without making assumptions about how "perception, biology, and milieu are related" (Introduction 3; 1). Cohen uses the metaphor of "voice" to demonstrate how senility cannot be "heard"—legitimized, understood, interpreted, disciplined—until it is divorced from the process of "normal" aging and pathologized as dementia (5). *Saturday* enacts some of these same presumptions. The old lady's "wild, haunting calls" are unintelligible to Perowne because they are not particularized within medical or scientific discourse, or within a clinical or institutional setting; she is an anachronism. The "ruined old lady" is a haunting reflection of Lily Perowne as she might have been (mis)heard in an earlier time. This is not to argue that Lily Perowne is not better off in her nursing home than wandering in the square; as Cohen cautions, "that senility has been 'reduced' to a medical problem—in other words, rendered coherent only as dementia or in particular as Alzheimer's disease—is not necessarily a bad thing" (3). Rather, it suggests that the contemporary pathologizing of Alzheimer's disease has consequences for more than the patient herself. Ann Robertson argues that the disease has been constructed such "[o]ld age has become literally and figuratively everybody's business" (146).

The experience of the elderly Briony in *Atonement* likewise demonstrates the process by which aging is "civilized" only as conditions such as dementia can be excluded from "normal" old age and rendered pathological. Briony considers her selfhood as still inherently intact

(despite criticisms of aged appearance), but that selfhood is now at risk because of her encroaching dementia: “We may look truly reptilian, but we’re not a separate tribe. In the next year or two, however, I will be losing my claim to this familiar protestation. The seriously ill, the deranged, are another race, an inferior race” (336).

Alzheimer’s disease as a distinct pathology is a relatively new phenomenon, a product of changing cultural and social expectations of aging as much as medical and scientific discovery, and its origins as disease occlude unresolved tensions. By partially uncovering these layers, we see how *Saturday* implicates the thorny clinical, biomedical, and epistemological history by which senility came to be re-defined, but also, and importantly, how we can use the specter of aging to implicate the novel’s normalization or pathologization of neurological fitness or impairment as it relates to personhood. Not all neurological impairment impinges on personhood: at the end of their squash game, Perowne and his colleague briefly discuss an elderly female patient named Viola. Only one year older than Perowne’s mother, Viola is facing an operation on a brain tumor, and impresses Perowne by her professional credentials and by her mental sharpness, despite her tumor: “She’s seventy-eight, and it turns out that in her working life she was an astronomer...On the ward, while the other patients watch TV, she reads books on mathematics and string theory” (119). Perowne and the anesthetist are pessimistic about her chances, yet Perowne still claims, “I think we can help her.” It is Perowne’s reliance on neuromedical definitions of consciousness (and thus, of selfhood) that exacerbate his anxieties about old age. Stephen Post argues that in a “hypercognitive society” in which cognitive ability is tied to definitions of personhood, “nothing is as fearful as [Alzheimer’s] because it violates the spirit (*geist*) of self-control, independence, economic productivity, and cognitive enhancement

that defines our dominant image of human fulfillment” (245).¹¹³ By contrast, “successful” aging, a construct of the past few decades, is a normative construct that entails the maintenance of physical and mental health, as well as productivity and independence, well into retirement and the third age.¹¹⁴ Lily’s dementia and the “ruined old lady’s” silent senility threatened these models in a way that Viola does not.

Furthermore, *Saturday* demonstrates how the “alzheimerization of old age” is reinscribed onto the other stages of the life course and the process of aging more generally. Gilleard and Higgs argue that the process by which the uncivilized senile body became “civilized” as a neurological disorder affecting people in late life had a profound affect not only on those already in the Fourth Age (dependent “old” old age), but also those in the Third Age, that is the “young” old, such as those newly retired yet in full enjoyment of health and financial resources. They demonstrate how the re-branding of dementia was also dictated by political and economic forces; diseases of old age, like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s, once pathologized, began to emerge as a public threat in the 1980s, and as such became, under the new economic and social policies of “individual choice and individual responsibility” (*Cultures* 177), the responsibility of the third age. As dementia in late life became pathologized as a recognizable disorder, and, thus, by implication, to be able to be diagnosed, prevented, and treated—i.e. “managed”—the problem of caring for this potentially growing number of “uncivilized” bodies became a potential crisis:

¹¹³ In the 1990s, the “personhood” movement within Alzheimer’s studies sought to point out the dangers to Alzheimer’s patients of a cognitive model of selfhood. In a 1992 essay, Tom Kitwood and Kathleen Bredin argue that care for a dementia sufferer must take “personhood” into account, and should do so because “a dementing illness, although it often does involve a dismantling of the person, need not necessarily do so; and that a dementia sufferer can be in a state of at least relative well-being” (270). However, for a critique of Kitwood and the “personhood” movement, see Daniel H. J. Davis, “Dementia: Sociological and Philosophical Constructions.”

¹¹⁴ For a more detailed definition and feminist critique of the ideology of “successful aging,” see Martha Holstein and Meredith Minkler, “Self, Society, and the ‘New Gerontology.’”

...in response, another new paradigm began to emerge—one that frames the problem of Alzheimer's not as an inevitable responsibility for the state but as an avoidable risk for the individual. The final decade of the twentieth century has seen one more twist in the relentless process of renegotiating ageing identities—one that re-presents the contradiction at the heart of the Alzheimer's/senility debate under a new guise. This is the shift from an epidemiology of need to an epidemiology of risk. (Gilleard and Higgs 181)

Gilleard and Higgs's description of the epidemiology of risk applies to the study of age identity and aging populations per Giddens's concept of the late-modern risk society, wherein to experience living in late modernity means re-making self-identity, one's body, lifestyle, everyday practices, as part of the management of risk (*Cultures* 108). According to Chris Phillipson, globalization is closely tied to the creation of such risk, and it has caused two contradictory effects: "On the one hand, growing older seems to have become *more* secure, with longer life expectancy, rising levels of economic well-being, and enhanced lifestyles in old age. Set against this, the pressures associated with the *achievement* of security are themselves generating fresh anxieties among older as well as younger people"—both individual and their families ("Ageing" 203). McEwan enacts this history of late modern age identity-formation in *Saturday* within the particular context of cognitive risk: as old age is increasingly "alzheimerized," reduced to questions of mental fitness, responsibility for maintaining that mental fitness is absorbed by private individuals at all stages of the life course, not just in late life.

For the middle-aged Perowne, aging is in part a process of internalized surveillance and individualized risk management. He examines himself in the mirror; he notices and voices concern about the physical signs that signal middle age, but is not yet entirely dismayed.

Perowne has internalized what Margaret Gullette terms the master narrative of decline that she argues begins in the “middle years”: “A man, a mirror, the desolation of seeing what one sees...we needn’t know the age of the man; who ever knew Prufrock’s age? Any negative age reference can pull up a chain of signifiers, confusedly multiplying bad things and linking them to ‘the midlife.’ The master narrative runs on synechdochic muddle” (*Declining* 173). Perowne anticipates gradual decline; he examines his middle-aged body for weight gain, lack of flexibility and endurance, and vows to stop the grueling marathons and squash games by the time he reaches 50 in a few years. Yet the aging narrative that Perowne describes is more complicated than one of decline; McEwan’s language in describing this kind of aging renders it “normal” and acceptable, part of an expected and anticipated life course transition: “And then, he, Henry, will turn fifty and give up squash and marathons, the house will empty” (285). McEwan does not problematize Perowne’s acceptance of the decline narrative of mid-life because it is in fact the preferable option; the alternative is Lily’s fate, an old age rendered abnormal and unacceptable and which is bereft of any meaningful future.

Managing the Epidemiology of Risk

Saturday’s narrative structure and McEwan’s characterization of Perowne enact this shift toward the “epidemiology of risk”; as modern self-identity relies heavily on mental capacity and cognitive function, and as new definitions of aging (increasingly pathologized, i.e. “alzheimerized”) threaten that project (both on an individual and demographic scale), the forces of welfare capitalism shift the potential burden for accommodating this form of aging onto individuals. In the context of Alzheimer’s disease, Robertson calls attention to the way in which the *families* of Alzheimer’s sufferers are enfolded into the professionalization of the disease,

and in fact are often painted as the “real” victims (142). By positioning Perowne as both a “potential [carer] and as potential [client]” (*Cultures* 178), that is, as someone who will either suffer from late-life dementia or need to care for someone who does (this is already the case), McEwan directs much of his own and his character’s resources into “managing” this risk, while also subtly undermining this effort.

The rhetoric of “management” appears in McEwan’s own privileging of cognitive function, in its role as guarantor of consciousness and meaningful selfhood. In 2005, the year of *Saturday*’s publication, McEwan and other prominent British thinkers were asked about what constituted their “unprovable beliefs.” McEwan’s response stresses the finality of death, life’s transience, and the centrality of consciousness to that life. “No part of my consciousness will survive my death,” McEwan responds. For McEwan, the brevity of life and the centrality of consciousness to that life thus impart to us a moral directive: “That this span is brief, that consciousness is an accidental gift of blind processes, makes our existence all the more precious and our responsibilities for it all the more profound” (“2005”). The significance of McEwan’s statement lies in its acknowledgement of vulnerability with a simultaneous call for protection. While McEwan’s response does not detail precisely how consciousness is to be valued or cherished (although it is “precious”) or in what way “we” are to be held accountable for its use, protection, or prolongation (implied by “responsibilities”), the moral impetus of this statement is imparted to its fictive embodiment in *Saturday*.

The most definitive way in which McEwan stages the “management” of Perowne’s anxieties about the potential loss of cognitive function is through performance of his professional identity. As scholars of McEwan’s work have noted, the responses of McEwan’s characters are often profoundly performed through their professional identities—science journalist Joe in

Enduring Love, judge Fiona Maye in *The Children's Act*, physicist Michael Beard in *Solar*.

Patricia Waugh makes a similar observation of Perowne's response to potential threats in *Saturday* that "Terror and violence lurk, but are managed through the rationally applied skills and the cool compassion of the liberal professional" ("Thinking" 82).¹¹⁵

McEwan hints throughout the novel that Perowne's appreciation for a surgical environment that he is skilled at controlling extends to a larger hope for simpler, easily fixed problems. When he sees the plane go down in the opening scene, for instance, his immediate reference point—the September 11 attacks—makes him conclude that "The best hope for the plane is that it's suffered simple, secular mechanical failure" (17). A mechanical reason for the plane's troubles would avoid the messiness of more diffused political issues that Perowne cannot control. As in John Banville's scathing review of the novel, criticism of *Saturday* is often directed toward the too-neat closure of the political allegory. Banville faults the novel for unproblematically endorsing the hero narrative and the bourgeois complacency of Perowne's lifestyle and liberalism, a too-easy and too-clean solution to current cultural and political anxieties about fundamentalist terrorism. "Are we in the West so shaken in our sense of ourselves and our culture, are we so disabling terrified in the face of the various fanaticism which threaten us, that we can allow ourselves to be comforted by such a self-satisfied and, in many ways, ridiculous novel as this?" (14), Banville asks.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ McEwan highlights the centrality of professional identity in the opening sentence through the use of the appositive: "Some hours before dawn Henry Perowne, a neurosurgeon, wakes to find himself already in motion" (1). *Saturday* is riddled with just these kinds of appositives, replacement nouns or noun phrases that offer us an alternative and equivalent substitution. McEwan frequently uses appositives in the novel as a way of signaling when characters are occupying different roles or different relationships with each other. At a later point in the novel, Perowne is tagged the fly-fisherman ("Naturally, Perowne the fly-fisherman has seen the recent literature" (127)), but his identity as fly-fisherman is tied to his neurosurgical one: the interest in fish referenced here concerns studies of pain receptors in rainbow trout.

¹¹⁶ Scholars have found much to discuss in this first important scene of the novel: Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, for instance, deplores Henry's willful ignorance of London's vibrant multicultural landscape; scholars like Jane Thrailkill, picking up on McEwan's interests in cognition and neuroscience, have noted the ways in which this scene

Neurosurgery is represented in *Saturday* as not only a space of control but also one of identity transformation. Perowne's patient Andrea Chapman embodies neurosurgery's transformative potential. Before her operation, Andrea is "a problem patient, a problem niece" (8), a disrespectful, disruptive young woman. She undergoes a complete personality transformation after her surgery, even though "the area [Perowne] was operating in, the vermis, has no bearing on emotional function" (267). After the operation, she is sweet and respectful, and wants to become a "brain surgeon" herself. Baxter, too, is emotionally transformed by his surgery, though it has not and cannot cure his disorder: "Sleep has released his jaw and softened the simian effect of a muzzle. The forehead has loosened its habitual frown against the outrageous injustice of his condition, and gained him some clarity in repose" (271).

Neurosurgery begins to function more metaphorically in these cases, as a way of not just fixing existing problems but of controlling or shaping events to more favorable—to Perowne—outcomes. When Andrea asks, "'what's the prognosis?'" (262), stumbling charmingly over the unfamiliar word, McEwan refers to more than just her medical condition. Here McEwan uses the space of neurosurgery to express and deal with existential anxieties about the future, particularly framing those anxieties as *identity* losses that medicine and science will fix. McEwan also explores the limits of scientific and medical knowledge when faced with problems of cognition and consciousness: "faced with these unknown codes, his dense and brilliant circuitry, he and his colleagues offer only brilliant plumbing" (263). Though Perowne has every right to be proud of his technical skills (the "mechanical failures"), he knows that they in themselves are not enough to cure people like his mother and Baxter. In fact, sometimes it is the brilliance of those very skills that blinds him to that fact.

dramatizes the workings of human consciousness, memory, and attention; many have studied the novel's topical political themes, which will be shortly introduced to readers when Henry spies a plane crash lighting up the London skyline.

Managing risk involves a time-related process that Giddens calls the “colonisation of the future” (111). McEwan defines consciousness in part by means of its ability to imagine the future; the novel defines the evolutionary purpose of consciousness as performing the function of anticipation: “[there] must have been survival advantage in dreaming up bad outcomes and scheming to avoid them. This trick of dark imagining is one legacy of natural selection in a dangerous world” (40).¹¹⁷ In Perowne’s eyes, both Lily and Baxter, by contrast, lack either the means of anticipating the future, or completely lack a meaningful future: McEwan calls Baxter a man with “no future” (168) because of the irreversible impairments caused by Huntington’s.

Thus, in his quest to age “successfully,” and confronted with his mother’s decline, Perowne resolves to avoid his mother’s fate at all costs. When he envisions himself in Lily’s place, being tended to by his own children in turn, he imagines ways to prevent this potential future:

High blood pressure is one good predictor of strokes. A hundred and twenty-two over sixty-five last time. The systolic could be lower. Total cholesterol, five point two. Not good enough. Elevated levels of lipoprotein-a are said to have a robust association with multi-infarct dementia. He’ll eat no more eggs, and have only semi-skimmed milk in his coffee. He wants his prodigiously connected myelin-rich white matter intact, like an unsullied snowfield. No cheese then. He’ll be ruthless with himself in his pursuit of boundless health to avoid his mother’s fate. Mental death. (169)

Perowne’s projection of himself onto his mother’s “fate” suggest that his anxieties about aging are also informed on some level by a fear of inheriting his mother’s condition. Perowne’s views of Baxter’s genetically determined future (or lack thereof) demonstrate how, according to Robert Mullan Cook-Deegan, the sense that “genes are destiny” (273) overpowers the long-recognized, but less dramatic, reality that the environment influences the expression of genetic material. In

¹¹⁷ Philosopher Daniel Dennett argues in *Consciousness Explained* that consciousness is a product of an evolutionary need for survival. For our ancestors to react exceptionally well to their environment, “what you want is an anticipation machine that will adjust itself in major ways in a few milliseconds, and for that you need a virtuosos future-producer, a system that can think ahead, avoid ruts in its own activity, solve problems in advance of encountering them, and recognize entirely novel harbingers of good and ill” (188). Consciousness provides such an anticipatory tool.

fact, anxieties about inheritance (in more prosaic financial sense) appear throughout the novel; the dispute with Henry's father-in-law John Grammaticus, for instance, concerns the inheritance of his wife's family's chateau in France. The genetic inheritance of dementia troubles Perowne more. Lily's disease is much less clearly genetically dictated than Baxter's. For Perowne, this is a relief as much as a burden. On the one hand, it frees up the strict determinism of genetics, leaving open the possibility that epigenetic, environmental, and behavioral factors can just as easily contribute to the expression of disease. On the other hand, Perowne also indicates the nature of the "responsibility" that McEwan advocates be taken against premature loss of cognitive ability: it is an individualistic moral imperative, wherein an individual is responsible for maintaining mental fitness: "He'll be ruthless with himself," vows Perowne, resolving to avoid his mother's fate through his own self-control.¹¹⁸ As age is increasingly "alzheimerized," reduced to questions of mental fitness, responsibility for maintaining that mental fitness is absorbed by the individual.

A key tension regarding cognitive and neurological impairment in old age is that between growing awareness of genetic susceptibility and the management of this susceptibility as knowledge of the intricacies of genetic expression also changes. According to Gilleard, the exact nature of the relationship between dementia and genetics, and the epigenetic and environmental factors (toxins, for instance, or sociodemographic factors such as gender or occupation) influencing the expression of a disease like Alzheimer's, is still being determined. Changing theories of the genetic basis of these diseases strongly influences their real or perceived preventability.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Gilleard notes the same pattern. He claims that "The desire to identify certain substances (e.g. tobacco, alcohol) as contributing to dementia may be considered as much a moral as a scientific project" (107).

Perowne's anxiety exhibits what scholars have identified as "anticipatory dementia." Stephen J. Cutler and Lynne Gershenson Hodgson define this sociological phenomenon as "the concern of the children of Alzheimer's disease patients that their own normal age-associated memory change is a harbinger of dementia, a concern that their parent's disease will become their own" (657), a concern that then may extend to the larger population, who also worry that the any increasing memory problems that appear with aging may also herald a future of cognitive impairment. These fears are exacerbated when people consider the genetic components of diseases like Alzheimer's or Huntington's (Hodgson and Cutler 62). Mark Haddon's *The Red House*, another example of an aging neuronovel, includes a similar example. The character of Angela exhibits the dual role of both "carer" and potential "victim"; in bearing the brunt (as opposed to her brother, the radiologist) of the emotional work of caring for her recently deceased mother, a dementia sufferer, Angela fears that her current mental state is symptomatic of an encroaching mental illness like her mother's. Unable to remember episodes from childhood, she confesses of her memory gaps that "It scares me. Makes me wonder if I'm losing my mind. Like Mum" (48). *The Red House* enacts not only the phenomenon of "anticipatory dementia" but also shows, as does *Saturday*, that the "neuro" of the contemporary neuronovel structures age anxiety in the language of its own values.

Fateful Moments

The novel takes place on February 15, 2003, the day of mass demonstrations in London protesting Britain's planned involvement in the Iraq War. Henry Perowne's seemingly ordinary Saturday is disrupted by a minor car accident with a thug named Baxter and his henchmen. Thanks to his expertise in neurology, Henry escapes the conflict by diagnosing Baxter with

Huntington's disease, an inherited degenerative brain disorder causing debilitating physical and cognitive impairment. The initial confrontation between Perowne and Baxter constitutes what Anthony Giddens defines as a "fateful moment," a moment that disturbs the relative placidity expected by the risk-assessing individual, threatening the "protective cocoon which defends the individual's ontological security" (114). While Perowne initially appears to make a successful decision and evade Baxter, this confrontation sets in motion longer-ranging consequences that expose the instability of the late twentieth century identity project. Such moments

...are the moments at which the appeal to *fortuna* is strong, moments at which in more traditional settings oracles might have been consulted or divine forces propitiated.

Experts are often brought in as a fateful moment approaches or a fateful decision has to be taken. Quite commonly, in fact, expertise is the vehicle whereby a circumstance is pronounced as fateful, as for instance in the case of a medical diagnosis. (113-4)

Perowne's diagnosis of Baxter's Huntington's decides both his own (immediate) future while pronouncing on Baxter's. Its location in an urban street, ironically isolated despite the throngs of people assembled outside for the anti-war demonstration, lends it a provisional, performative quality.¹¹⁹

Perowne's performance of his professional identity in this encounter resembles Oliver Sacks's description of the "street neurologist." In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Sacks recounts his experience "taking to the streets" of New York City to observe neurological disease "in the real world" instead of the closed, controlled environment of a clinic or laboratory. After spending an extensive amount of time with a patient with Tourette's syndrome, he finds his "eyes and mind" opened to the observable symptoms of the disease, and the following day

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of contingency in McEwan's narrative, see James Wood, "James Wood writes about the manipulations of Ian McEwan."

witnesses three people in the New York streets suffering from what he instantly recognizes as Tourette's.¹²⁰ Sacks explains the importance of "street-neurology," as he so aptly dubs this practice, by noting the sometimes obscuring effects of traditional spaces of diagnoses—like doctors' offices—on diagnostic procedure. Perowne's reaction during this "urban drama" (86) is to revert to his medical specialization, performing a version of Sacks' street neurology. He "automatically" spies the symptoms of Huntington's disease in the violent Baxter, and regains control of the situation by hinting to Baxter about his superior knowledge of his medical condition. There is no question of colonizing the future with Baxter and the genetically determined Huntington's: "The misfortune lies within a single gene, in an excessive repeat of single sequence-CAG. Here's biological determinism in its purest form. More than forty repeats of that one little codon, and you're doomed. Your future is fixed and easily foretold" (94); that future is a "meaningless end" (94).

If the urban space of the encounter with Baxter allows Henry Perowne to exert his mastery over the figurative threat of cognitive disability, then the domestic spaces of the novel represent their extreme vulnerability. Whereas Baxter's revenge-seeking assault on the Perowne household later in the evening threatens the domestic and familial space, placing Lily at the heart of the novel shows us that the domestic has *always* been an unstable space for McEwan. Lily's nursing facility, for instance, still retains the ghosts of its domestic (almost pastoral) past, but its residential name cannot hide the fact that three houses had to be destroyed for its existence. Even more ancient ghosts also reside here. The space of the nursing home is evidence of the duality of McEwan's temporal view of consciousness: shorter, human lifetimes overlay longer,

¹²⁰ Thrailkill briefly mentions Sacks' work in her essay: "Oliver Sacks has made an art of the instructive, often poignant neurological case study...in populating *Saturday* with characters suffering from brain disease...McEwan extends Turner's [dictum], that "'only a neurobiologist is likely to notice the constant mechanisms of vision that create our visual world.' A neurobiologist would notice – or a novelist" (186).

evolutionary timelines. Perowne imagines that a generation ago, this entire area outside London was still comprised of “great tracts of agricultural land,” and considers how easily “the land would revert to cereal crops and grazing” (161), nature reasserting itself. The land retains markers of its past identity, and so, too, does Perowne describe Lily’s condition in the same metaphor of land and space: “Henry likes to think that in the misty landscape of her dementia, a sense of familiarity breaks through occasionally and reassures her” (161). Lily, who once cared for her modest home with pride and dedication (by herself, due to the early death of Henry’s father), can no longer do so. Lily’s disease is deliberately rooted in a break-up or distortion of domesticity, connected to the feminized space of the institution.

McEwan re-emphasizes the uncanniness of the domestic space by doubling Lily’s nursing home with Perowne’s nearby childhood home. Perowne recalls ridding this childhood home of piles of trash before putting the house up for sale and moving his mother to the nursing home. Emptying Lily’s house is analogous to erasing Lily, “[dismantling] Lily’s existence” (284). McEwan parallels the act of emptying one’s personal space with the similarly deadening, identity-destroying effect of dementia. By marking the domestic space as vulnerable to loss of the cognitive function underpinning personhood, McEwan thus forces us to re-evaluate the novel’s climactic scene: Baxter’s “invasion” of the Perowne home later that evening, which collapses the earlier urban encounter with the (distorted) domestic encounter with Lily. The Perowne home is well-guarded, with “three stout Bonham locks, two black iron bolts as old as the house, two tempered steel security chains, a spyhole with a brass cover, the box of electronics that works the Entryphone system, the read panic button, the alarm pad with its softly gleaming digits” (37). These defenses function as a send-up of the Perownes’ wealth, privilege, and classism, but they also symbolize Perowne’s defense of the vulnerable domestic space

against the threat represented by both Baxter and Lily: “mental death.” The sheer hyperbolic magnitude of these fortifications practically ensures readers of their ultimate futility later in the novel. The Perownes’ bolts cannot withstand Baxter’s invasion, metaphorically speaking, because Henry Perowne has misrecognized the source of the threat. To recognize that the real risk of a degenerative disease like Huntington’s or Alzheimer’s, comes from “within”—from genetics, from the brain, from the body—would be to perceive as a threat precisely that which is most valued and which remains vulnerable despite the most stringent precautions.

Conceived more broadly, the trope of home invasion or of home burglary, when placed in the context of late life, frequently represents a reaction to the model of individualized responsibility, consumerist welfare, and the “epidemiology of risk.” For example, in Pat Barker’s 1986 novel *The Century’s Daughter* (published in the U.S. as *Liza’s England*), a young social worker develops a friendship with the ill, elderly Liza Garrett, who is exactly as old as the twentieth century and whose life mirrors its major historical moments; the young Stephen tries to convince her to move out of her run-down home. At the end of the novel, teenagers from the neighboring estate attempt to rob Liza, ultimately causing her death, under the mistaken assumption that the metal box she prizes and often consults contains hidden money or valuables. In fact, Liza is poor; the box merely houses sentimental mementos and photographs. A similar trope plays out in novels such as Marina Lewycka’s *We Are All Made of Glue* and Penelope Lively’s *Family Album*; here, the dilapidated home of the elderly protagonist, which is too much for her to maintain alone, is revealed to be extremely desirable and valuable real estate. Though this latter example lacks the violence inherent in the former, the “secret treasure” trope—wherein the elderly person is either knowingly or unknowingly hoarding something of great value—represents the other side to the extreme individualization of risk in relation to aging. If aging

“well” becomes the responsibility of the individual, if, as Gilleard and Higgs claim, the “‘cost’ of mental frailty in old age is transformed from a responsibility to be planned for and borne by an ‘ageing’ state to one that resides primarily with individuals—whether as victims or as carers” (*Cultures* 188), then the demented elderly by definition becomes a burden on the public sphere. The fictional “demanding” of the elderly individual’s secret treasure—hidden wealth, desirable real estate—becomes the reactionary narrative representation of this perceived burden.

Alzheimer’s and Authorship

Saturday demonstrates the impact of “cognitive culture” on late-twentieth century age identity; as neurological impairment and neurodegenerative disease, particularly Alzheimer’s-like diseases, are rendered increasingly frightening given our current cognitively-oriented definitions of self, so individuals are increasingly tasked with anticipating or managing the risk of such a future. Dannefer and Miklowski, who use retirement planning as a main example of individualized risk management in late modern societies but who also note that it extends to such realms as health and lifestyle, suggest that the ultimate consequences of this shift are unclear; while such ideological shifts often promise more agency, it remains “unclear that such changes necessarily imply more ‘agency’ for individuals. More knowledge and more control can also mean more risk and more stress” (37). In other words, are such definitions of aging ultimately “sustainable” (Gilleard and Higgs, *Cultures* 187)?

Perowne’s performance of “managing” an Alzheimer’s risk reveals its contradictions even as it upholds its necessity, although while McEwan’s novel shows the precariousness of such a construction of aging, it does not offer many alternatives. What it does, however, is leave open the possibility that others will: other novels, authors, researchers, scholars. And, indeed,

they have: new models of the brain are discovering (or re-discovering) the relationship between emotion and cognition, for instance, or between bodily responses and habits and the mind; sociologists and healthcare advocates are exploring ways to restore value to the lives of dementia sufferers, such as emphasizing creative tasks (art, music, and story-telling) and the care-giver relation. For instance, Jane Thraikill argues that despite Lily Perowne's increasingly faulty memory system, she remains sensitive to affect and emotional environments (as Perowne himself notes), and thus can find comfort in other, "prosthetic" stories: "Because the stories that circulate around Lily are both sustaining and efficacious, they can aptly be termed *prosthetic*. Like an artificial limb, these prosthetic stories are 'made up' yet have real material effects, supporting both Lily and the caregivers as they provide the emotional and material resources she needs" (188). Although *Saturday*'s view of the future is couched in the context of neurosurgery, medicine, and institutionalized care, as in Andrea's questioning of her "prognosis," it also creates space for intervening in that future.

The greatest challenge issued by McEwan's depiction of the "alzheimerization of old age" may in fact be the one that McEwan issues to himself. For McEwan, consciousness is not merely central to self-understanding but to narrative itself, not only the metaphoric act of self-authorship but the literal/literary one as well. For Thraikill, for instance, the colonization of the future is an act also performed by the novelist: "McEwan affirms a constructivist theory of knowledge, in which individuals and collectives—including novelists—participate in making up meaningful presents and livable futures" (171). McEwan's view of consciousness implicates himself as novelist and thus of aging *authorial* identity.

If *Saturday* teaches us to internalize a process of self-surveillance, to look for "[m]ore evidence of decline" (245), as Perowne does looking in the mirror, what effect does that have for

the aging novelist? Of course, concerns about declining authorial productivity and creativity in old age are a common refrain, from Thomas Hardy's own dejected view in his looking glass to William Butler Yeats's dream of Byzantium. (In Virginia Tiger's view, this type of concern is particular to male authors, who have dominated the discourse about age anxiety in the Western literary canon (2-3); women authors have historically faced rather different challenges in a negotiating the literary marketplace and even negotiating their authorial selves in light of more prescribed social roles.) The nature of this real yet *familiar* concern about (male) authorial decline in old age is demonstrated via *Saturday*'s resident "eminent poet" (199), Perowne's father-in-law John Grammaticus. "The years and the drink are not softening him. And naturally, as he ages and writes less, he's become unhappier. His exile in France has been a prolonged sulk" (130). This "childish, domineering man" (130) is threatened not only by his own relative decline in poetic productivity but also by the rise of a younger poetic generation, including his granddaughter Daisy, who he himself helped to mentor.

By its very foregrounding of a neurologically-based consciousness and narrative, however, McEwan's work also raises the specter of the aging artist in a different light. Whereas the modernists used stream-of-consciousness to produce a "modernist 'slice-of-life' novel," Dominic Head writes that McEwan favors a "diagnostic 'slice-of-mind'" style, "the literary equivalent of a CT scan" (193).¹²¹ By logical extension, the "alzheimerization" phenomenon makes the works of literature open and available to the same type of scrutiny: just as Snowden's Nun Group examined the memoirs for symptoms of Alzheimer's, so too are neurologists examining the

¹²¹ Among others, Patricia Waugh also has compared contemporary neuroscience to the representation of mental and emotional states in modernist literature. She describes *Saturday* as showily evoking modernist texts, in its *Mrs. Dalloway*-like opening and single-day structure, for instance, and its nighttime ending scene echoing Joyce's "The Dead." The difference, according to Waugh, is that McEwan attempts to improve on the original model, taking "the modernist representation of mind in the direction of greater scientific truth" ("Thinking" 78). Waugh concludes, however, that *Saturday*'s depiction of interiority via the discourses of evolution and neuroscience lacks the nuance and productive instability of the modernists' less scientific representations and that it values the objectivity of brain science over emotional experience.

literary works of Iris Murdoch and Agatha Christie for signs of encroaching dementia and cognitive impairment in their work.¹²²

In *Saturday* McEwan side-steps this concern by aiming Perowne's professional interest elsewhere; Perowne professes little interest or understanding of fiction or poetry. Little wonder, then, that he does not or cannot look for artistic merit or creativity in the meandering, disconnected, yet often lyrical stories told by his mother Lily. For *Atonement*'s Briony Tallis, a novelist herself, there is more at stake. Already her diagnosis of vascular dementia has taught her the trick of surveillance, of detecting potential symptoms. Even sitting across from her doctor, she notices "how the pencil tip quivered in his hand, and I wondered if he too was suffering some neural disorder" (334). In the taxi, heading toward the party, she turns that surveillance on herself: "Which portion of my mind, of my memory, had I lost to a minuscule stroke while I was asleep? I'll never know" (342). In setting into motion the "alzheimerization of age" in the context of narrative and authorial identity, McEwan raises the possibility that an author's own encroaching dementia is merely a contemporary extension of the "unreliable witness" (338) of literature, as Briony calls herself. However, it is also possible that in doing so he has written himself, to use of one of Perowne's final thoughts, into an "oblivion" (289)¹²³ that is much worse.

¹²² See Le, Xuan, Ian Lancashire, Graeme Hirst, and Regina Jokel. "Longitudinal Detection of Dementia Through Lexical and Syntactic Changes in Writing: A Case Study of Three British Novelists."

¹²³ For McEwan's use of this word in the context of the September 11 attacks, see McEwan, "Only Love and Then Oblivion."

CONCLUSION

THE EMPIRE RETIRES: THE PROBLEM OF POSTCOLONIAL AGING

Previous chapters have articulated how age functions as a marker of material, ontological, and epistemological difference in twentieth-century literature. In this conclusion, I show how using age, and retirement more particularly, as a representational marker of difference overlaps with ideologies of imperialism and with the formation of colonial and postcolonial communities and subjectivities, including how such representations serve to inform twentieth-century British literary history.

The “problem” of aging has been one of the most important of the twentieth century, one that has been “managed” by social policies, scientific and medical knowledge, popular representations of aging (often panicked), and the “institutionalised life course” (Gilleard and Higgs, *Ageing* 37). One key result of the latter is the institutionalization of retirement as a normative part of the life course—even as in recent decades state welfare dismantling has caused this norm to fragment, creating the potential for liberating post-retirement lifestyle benefits to some, while, for others, a diminished late life existence (Blaikie, “Visions” 15). It is thus not surprising that literary texts examining the legacy of the British Empire, which also profoundly shaped the twentieth century, should also reflect the “problem” of aging and the negotiation of retirement. As the introduction explained, there is no simple equivalence between the literary history of the twentieth century and representations of aging; anxiety about the “decline” of the British empire or of the British literary tradition, in the vein of Hugh Kenner’s *A Sinking Island*, is not simply correlated with representation or aging—nor should it be, since the overall trajectory of age advocacy in the twentieth century have been to counteract such a narrative. Thus, in this conclusion, I show how models of aging, especially those regarding retirement and

the welfare state, function not only as an imaginative metaphor for making sense of what “happens” as the British empire ends but also as a way of marking the material and historical tensions underlying colonial and postcolonial relations. As we will see, these two complex phenomena do not merely run parallel to each other; rather, they serve variously to augment, disrupt, or displace one another in the (post)colonial narratives of twentieth century literature.

As a result, the literary examples in this conclusion will span the century, offering three snapshots of the “retiring empire” at particularly pregnant moments when Britain’s relationship to its own empire is undergoing a significant change or crisis: E. M. Forster’s 1924 *A Passage to India* shows an imperial zenith that is about to topple; the work of V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon covers the immediate postwar decades, especially the 1950s and 1960s, when immigrants from the newly impendent Commonwealth nations are changing the cultural makeup of Britain; and finally, the contemporary aging landscape, viewed through the lens of an often troubling globalization, capitalism, and neo-colonialism, is examined in a work of popular fiction, Deborah Moggach’s 2004 *These Foolish Things* (better known as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*). If empire “messes with identity,” in the words of Gayatri Spivak (qtd. in Baucom 14), then so too does aging, in ways that often work with or against the construction of colonial and postcolonial subjects.

Jed Esty’s work has been instrumental in leading the pervasive narrative of postimperial twentieth-century British literature away from emphasis on national and cultural decline. In *Unseasonable Youth*, Esty demonstrates that “youth” functions as a disruptive trope in modernist texts, arguing that these texts destabilize the genre conventions of the traditional Bildungsroman through tropes of “youth out of joint—endlessly adolescent or suddenly aged” (16), and in doing so critique the narratives of progress, modernity, and capitalism at work during the tail end of

imperialism, 1880-1920. Esty notes that the subject of *Bildung* operates under a logic of equivalence, in which the subject of the biographical novel parallels the development (or lack thereof) of the nation: the “soul-nation” novel. Thus, the disrupted and disruptive modernist Bildungsroman, such as James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, “explore[s] the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire” (3), including discourses of teleological national progress and justifications of imperial authority.

In his conclusion, Esty places his literary analysis within the context of the larger scholarly debates about how to characterize modernity/modernities, decolonization, and cultural difference in a postcolonial, globalizing world. I quote at length from his description of his own project and its larger implications for twentieth-century literary history because I see my own purpose in this conclusion as identifying the “connective tissue” that Esty argues defines modernist fiction’s dialectical engagement with imperial narratives:

I would venture to say that the intellectual crisis of progress in the late nineteenth century...does strongly, if not deterministically, mediate between the material collapse of the Western empires and the artistic power of modernist form. The texts examined here, in all their variety, cut the process of aging from between the twin plot points of youth/exposition and death/closure, removing the connective tissue definitive of historicism itself. The resulting form established a dialectical rather than an antinomial relation between world-historical development aimed at a shared destiny and a world of static, anthropologized differences splayed on a planetary grid. (*Unseasonable* 202)

Whereas Esty examines the genre of texts polarized around youth and death (openness and closure), this conclusion examines texts that take as their subject matter the in-between of these two poles: old age. I argue that old age in fact functions as an “excluded middle” in both

postcolonial narratives as well as the literary history of twentieth-century British literature. Specifically, this conclusion will restore age as the “connective tissue” that Esty describes as removed, by examining the motif of retirement, a specific aspect of late life that is directly the product of a twentieth-century universalizing and “managing” of the life course. Because it is itself a dynamic historical phenomenon, retirement also provides the literature of decolonization, postcolonialism, and migration with an awareness of its own historicity and with the tools to negotiate its place in twentieth-century British literature.

More broadly, old age frequently shares with colonial and imperial narratives a marginal representational space; that is, the aged subject, like the colonial subject, is structured around discursive strategies that devalue or exclude in their construction of an Other. Teresa Mangum offers a striking example in her study of elderly female figures in Victorian youth literature, a subset of which features these women (characterized as burdensome, uncivilized, or generally socially unacceptable) ousted to colonial settings. According to Mangum, this literary ejection performs an ideological function for the colonial enterprise, which in addition to seeking material gain also sought “to exile England’s undesirables—criminals, single women, orphans, and the old” (78). In an example like the 1854 *Punch* cartoon picturing a stereotypically shabby elderly woman on a dock, waiting to sail to “The East,” and entitled *How to Get Rid of an Old Woman*, the “elderly as *émigré*” becomes “a new kind of colonial subject” (79). In other examples, Mangum demonstrates how such ageism reinforces imperial racism, as when the racist stereotypes used to target colonized peoples—“primitive, bestial infancy” (79), for instance—are attributed to old age as well. The overlap between aging and colonial subjectivities registers not only on the level of the social but also the psychological; many of the psychological processes that Homi Bhabha, for instance, argues result in the “splitting” of colonized subjects (processes

such as “deferral and displacement” (64)) are also useful in exploring the creation of aging subjects. These processes operate on “any textual system,” as Bhabha writes, “within which the display of difference circulates” (98), as the following discussion of twentieth-century literary texts explores in the context of aging and colonial subjects.

A Cave of One’s Own

“Say, say, say,” said the old lady bitterly. “As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace. Not to die,” she added sourly. “No doubt you expect me to die, but when I have seen you and Ronny married, and seen the other two and whether they want to be married—I’ll retire then into a cave of my own.”

E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

Midway through E. M. Forster’s 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, which turns a critical eye toward the British colonial presence in India, Mrs. Moore, the character that Forster sets up as the novel’s possible moral center or political middle ground, begins to voice her discontent with not only the “muddle”¹²⁴ (to use a favorite Forster phrase) of Anglo-Indian relations but also with her symbolic role in its representation. Frustrated by the behavior of her son Ronny Heaslop and his fiancée Adela Quested, the elderly Mrs. Moore is anxious to return to England and end her disappointing trip to India to visit Ronny, a young and ambitious colonial administrator. In the passage above, Mrs. Moore has exhausted both herself and her goodwill, faced with the aftermath of Adela’s ultimately baseless accusation against Dr. Aziz, stemming from their trip to visit the mysterious Marabar caves. Mrs. Moore functions as the novel’s figure of mediation and potential goodwill between British colonizers and colonized Indian subjects; when she leaves India mid-way through the novel, her disappearance signals a loss in Anglo-

¹²⁴ For a succinct exegesis of Forster’s use of this word, see Harriet Blodgett, “From *Jacob’s Room* to *A Passage to India*: A Note.”

Indian relations, the failure of mediation or a middle ground, and, indeed, the futility, hypocrisy, and moral bankruptcy of the British imperial enterprise.

Though she manages to leave India midway through the crisis with Aziz, Mrs. Moore never reaches England again, instead dying with little narrative depiction “off-stage,” on the ship back home. Her death is consistent for the narrative, serving as an escalation of her symbolic role in representing colonial relationships. As Aziz and English educator Fielding’s conversation demonstrate at the end of the novel, Anglo-Indian relationships under colonialism are in a holding pattern; the two sides cannot be friends “yet,” while India is under British rule. It is no coincidence that Mrs. Moore’s age, declining health, and unrepresented death make for a convenient symbol for colonial relations in *A Passage to India*. On the contrary, I suggest that Forster’s representation of Mrs. Moore’s advanced age and its accompanying signifiers (poor health, plans for retirement, and eventual death) create the possibility of articulating national and cultural differences in the first place.

As typified by the passage beginning this chapter, Forster consistently calls attention to Mrs. Moore’s advanced age and poor health; she is the “old woman” to many, even her son Ronny. The introduction of this study explained how modernists of the first few decades of the twentieth-century encouraged, at least initially, the propagation of a “cult of youth” that celebrated youth as a category in itself. Forster was one author who felt limited by the attention paid to youth; he felt that the social devaluation of the middle-aged and elderly compromised his ability to write from his own, more mature perspective (Port 143). Such an attitude may explain why elderly characters such as Mrs. Moore receive relatively little narrative attention in the novel, yet play a structurally essential role. One reading of the significance of Mrs. Moore’s declining health in India—she leaves India in worse health than she found it—would suggest that

her decline measures the instability of relations between colonizer and colonized, or a foreshadowing of the decline of the British empire. But such a reading misses the material, experiential reality of what it means to be old, or to be represented as old, particularly under the power disparities of colonialism. My preliminary discussion of *A Passage to India* considers two aspects of Mrs. Moore's age: the absence of meaningful discussion of retirement, and radical potential of aging within the colonial context.

As Lawrence Cohen demonstrates in *No Aging in India*, imperial and postcolonial (and, I would add, neo-colonial) politics affect constructions of aging subjectivity. Cohen laments the neglect of aging within postcolonial studies, explaining that "Much recent work in the social sciences and humanities has examined the relationship between gendered and sexual representations and the politics of empire and the postcolonial nation, but *age* has far less frequently been examined as a form of difference in its own right" (5). In one example, Cohen discusses an incident that occurred in 1865 in Varanasi, India, in which a prophecy made by an old woman threatened to completely change the traditional work and community structure of a group of families called the Mallahs. This prophetic message, calling on the Mallahs to cast aside their traditional occupation of fishing to instead become religious devotees, agitated the community and ultimately resulted in the deaths of several Mallahs at a festival.

Cohen's point in telling this story is to compare the reaction of the Mallah community to the reaction of the British occupiers; in discussing the incident in the colonial press, the British emphasized the "macabre religiosity of Indians...in the absence of British intervention" (*No 2*)—a reaction markedly similar to Ronny Heaslop's in *A Passage to India*, when, interceding between the city's Hindu and Muslim populations, he believes his intercession proves "that the British were necessary to India; there would certainly have been bloodshed without them" (96).

As in *A Passage to India*, this Varanasi incident becomes a justification for colonial interference. Cohen is particularly interested in the figure of the old woman who first makes this prophecy, for she functions differently for the Indians who interpret her message, than for the paternalistic British colonizers. Cohen demonstrates that the “mad old woman” is a common trope in British colonial law and correspondence of the period. For the British, the “colonial repetition of the decrepit or crazed old person” functions negatively as a “sign of Indianness”(4). Meanwhile, in contrast to the dismissive British, the Mallah community took the message seriously, enticed by the possibility of social change that it promised.

The connection between old age and colonial attitudes is more than merely discursive, however. British beliefs about aging materially shaped colonial Indian law: Cohen cites the example of the Indian Lunacy Act of 1912, a law clarifying testamentary issues in cases involving potential senility on the part of testators. Because the writing of such laws depended on defining senility and dementia, and therefore of the difference between normal and pathological aging, its terms reflect British definitions of age and dementia at the beginning of the twentieth century. This law is an example of the ideological formation in multiple senses: first, the British project of “civilizing” India (Cohen, *No* 24), and second, the project of “disciplining” old age, as projected by the British onto their colonial subjects.

The project of “disciplining” old age¹²⁵ is related to other knowledge paradigms relied upon by British colonialism; for instance, Cohen explains that the British relied on the popular mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourse of “cerebral softening” to describe both aging *and* Indian nationality. The concept of a gradual “softening” of the brain was used to describe bodily and mental decay that was the supposed result of both aging and tropical

¹²⁵ My use of this term refers to Stephen Katz’s *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge*, the focus of which is the history of gerontology as a field of study.

climates, with the added assumption, when applied to colonial contexts in particular, that this “softening” also implied moral decay. Senility, writes Cohen, “the tendency of all things tropical to evolve into imbecility, is the dominant trope of imperial appraisal” (*No* 22-23).¹²⁶ This trope appears in *A Passage to India*, ironically applied to Mrs. Moore: when Mrs. Moore says to Adela Quested that her friend Aziz is innocent of the assault she accuses him of, her son Ronny dismisses her suggestions as “senile intrusions” (202). Taken in light of the discourse of “tropical softening,” this dismissal is tantamount to an indictment of Mrs. Moore’s mental life and moral character. In another part of the novel, for instance, an important British administrator is revealed to be having an affair. Revealing that the “softening” caused by the tropical climate often implied a moral condemnation of character—and that this racist belief was used not for medical purposes but as imperial justification—Aziz informs Fielding of the affair, predicting that the guilty man “will blame the Indian climate. Everything is our fault really” (272). Moreover, Ronny’s dismissal of his mother’s ideas and her declining health and implied dementia symbolically connect her more strongly with colonized India.

Though the British colonials, including her son Ronny, see her as succumbing to the “tropical softening” that Cohen describes, Mrs. Moore pushes back strongly against their expectations. She answers a similar question asked by Cohen, “How and why might the old body serve as a critical site in the constitution of collective meaning and practice?” (4). That she is old and increasingly vague—to her son’s eyes—puts her on course with British representations of India as riddled with “mad old women,” according to Cohen’s formulation. In the passage first quoted, however, Forster shows Mrs. Moore not only as unhappy with the behavior of Adela and Ronny, but actively resisting social roles she feels they demand she perform. She has played, and

¹²⁶ Cohen also shows that cerebral softening is often tied to images of diarrhea and excrement, both figures “supplement one another as figures of liquefaction and the abject nature of the Indian’s lack of boundaries” (*No* 23). Forster frequently depicts India as lacking in boundaries or private space in *A Passage to India*.

is expected to play, the role of the maternal, domestic counselor, the guarantor of Ronny and Adela's engagement and potential marriage, and representative of home. Yet, as this highly charged passage shows, Mrs. Moore frequently rejects the role of "aged sage" imposed on her by the other characters.¹²⁷ With Forster frequently ventriloquizing through her a critique of conventional heterosexual marriage, Mrs. Moore laments "my body, my miserable body...Why isn't it strong? Oh, why can't I walk away and be gone? Why can't I finish my duties and be gone...Why all this marriage, marriage?" (201). This represents a change from the beginning of the novel, where in the mosque with Aziz she had considered that "her function was to help others, her reward to be informed that she was sympathetic. Elderly ladies must not expect more than this" (9). She later comes to regret the minor material role she had previously felt she was expected to occupy.

Though she is English, Mrs. Moore's age ties her to discourses about Indian nationality, and her disavowal of certain gendered age-based stereotypes creates a pocket of potential resistance, both to these stereotyped social roles and, by extension, for colonized India. By terminating her attempts to retire, her death also signifies an abbreviated Indian nationalism *and* proto-feminist overtures. Although Forster's novel ends with a glimpse into the future, a moment when India gains independence and Aziz and Fielding will no longer be divided from each other, Mrs. Moore is left with no future. Her son, for instance, cannot really fathom a significance for her outside of her current (disrupting, to him) presence in Chandrapore: "He wished she wouldn't interfere. His mother did not signify—she was just a globe-trotter, a temporary escort, who could retire to England with what impressions she chose" (31). In the passage quoted earlier, Mrs. Moore expresses her desire to "retire then into a cave of my own." We have already

¹²⁷In contrast to the complacent Professor Godbole, another elderly character, who encourages such a view of himself.

seen that Mrs. Moore's idea of retirement is strongly gendered, and connected to her desires to resist her conventional role as maternal presence and homemaker.¹²⁸ Mrs. Moore's view of retirement is in one sense the classical demarcation of a socially acceptable moment at "which individuals could withdraw from public duties" (Thane 3), and could then focus on private interests. On the other hand, it is also a surprisingly progressive view of retirement that marks an incipient twentieth-century official institutionalization of retirement as a normalized part of the life course, even though such a view of retirement, with its ties to traditional labor structures, is and remains problematic for women. Mrs. Moore has presumably never labored in a profession or career (unlike Adela, who ultimately returns to England to pick "profession" over marriage),¹²⁹ but she clearly sees her role as domestic arbiter as a form of work, from which she now feels she deserves retirement. Mrs. Moore blames her physical body as a barrier to obtaining the "peace" she longs for, but the novel's failure to allow her to retire also constitutes a latent commentary on the definitions of retirement itself. Even Mrs. Moore herself cannot imagine her retirement in detail, describing it in negative and vacant terms as being on "some shelf" (200). What does "retirement" mean for women without professional identities or social roles outside the domestic sphere? Analysis of contemporary research in the sociology of aging suggests that this will continue to remain a problem for women in the retirement years due to lifelong inequalities in the labor market, in employment and remuneration, and in the persistent societal

¹²⁸ We can think of Mrs. Moore's reference to "a cave of her own" as an older version of Virginia Woolf's feminist formulation of "a room of one's own." The reference to the cave connects Mrs. Moore more strongly to the haunting mysteries of the Marabar caves.

¹²⁹ Macnicol explains the historical development of "career" as distinct to the twentieth century: "In the nineteenth-century labour market, many individuals possessed an ambiguous status, drifting between what we now think of as notionally precise categories like 'employed,' 'unemployed,' 'retired,' 'inform' or 'part-time.' By the twentieth century, a clearer dividing line was becoming established between those engaged in the formal labour market and those dependent upon the waged income of a breadwinner. One aspect of this was the development of the idea of a career, terminated by the fixed age of retirement" (5).

expectations that women bear the brunt of (unpaid) domestic labor and care well into late life (Price and Ginn 78).

While there are few direct references to retirement in *A Passage to India*, Forster does imply a connection between colonialism and work. Fielding, for instance, evinces some guilt at Englishmen taking over Indian jobs, and Aziz is aware that he is a better surgeon than his British superior. These references to the labor and market forces of empire belie the rhetoric of paternalism used elsewhere by the British in justifying their presence. *A Passage to India* is prominently centered around Ronny Heaslop's anxiety over his expanding career as city magistrate in the fictional Chandrapore, but like the other British officials, his stay in India is presumed to be temporary. There always looms an image of home to which, it is implied, these British will return: He will make his career in India, and then retire to England. In his one direct mention of retirement, Forster speaks derisively as Aziz imagines these retired English as still convinced of his guilt even despite Adela's recantation: "They still believed he [Aziz] was guilty, they believed it to the end of their careers, and retired Anglo-Indians in Tunbridge Wells or Cheltenham still murmur to each other: 'That Marabar case which broke down because the poor girl couldn't face giving her evidence—that was another bad case'" (261). Just as the novel cannot narrate Mrs. Moore's retirement, it imaginatively registers but cannot articulate an imperial retirement that exists *apart from* the colonial enterprise; even in their safely suburban English spaces of retirement, the former colonials remain thinking of their time in India, maintaining their beliefs to the end. Forster's brief mention of retirement within the context of the British imperial machine show how little attention has been paid to the way that retirement itself played a much larger role in the material, financial, and structural aspects of imperialism, but so, too, does it suggest that even as *A Passage to India* criticizes the British empire and

predicts its decline, it cannot easily imagine its second act. The denial of Mrs. Moore's retirement is representative of that lack, and a displacement of the future of young colonial administrators like her son Ronny. Of course, the figure of the retired colonial officer or official is a common stock character in late Victorian and early twentieth-century novels, including works of detective fiction.¹³⁰ But, sensing already the end of empire, how will Ronny define himself and his life course after India?

Mrs. Moore's death also marks the absence of discussion of real retirement, itself an uncomfortable reminder of the British imperial enterprise as labor, as well as the issue of migration, which later sections will discuss in greater detail. In "Decolonization: The Ultimate Diaspora," Anthony Kirk-Greene argues that questions of retirement play a large (and largely ignored) role in *decolonization*. He calls attention to the "thousands of British overseas civil servants [whose] permanent and pensionable (p. and p.) careers were cut short between 1947 and 1997 by premature retirement consequent on the end of colonial rule" (133), arguing that this re-settlement had a profound effect on both the lives of the more than 25,000 employees who often struggled to find "second careers" back home, as well as on the postwar British economy and society, to which these workers had to be reabsorbed (133). Though Kirk-Greene's assertion that the case of these 25,000 civil servants is "the ultimate diaspora in the story of twentieth-century decolonization" (3) is somewhat overstated considering the profound social upheavals caused by decolonization and independence in the former empire and colonies alike, it helps us understand *A Passage to India* as problematically depicting, or unwilling to depict, the Empire's "second act" once it retires and returns to an absent or radically altered "home."

Though the connection between Mrs. Moore's "retirement" and the colonial enterprise initially seem largely symbolic, it in fact has a material and historical relevance that has largely

¹³⁰ As in, for example, Agatha Christie's 1926 mystery novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

remained unexamined. I suggest this reading of *A Passage to India* because it represents a pattern that emerges as the British empire begins to recede in the early and mid-twentieth century. Like Mrs. Moore, images of retired pensioners, or, images of *failed* retirees, work to disrupt the status quo of colonial and eventually postcolonial relations. In the case of *A Passage to India*, it does so as a form of resistance to the political and representational inequality perpetrated by colonialism, as well as an indictment of the hypocrisy of the ideology of the British empire. Forster leaves *A Passage to India* with Aziz and Fielding's postponed friendship; if we fast forward several decades, would they, or Mrs. Moore, finally be able to retire after decolonization and colonial independence? What might contemporary retirement look like for our imaginary Mrs. Moore, under current regimes of information technology, transnational migration patterns, and financial globalization? The next two sections attempt to answer these questions.

“Campers in the Big House”: Retirement as Postcolonial Absence

Both Forster's Mrs. Moore and—in the following section, Deborah Moggach's Evelyn Greenslade—represent white, western, female subjectivities. They certainly do not unproblematically speak from the “center”; indeed, it is their age and gender, among their other representational roles, that enable the depiction of their failed or delayed retirements. Nonetheless, they occupy a position of relative privilege in the colonial or postcolonial settings they inhabit. In this section, I turn to writers speaking and moving from the periphery. Where *A Passage to India* and *These Foolish Things*, the focus of the next section, represent a difference of 80 years and the change from loosening imperialism to globalization, this section examines the period between these: the postwar decades, those following decolonization, with the influx of immigrants from the former colonies changing the makeup of the United Kingdom (and of

British literature). While later generations in later decades also face the challenges of acculturation and discrimination, these earlier “pioneer” generations are in some ways uniquely positioned to discuss old age because of their contemporaneity with other significant postwar developments, mainly the installation of the welfare state and new retirement policies. Like *A Passage to India*, the texts discussed in this figure the topic of aging and retirement only at a distance, but in fact the distance is significant, measuring the degree to which the postwar, postimperial welfare state has failed to become “home” to newly arrived migrant populations. If poor imperial planning has failed Mrs. Moore, it doubly fails the protagonists of writers such as V. S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon. Both authors use representations of home or of domestic/domesticized spaces to articulate discomfort with both age and ethnic prejudice—not surprisingly, as “home,” with its relevance to issues of care, (in)dependence, identity, and community, is an at-risk and contested physical and ideological space for migrant and elderly individuals.¹³¹ In *Dwelling Places*, James Procter argues that readings of the literature of diaspora too often idealize the metaphysics of rootlessness or homelessness, and ignore the real cultural and political anxieties of establishing residence, especially in the postwar period: “Postwar post-colonial migration to England in the 1950 and 1960s amounted to more than the abandonment of ‘home,’ or to an ontological condition of ‘homelessness.’ It also involved a desperate territorial struggle *for* home within the context of housing shortages and the overtly racialized ‘colour bar’ surrounding domestic space” (4).¹³² The question of home thus becomes doubly fraught for elderly migrants, as for the protagonist of Joan Riley’s 1987 novel *Waiting in*

¹³¹ For a discussion of the sociological and psychological importance of “home” in elder residential care, for instance, see Sheila Peace and Caroline Holland, “Homely Residential Care: A Contradiction in Terms?”.

¹³² Another perspective is offered by Rosemary Marangoly George in *The Politics of Home*, which shows how the meaning of “home” has changed in a postcolonial world. She claims that home can have several meanings within the genre of immigrant fiction: either “a yearning for the authentic home (situated in the past or in the future),” or “the recognition of the inauthenticity or the created aura of all home” (175). Where George argues that most immigrant fiction, including the work of Sam Selvon falls into the latter, Naipaul’s is operating under the first definition.

the Twilight, the Jamaican migrant Adella, whose dream of owning a home is dashed by financial vulnerability, exacerbated by prejudice against her ethnicity and migrant status, her illness and disability, and eventually, her age; the Council, she thinks, had “pulled the heart out of her when they took her house” (13).

In one section of *The Enigma of Arrival*, V. S. Naipaul’s 1987 fictionalized autobiographic novel, entitled “The Journey,” Naipaul’s narrator describes his arrival in London as a young scholarship student.

I felt the house was no longer being used as the builder or first owner had intended. I felt that at one time perhaps before the war, it had been a private house; and (though knowing nothing about London houses) I felt it had come down in the world. Such was my tenderness toward London, or my idea of London. And I felt, as I saw more and more of my fellow lodgers—Europeans from the Continent and North Africa, Asiatics, some English people from the provinces, simple people in cheap lodgings—that we were all in a way campers in the big house. (186-87)

A Trinidadian author of Indian descent who himself made a similar journey to England as a young man in 1950, Naipaul reaches toward his own layered origins and lived experience of migration in most of his works, exploring issues of displacement, belonging, and prejudice that are the effects of a British imperial legacy in the former colonies as well as of migration and Commonwealth diaspora more generally. These themes appear frequently in the work of other Commonwealth writers of the period (and after), though Naipaul has been disparaged—most famously by Edward Said—for being too critical of the newly independent nations, including his home country of Trinidad, and insufficiently so of British imperialism and the Western values that contributed to its creation. In this passage from “The Journey,” Naipaul’s narrator admits to

feelings of loss for an ideal, romanticized image of London, one based heavily on its imperial, metropolitan identity. The boarding house in shabby Earls Court represents this loss, in its decline from a formerly private residence (wealthy, centralized, and coherent) to a boarding house, a place of temporary, displaced inhabitation, reflecting the process of migration as well as the changing cultural makeup of London that the narrator unfortunately interprets as chaotic, divided, and impoverishing.

This feeling extends to the city as a whole. The few signs of metropolitan “size and power” only serve to highlight its overall loss: “And after this grandeur there was the boarding-house in Earls Court. So I grew to feel that the grandeur belonged to the past; that I had come to England at the wrong time; that I had come too late to find the England, the heart of Empire, which (like a provincial, from the far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy” (187). Naipaul maps the temporal and spatial elements together, with his sense of nostalgic belatedness connected to the remoteness of his geographical origins. Ian Baucom understands Naipaul’s feeling of belatedness or loss of authentic Englishness as in fact a reaction to his painful recognition (but failure to admit) that this authentic Englishness is only illusion (178). As a result, Naipaul turns to celebrating not Englishness, or even English imperialism, but rather the end, the ruin of the imperial project (182).

Where the “The Journey” contextualizes this problematic nostalgia as youthful uncertainty and naiveté, Mr. Stone’s earlier 1963 “English” novella *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* places the problem of an idealized image of an older England with the context of aging and retirement. If much of Naipaul’s work can be understood as a “love song of the empire’s ruin” (Baucom 182), then *Mr. Stone* is a love song to the British welfare system. Only

the love is not incomplete; if anything, *Mr. Stone* is as close as Naipaul comes to a pointed critique of British social policy.

Written between his two more prominent successes, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967), and unlike them in setting and protagonist, *Mr. Stone* is unusual in that it features an English protagonist who barely registers either decolonization or migration. In his analysis of the novella's main themes, John Thieme begins by calling attention to *Mr. Stone* as an "oddity" because it "does not demonstrate an immediate and obvious concern with Third World society" (497). Nonetheless, Thieme argues that like these more major works, *Mr. Stone* is a "fable about cultural identity, and Mr. Stone is as much a displaced person in his native English environment as any of Naipaul's earlier colonial protagonists were in theirs" (498). The novel does so by relying somewhat on a stereotype of late life, the characterizing of older people as static and opposed to change, as well as marginalized by society (and, in this, experiencing a structurally similar marginalization to other kinds of social outsiders).

The novel narrates a late life crisis faced by protagonist Richard Stone, a 62-year-old white English bachelor living a quiet life in London as a librarian in Excal, a large, generic corporation. Nearing (and fearing) his encroaching retirement, and subtly influenced by signs of social unrest (and the more mundane seasonal changes) around him, Mr. Stone makes several sudden changes in his life: he marries the aptly-named Miss Springer, and, in a burst of creative enterprise grounded in anxiety, he creates and succeeds in launching a new enterprise within Excal. This new scheme, eventually called the Knights Companion by Bill Whymper, its painfully modern public relations officer "whose boast was that he made nothing" (86), is partly a pensions program and partly a welfare state corrective. The enterprise operates on the basis of cooperation and a sense of communal responsibility based on the workplace. The "Knights" are

former Excal employees, now pensioners, who visit other Excal pensioners, enjoining companionship as well as ensuring their mutual well-being (decidedly not ensured, according to Naipaul's description of early '60s Britain, by national insurance). Both the marriage and the Knights Companion scheme eventually lose their creative momentum for Mr. Stone, and the novel ends in a similar place where it began, with Mr. Stone alone in his empty house, abandoned by the simultaneously loved-and-loathed cat that frequents his house.

Like the Earls Court boarding house in "The Journey," Mr. Stone's house reflects its general decline; unlike the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* who remembers seeing this decline through younger eyes, Mr. Stone is not unhappy with its condition. On the contrary, his home is a place of comfort and strength to him: "He took pleasure instead in the slow decay of his own house, the time-created shabbiness of its interiors, the hard polish of old grime on the lower areas of the hall wallpaper, feeling it right that objects like houses should age with their owners and carry marks of their habitation (18). Mr. Stone is complicit with the house's decline, seeing it as a sign of permanence if not brilliance, the same note on which the novella ultimately concludes ("Once before the world had collapsed about him. But he had survived" (126)). His marriage to Margaret Springer disrupts this well-established space, threatening his masculinity and his own carefully repressed anxieties about aging, those that cannot be "managed" as his house can (as when Margaret reveals that she has false teeth, to match his own). The contrast to his wife's previous residence is telling. Margaret lives in a "private hotel in one of the crescents off the Earl's Court Road" (26); this residence is like the boarding house in "The Journey" in its "disreputable, overcrowded" (26) Earls Court address, but unlike it in that it attempts to resist the influx of new (non-white) arrivals, as evidenced by the "Europeans only" sign that "proclaimed

it a refuge of respectability and calm” (26).¹³³ Though both Mr. Stone’s house and the hotel are shabby, Naipaul is clear that the house’s respectable decline is more acceptable; the house has earned its shabbiness. Naipaul’s narrative is at its most ageist in its representation of Margaret’s hotel, the unrelenting stasis of the other hotel residents, the “discreet stares from the old and frank, uncomprehending stares from the very old” (28-29) somehow a literary revenge for its racism and narrow-mindedness.

On the surface, it appears that Mr. Stone’s age and house are symbolically tied, as in the boarding house of “The Journey,” with British social, cultural, and economic decline. Part of this decline is the changing racial makeup of British society. John Thieme reads the novel as Naipaul’s “English fable,” and understands Mr. Stone as representative of the loss of “homogenous, older England,” which is “seen as being infiltrated by colored immigrants, the new youth culture, and continental European influences” (499-500). These changes are mapped onto the spaces of London. In Earls Court, for instance, Mr. Stone notices that “the entrance to the Underground station was filthy; in a street across the road a meeting of the British National Party was in progress, a man shouting himself hoarse from the back of a van” (26). Naipaul goes out of his way to mention social changes that Mr. Stone finds upsetting, particularly emphasizing the racist elements of early 1960s society, such as the reference to the conservative anti-immigrant British National Party, and Whymper’s lunchtime activity of counting all the black men on the London streets (64). According to Thieme, the novel’s Arthurian motif—the Knights Companion as an Arthurian round table; an Excal company trophy called Excalibur—reinforces Naipaul’s symbolic connection between Mr. Stone and an older England (in this case, particularly idealized). However, this fantasy of Arthurian England is tainted because it is the

¹³³ A retirement hotel like Margaret’s is also centrally featured in Elizabeth Taylor’s 1971 novel *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont*.

inauthentic marketing product of Whympers's publicity campaigns, thus further establishing the futility of looking for any permanent sense of creative renewal within either the capitalist system, personal relationships (especially between men and women, whom Mr. Stone finds suffocating), or contemporary British culture.

Though it may seem straightforward to equate, as Thieme does, Mr. Stone's conservatism and age with a representation of an idealized former England, Naipaul's social commentary in *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* in fact offers a more poignant critique of British society and its postcolonial relations than his somewhat crude characterization of Whympers's racism would suggest. (For instance, does Mr. Stone represent the loss of an idealized figure of cultural Englishness, or simply the realization that such a figure was only ever an idealization? Is the "decline" meant to be a description of historical change, or a (subjective) change in perception, perhaps even ironically a marker of personal development?) For even as Mr. Stone's age and house serve as literary symbols to tie him to older English culture, his position vis a vis retirement and the contemporary welfare state align him with a more multiracial British society. In particular, his own marginalization within Excal and society (partly the result of his age and partly of his lack of capitalist drive), despite the brilliance of his scheme to create the new Welfare department, makes him a figure more closely aligned with the displaced and struggling immigrant figures—particularly those desirous of social acceptance, such as the "Jamaican family of ferocious respectability" (111) who move into Mr. Stone's neighborhood—than Thieme allows for.

In many ways, Mr. Stone appears to feel the pressure of the stereotypes of aging prevalent during the 1950s and early 1960s, particularly the threat of "traumatic retirement" that Chapter 1 examined with respect to the work of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. He fears that retirement

signals a moral failure, a complete withdrawal from a productive role in society resulting in psychological turmoil and ill-health: “[E]very racing week drew him nearer to retirement, inactivity, corruption. Every ordered week reminded him of failure, of the uncreative years once so comfortingly stacked away in his mind” (46). This rhetoric of retirement as signifying a moral failure of the work ethic signals the complex history of pensions and retirement that underlies Mr. Stone’s actions. Where Mr. Stone struggles against the significance of these new policies for creating a meaningful late life, post-work existence, Whympers’s description of the project reinforces the ambivalence in postwar retirement policies noted by Chris Phillipson; namely, that the postwar labor market required the continued labor of retired or retirement-age workers, even at the moment when retirement became a clearly delineated and institutionalized part of the life course (“The Emergence” 3). ““How about this?”” Whympers asks Mr. Stone as they work on the details of Mr. Stone’s welfare scheme, ““Our pensioners visit the pensioners of clients. Take them a little gift from the company and so on. It wouldn’t wreck Excal....and think. Men working for Excal even after they retire. A whole army of Excal old boys on the march, in every corner of the country”” (64). Whympers’s fantasy of the “army” of ex-Excal workers mimics the idea of pensioners as a flexible, auxiliary work force, his military imagery suggesting its disciplinary function instead of its care-taking (and thus more feminized) function.¹³⁴ At the same time, however, as Mr. Stone’s relative invisibility at Excal makes clear, one of the overall twentieth-century labor trends informing the creation of state pensions is in fact the gradual removal of older male workers from the labor force (Macnicol 5).

¹³⁴ In characterizing the period after World War II and through the mid-1960s, Phillipson writes that “renewed stress is laid on the economic, social and individual necessity for work, with considerable ideological pressure—particularly in the early part of this period—for workers to delay retirement” (“The Emergence” 4).

Far from falling firmly in-line with state pension schemes (and state welfare policies more generally), however, Mr. Stone's own welfare plan in fact enacts one of the rarely acknowledged historical tensions within the development of pension policies of the period: namely, the "rivalry," as Leslie Hannah calls it, between state pensions and occupational tensions. According to Hannah, the development of state pensions in the early decades of the twentieth century was initially hindered, or at least resisted, by employers and other organizations, such as trade unions and friendly societies, that had stakes in insuring its members or employees (46-47). Mr. Stone's idea for a company-sponsored and implemented Welfare department imagines alternatives to the postwar establishment of national insurance. His is a fantasy of sustainability that works to the benefit of the program's recipients with minimal input from the bureaucracy; he describes his pension program as follows: "In this way we organize our pensioners into a self-sufficient, self-help unit. All we provide is the administration" (65).

Mr. Stone's ideal of the self-sustaining, renewable source of pension support (a fantasy indeed for the late twentieth century) contrasts with his description of the welfare state, which it sees as trivializing, moralistic, and self-congratulating, as in his sarcastic description of the social assistance received by his sister for her young daughter: "What delight Olive had taken in the food ritual imposed by a government so conscious of Gwen: the milk and orange juice and codliver oil beneficently doled out, sacramentally received and administered!" (117). Whereas the young are officiously cared for, the elderly are ignored. One of the most significant successes of Mr. Stone's program is its uncovering of instances of maltreatment of the Excal pensioners; one such instance involves an Excal Knight discovering that his pensioner, dubbed the "Prisoner of Muswell Hill" by the media, is in fact being ignored and starved by his caretaker daughter. Mr.

Stone understands himself and Excal—private individuals and private companies—as working toward uncovering these government failures and omissions.

Yet Mr. Stone is himself sometimes insensible to other inequities perpetuated by the same system, including gender disparities. Naipaul subtly contrasts Mr. Stone's encroaching retirement with his housekeeper Miss Millington's lack of the same resources. Though Miss Millington is of pensionable age—she attends the cinema every week for the “cheap show for pensioners” (17), as a woman and a domestic worker, the clearly articulated and delineated parameters for retirement, as delineated both by the national insurance and private firms like Excal, do not apply to her. Though Mr. Stone chafes against these parameters, Miss Millington's fate is even more uncertain. Described as “heavy, slow, too old for work, too helpless to retire” (18), she eventually is deemed too burdensome—in quite an exaggeratedly comic way, almost killing Margaret—and she leaves the Stone's employment to join family elsewhere. Margaret, too, occupies a different aging narrative, her class separating her from Miss Millington and her gender from Mr. Stone. She has, perhaps, the narrowest options, other than being “rescued” (29) by Mr. Stone from the unpleasantness of the hotel. As a foil to Mr. Stone, Miss Millington's dilemma highlights the systemic gender inequalities of the pension system. While Naipaul depicts Mr. Stone as articulating real anxieties about the inadequacies of the welfare state and the effects of social marginalization due to age discrimination, his privilege is still relatively secure when compared with women like Miss Millington, or to non-white or migrant populations, who remain so excluded from the system that they cannot be represented as operating in it at all.

Mr. Stone's scheme is ideologically important in the novel because it uses the microcosm of retirement and aging discourses to imagine alternative narratives of the welfare state (and thus, of twentieth-century British history) that Mr. Stone desperately tries to shape, but from which he

is ultimately excluded. The negotiations enacted by Mr. Stone are far from over. Naipaul imagines the beneficence of the welfare state existing in perpetuity, as when his young niece, whom he dislikes, reveals that she is pregnant, by Whymper no less. “‘I’m not surprised! I’m not surprised!’ He was, deeply. ‘But the welfare state hasn’t run short of milk and orange juice and cod-liver oil’” (122), he thinks, dismissing its ministrations as trivial at the same time as he acknowledges its generational continuity. In a recent essay, Bruce Robbins reminds us of some of the welfare state’s contradictions, comparing the same image of the 1950s distribution of orange juice (and the specter of the social services’ “health visitor”) that Naipaul uses with a more insidious “orange,” the Agent Orange used in military actions of the period. “What’s in a common color?” Robbins asks. “Are we sure that the violence of the dioxin-bearing, cancer- and birth-defect-causing defoliant is the hidden truth behind the supplying to children of the humble citrus drink, rich in vitamin C?” (“Orange” 5). Robbins asks if it is right to exculpate the former because of the latter, or even if the “orange juice” loses its ethical purchase because of the existence of Agent Orange. But this is not only a tension between opposing ethical principles; it is likewise a tension between administrative openness and government secrecy, between inclusive national well-being and exclusionary international hostility. In fact, Robbins suggests that the oranges represent more than simply a shifting tension, but that in fact their existence is mutually dependent, and that the international hostility can easily be understood as the project of colonialism:

It is arguable, though by no means firmly established, that the welfare state has managed to exist, in countries with more or less developed social services, only by taking advantage of the violence that the European powers in their colonial phase and the neocolonialism of the United States have been in the habit of meting out to countries that

have no such services. It seems hard to deny that, historically speaking, funding for what were to become welfare institutions would have come at least in part from what can still be called imperialism. (“Orange” 7)

In suggesting a possible imbrication of welfare and colonialism, Robbins’ argument sheds light on Mr. Stone’s—and Naipaul’s—dissatisfaction with the welfare state, and his attempts to correct it with his own resources and for the purposes of ameliorating his own anxieties.

Although there exists, as John Thieme argues, a strong and characteristic element of ‘old England’ nostalgia in Naipaul’s characterization of Mr. Stone, Naipaul’s novella also constructs alternative narratives of mid-century retirement that at least force us to question its moral economy, including potential weaknesses. Robbins suggests that one of these omissions is the failure to acknowledge or recognize the welfare state’s ideological and material reliance on Britain’s colonial past. In deliberately framing the problem of retirement as white and “English,” Naipaul also asks us to look for what the vision of postwar aging in *Mr. Stone* is ostentatiously excluding.

In *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, Naipaul hints at the conundrum that Sam Selvon’s *Moses* novels, to which our discussion now turns, make explicit; namely, that there is little place in mid-century concepts of aging for migrant populations. More so even than Naipaul, Sam Selvon typifies the “first generation” of postwar postcolonial writers, those who “wrote back” to their former colonizer from newly independent nations, or as immigrants facing the challenges of displacement and prejudice in the increasingly multicultural and multiracial Britain. Born in Trinidad of Indian descent, like Naipaul, Selvon immigrated to Britain in the 1950s. And like his contemporaries, writers such as George Lamming and Andrew Salkey, whom he references in his novels, Selvon frequently explores the changing postwar metropolitan

landscape, the heterogeneity of West Indian culture and burgeoning nationalisms, the negotiation of cultural identity and national consciousness, and the challenges and prejudices faced by immigrants.

He does so at the level not only of narrative but also of style, often writing in, for instance, a Creole Trinidad idiom, or, as in *Moses Ascending*, a satirically archaic English. In addition to these important aspects of Selvon's work, which have been carefully detailed in the scholarship of postcolonial and Caribbean literature, Jed Esty argues in *A Shrinking Island* that Selvon's work also examines the nature of postcolonial authorship and the relationship of postcolonial writing to twentieth-century British literature and literary history, especially the shift from New Criticism to cultural studies scholarship in the middle of the century.¹³⁵ Drawing on Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, in which Gilroy writes that "the entry of blacks into national life was itself a powerful factor contributing to...the formation of both cultural studies and New Left Politics" (qtd in Esty 198), Esty connects the social changes sparked by the influx of immigrants from the "periphery" into Britain with a concomitant literary re-imagining of English culture occurring in the 1950s (200). The following discussion of Selvon's Moses trilogy examines the role that representations of age (or their pointed absence) play in this re-imagining.

Selvon's series of three novels featuring the Trinidad migrant Moses Aloetta spans four decades: *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) most explicitly evokes the racism and displacement felt by immigrants in postwar, post-imperial Britain. The next two books are more obviously satirical. In *Moses Ascending* (1975), Moses attempts to achieve social and financial well-being—and find

¹³⁵ English literary history shares a long history with colonial practices. In "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India," Gauri Viswanathan argues that the formation of English literature as a discipline of study assisted in British colonial effort in India, while the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, citing Viswanathan, suggest that "the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 3).

time to write his memoirs—by becoming a landlord, only to find himself ultimately displaced by his white servant and tenant. Finally, Moses leaves London and returns to his native Trinidad in time for Carnival in the last book, *Moses Migrating* (1983). After professing himself a loyal Briton during the Carnival celebration, Moses, no longer completely at home in his native land, eventually returns to Britain.

The characters in the three Moses novels, particularly Moses, attempt to resolve the needs of the individual to that of society, and in doing so, they both articulate a theory of postcolonial literature and postcolonial identity through an often satirical performance of Englishness that is tied to acts of authorship. Whereas Naipaul's novel *Mr. Stone* enacts Englishness at the level of the author, Selvon's Moses trilogy performs a critical and satirical Englishness at the level of the characters, particularly but not exclusively Moses.

Among the eponymous characters of *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Moses is resident in London the longest, and, as a “veteran” (33), often functions as an advisor and guide to his fellow West Indian immigrants, a role he is frequently reluctant to play. Though he finds it oppressively representative of his financial and social instability, his rented basement flat nevertheless serves as “home base” for an informal community of fellow immigrants. Though Moses often affirms larger group affiliations, acknowledging, for instance, that “it have a kind of communal feeling with the Working Class and the spades” (75), the novel ends with Moses's attempts at individuation via his growing consciousness of himself as a potential author. Ambivalent about whether or not his experiences signify any personal growth on his part (an anti-Bildungsroman), or are merely part of “a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot” (141), Moses instead frames his potential work as reflecting both social change and changing literary history. Hearing that in France “all

kinds of fellows writing books what turning out to be best-sellers. Taxi-driver, porter, road-sweeper—it didn't matter" (142), Moses aligns himself with these working-class authors, marginalized from the literary canon. In doing so, Selvon also marks his own work, and that of his compatriots, as marking a change: the re-orientation of twentieth-century British literary history around the creative explosion of postcolonial writing in the 1950s and beyond.¹³⁶ As Esty points out, postcolonial writing like Selvon's "[gains] cultural authority by depicting England from the point of view of racially marked estrangement" (*A Shrinking* 200); the outsider's perspective that Moses (and Selvon) offers at the end of *Lonely Londoners* marks this difference explicitly.¹³⁷

Whereas *Lonely Londoners* is critical of a seemingly "inauthentic" assumption of British identity, the later novels, *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), demonstrate a more nuanced use of the subversive potential of performance and of the performative nature of identity. *Moses Ascending* continues the literary theme begun in the earlier novel. Determining to improve his social and financial standing, and to "live in peace" to write his memoirs, Moses purchases a dilapidated rental house from a friend who is returning to Jamaica. Moses's acquisition marks the beginning of his "ascent," as, ensconced in the penthouse (attic) of the house, Moses is now the big house's landlord—or rather a "parody of an English landlord" (Morris x)—rather than a transient camper in its bowels. Yet Moses's ascent is only temporary; by the end of the novel, he suffers a change of heart and determines to be a better person. In

¹³⁶ Allison Donnell examines the consequences of the use in literary history of 1950 as the "enduring genesis moment" of Caribbean writing, beginning the 1950's "boom" of Caribbean male writers, of which Sam Selvon is a significant representative (*Twentieth* 11). James Procter warns, however, that literary attention is often focused on certain minority ethnic groups more than others; for instance, he cautions that in the 1970s through the 1980s, the "hegemonic male...African-Caribbean discourse" came to dominate, to the exclusion of feminist or queer perspective or migrants from other regions (6).

¹³⁷ Selvon frames it as difference in class perspective (Moses mentions working-class professions) instead of national or ethnic difference, though Selvon had made it clear earlier in the novel that this menial work was increasingly being performed by ethnic minorities and migrant workers.

doing so, he slowly descends in the levels of the house and finds himself once more in the basement, with the white couple, his “servant” Bob and the sexy Jeannie.

Moses Migrating, the third novel, most explicitly experiments with the performative nature of identity, as Moses deliberately frames himself as a “loyal Briton” (52) while returning “home” to Trinidad. Like the basement apartment and penthouse attic of the earlier novels, *Moses Migrating* uses transient spaces—the cramped, shared bunk in the passenger ship, the Port of Spain hotel room—to signal Moses’s uncertain negotiations of cultural and national identity. This re-migration on Moses’s part is yet another thwarted attempt to find “home” (Nasta 9). To make up for his feeling of rootlessness, Moses deliberately performs an exaggerated Britishness, making an elaborate imperial “Britannia” costume, modeled on the engraving on a coin, for the Carnival celebrations.¹³⁸ Though whether or not it constitutes a trilogy is frequently debated,¹³⁹ the three novels form a particular way of reading an early-generation postwar immigrant experience. Susheila Nasta uses a telling phrase when describing the sequence of Moses novels: “the construction of a recognizable immigrant life cycle” (8). Whereas significant attention has understandably been paid to Selvon’s depiction of the “immigrant” portion of this phrase, what is perhaps also remarkable is the little attention that has been paid to the “life cycle” part. Whereas Moses does *change* during the course of the novels (though not in a clearly developmental Bildungsroman way), he does not *age*. This is not a mere oversight; I argue that, as in *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, depictions of aging are rendered representationally impossible in the “immigrant life cycle.” *Mr. Stone* and the Moses trilogy form a chiasmus: where Naipaul’s

¹³⁸ Complementing the ironic emptiness of this performance of cultural and national identity, Selvon no longer depicts Moses as an aspiring author in this last novel. Instead, Moses becomes the object of another’s authorial gaze, as he encourages a local journalist to write about him and his costume.

¹³⁹ For a discussion of how the novels’ shifts in tone and focalization make them unlike a trilogy, see, for instance, Roydon Salick, “Selvon and the Limits of Heroism: A Reading of *The Plains of Caroni*,” and Helen Tiffin, “‘Under the Kiff-Kiff Laughter’: Stereotype and Subversion in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*,” both in *Tiger’s Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon* (ed. Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford).

novella operates within mid-century discourses of aging from which representations of migrants are pointedly absent or ironically demonized, the Moses trilogy operates within mid-century discourses of migration, from which existentially meaningful aging is thwarted.

Direct representations of old age are infrequent in the Moses books, and when they appear, they are often strongly gendered. In the Moses trilogy, Selvon inhabits primarily male communities and male subjectivities, whose gaze is frequently dismissive, sexual, or misogynistic. Like *Mr. Stone*, its gender politics are often uncomfortably regressive. It is perhaps no surprise, then, the few characters directly characterized as old are either female or feminized. The old “aunts” constitute the primary example: in *The Lonely Londoners*, Tolroy’s “Tanty,” the aunt who raised him as a child, arrives in London with other members of Tolroy’s family. She herself voices discontent at her London surroundings and her poor treatment, suggesting that her age and dedication to Tolroy’s family should hold more value. Tolroy, representative of the strong predication toward youth in the immediate postwar migrant communities, is dismayed by their arrival: “Tolroy want to send Ma and Tanty back to Jamaica (them two old bitches, I don’t why they don’t dead)” (140). Though she is eventually able to “adapt” and find her footing in the new country—taking public transportation and finding Jamaican groceries—Tanty initially wonders “Why I come to London” (80) when she is treated poorly in the new country. Likewise, in *Moses Migrating*, Moses runs into his own elderly Tanty Flora, who we learn adopted and raised the orphaned Moses (much like the Biblical Moses), and whom Moses has since neglected. Running into her selling oranges outside his Port of Spain hotel, Moses describes her as not aging in the “normal” way. According to Moses, “some people in Trinidad, they live through fire and water to a ripe old age. They seem to thrive on trials and adversities that would batter you and me up and knock we about so we get grey hairs before our time” (87). The “Tanty” version

of old age—feminized, domestic, and resilient—is one of the few direct references to age in the novels. These only really noticeable elderly characters, minor as they are, suggest that Selvon associates old age with the old world, feminine and domestic; Tanty Flora has remained in Trinidad and refuses Moses's British money, while Tolray's aunt adjusts to life in London by making the grocery stores more like the Jamaican ones she knows from back home. Selvon admits that postwar migration, tied as it is to the demand for labor, is a young man's game.

These depictions of old age are relegated to the domestic, female sphere, and while Selvon's representation of them acknowledges the injustice of these women's under-valued and invisible labor, and to a certain degree the injustice of younger male characters' dismissal of their presence, they serve to highlight why it seems that first generation postcolonial literature cannot adequately narrativize aging. Selvon is deliberately vague about how long Moses and his compatriots have been in London in order to augment the feeling of stagnation and stasis often felt by these migrants, but Moses, in one significant passage in *Lonely Londoners*, warns his friend Galahad, much more recently arrived, about the dangers of growing old as an immigrant:

“fellars like you would stay in Brit’n till you dead. You come like a old spade I know. He living down Ladbroke Grove. He come to this country since he was a young man, full of ambition, and he never went back. He had some good times, yes, but what you think happen to him in old age? If you see him now, crouching about in them tube station in an old beat coat, and picking cigarette butt from the pavement. Study for old age, boy. Study what will happen to you if you stay here and get old.” (132)

Although in part an acknowledgement of an intergenerational lack of communication, the curious ageless-ness of Selvon's (male) characters, as well as Moses's dire warning, contributes to what amounts to an occlusion of age and aging for immigrant communities.

In *Lonely Londoners*, this occlusion is strongly tied to insecurity about employment. Postwar labor shortages brought many immigrants to British shores, but now work scarcity, especially resulting from racist discrimination, or the availability of only low-paying menial work, is a real fear. Moses in fact embodies the irony of this fear, for he in many ways symbolically represents the welfare state in this novel. Selvon explicitly likens him to a “welfare officer” (25); he greets new arrivals at the boat-train and helps them find homes, but “scattering” them throughout town “like a welfare officer” (25) in an effort to prevent ghettoization and racial tension.¹⁴⁰ When Moses escorts Galahad to the Ministry of Labour to find work, Selvon comments on their reluctance to take public assistance: “it ain’t have no place in the world that exactly like a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State while they ain’t working. Is a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up...even when you go to draw a little national assistance it don’t be so bad, because when you reach that stage is because you touch bottom. But in the world today, a job is all the security a man have” (45). Selvon contrasts Moses’ and Galahad’s attitude a few sentences later with that of “an old English fellar” also at the Labour office, “one of the regulars” who “only draw dole” (45) instead of looking for work. The reluctance to rely on welfare is partly tied to Selvon’s construction of masculinity (and perhaps partly his retort to those prejudiced public elements who accuse the new migrants of subsisting only on public assistance), but it also suggests that while there may be a nominal place for these migrant communities within the welfare state, there is no meaningful social support. Much like Naipaul’s Mr. Stone, Moses must himself play the role of welfare officer to supplement these

¹⁴⁰ Selvon repeats this comparison, but only once, in *Moses Migrating*. During the boat journey to Trinidad, Moses, in his role as “loyal Briton,” feels outraged at what he perceives as his bunkmate Dominica’s national disrespect, prompting Dominica (his name conflated to his country of origin) to ask if Moses is “some sort of social worker or Welfare State or something” (52).

deficiencies. Researchers studying the effect of racial prejudice on retirement and late life find that although “popular myth” assumes that immigrant populations will have greater familial and community support structures enhancing the quality of late life, the reality is more varied and less sanguine; in summarizing such research, Blaikie notes that discrimination based on race and ethnicity leaves “persistent material effects” (*Ageing* 79) on individuals’ late life experience and resources.

Moses is marked by Galahad as one of the “old-timers” (3), unwilling to deal with social change or take part in communal political action. Learning of Moses’s plan to buy the building and write his memoirs, Galahad warns Moses that “I have noticed that you look as if you ready to retire, but I am with it, man. You will need me to cope with current events and the new generation of black people” (1). But because Moses is playing the part of the English landlord, it is difficult to know with what degree of irony we are meant to interpret Moses’s reluctance to engage with the events of the day. To a large extent, it is part of Selvon’s continual negotiation of the relationship between the individual and the community.¹⁴¹ Moses’s tenancy also enacts the generational conflict between first-generation immigrants with later immigrants and even the British-born second-generation children of migrants. However, the novel also shows Moses’s exclusion from emerging models of old age. Moses does not “retire” in the way that Mr. Stone does; he poses no institutional framework, no stable working history or professional career, no feeling of “belonging” within the retirement policies of the welfare state that would convey meaning for him based on his chronological age. In a way comparable to Forster’s Mrs. Moore and to Naipaul’s Mr. Stone, Moses’s “retirement” (such as it is) instead signals an individualized retreat, privilege, and luxury; most of all, retirement requires Englishness.

¹⁴¹ Alison Donnell examines the Selvon’s work through the lens of community and collectivity in “The Island and the World: Kinship, Friendship and Living Together in Selected Writings of Sam Selvon.”

The immediate postwar period marks a significant change in the makeup of British society and culture, as well as a literature. In *A Shrinking Island*, Esty argues that the role of this early generation of postcolonial literature is in providing, as Moses does in *The Lonely Londoners*, an anthropologically neutral middle ground between “a recuperative romance of Englishness and a disillusioned critique of Englishness” (201), that the space of irony claimed by Moses “relativizes” English culture, rendering it “ordinary” (202), and by doing so also claims space for writers like Selvon within English literature. But this space has limits, and while Naipaul’s “English” novel and Selvon’s Moses novels use the concept of retirement in all of its rich symbolic, material, and historical registers to understand negotiate their *contemporary* place in the postwar postcolonial decades, its multiple failures or occlusions mean that while the contemporary is being negotiated, their futures in late life remains impenetrable, unimaginable, and unnarrativizable.

“Welcome to Bournemouth-in-Bangalore”: Outsourcing Retirement

Whereas Mrs. Moore is categorically denied the retirement back “home” in England to which she aspires, Deborah Moggach’s 2004 *These Foolish Things* enacts the reversal of these aspirations, with its elderly characters seeking instead to find successful retirement in India (or an uncanny version) itself: “Bournemouth-in-Bangalore,” as one character calls it. What would happen if Mrs. Moore were alive in the twenty-first century? Where and how would she retire? This final section continues the central task of the previous sections in examining how latent discourses of retirement and aging reflect neo-colonial ideologies extant in processes of globalization and migration. The migrants in Naipaul’s and Selvon’s works were, for the most part, young men from the former colonies seeking to improve their economic well-being in the

metropolitan center. Retirement was in a sense denied them within the ideology of the welfare state. By contrast, the migrants in *These Foolish Things* reverse both the geographical and temporal dimensions; they migrate *because* they are older and retired, and because their economic well-being means moving from Britain to less developed countries.

The novel is a light comedy despite the serious topics it addresses, described by one *Guardian* review as “peopled by ordinary characters and packaged in excellent unpretentious prose” (Falconer). It depicts a group of elderly Britons who move to India to begin or continue their retirement, though they occasionally chafe at that term. The book explores the difficulties that ensue for these pensioners—overcoming prejudice, adjusting to cultural differences—as well as the personal, familial, and financial concerns that motivate them to take such a step, or that motivate their families to encourage it. The novel was re-released under the name *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* to match the title of the corresponding UK film released in 2012 and directed by John Madden, and will be referred to under that name in the ensuing discussion.

Though the novel suggests that the hotel’s British residents are all pensioners, the details of their retirements are quite varied and never thoroughly discussed; some characters, like Norman, appear to be retired after long middle-class professional careers, whereas some, like Evelyn, are in a more precarious position, having relied on her husband as breadwinner during her married life. These disparities represent a change from what was a coherent and centralized definition of retirement in the 1950s and 1960s (as embodied by Mr. Stone) to a much more varied and deconstructed form of “third age” late life developing in the past few decades. In *Ageing and Popular Culture*, Andrew Blaikie explains that where retirement been a fixed and uniform part of the life course, recent changes in welfare and state pension schemes have resulted in a “fracturing” of the life course, which is now “being deconstructed by individual

elders, or groups of older people, negotiating their own life course” (59).¹⁴² This hotel’s residents seem to embrace this deconstruction, with Evelyn acknowledging, for instance, that the word “retirement” seems unsuitably constricting. In contrast to Naipaul’s Margaret Springer (though occupying the same dependent role vis a vis her marriage), Evelyn feels “liberated” by hotel life, agreeing with some of her fellow residents that “the word ‘hotel’ still has possibilities” (136). Evelyn’s preference for thinking about “hotel” represents a reversal from attitudes toward transient spaces in earlier decades. The Marigold hotel contains elements of both the boarding houses we encounter in tales of postwar migration (in that it houses migrants) and the depressingly shabby pensioners’ hotels inhabited by “respectable” English women like Margaret Springer (in that it houses the non-infirm elderly).¹⁴³ Evelyn’s attitude is consistent with Blaikie’s description of the current ideal of retirement as “[evoking] a transition to a new life, rather than a continuation of the old” (*Ageing* 73), where Gilleard and Higgs view it as representative of “third age” thinking, central to which is “a stress upon the agentic construction of a life-world” (*Cultures* 38), which Evelyn comes to appreciate during the course of the novel.

But in its laudable attempt to re-claim the retirement hotel, the novel tends to forget that the contemporary deconstruction of and privatization of pension schemes, despite rhetoric promising increased individual agency in late life, is nonetheless dependent on systemic inequalities. Debora Price and Jay Ginn argue that, in an increasingly privatized pension system, those who face disadvantages throughout their employment history—disadvantaged by, for instance, gender, ethnicity, and disability—face more inequalities in post-retirement late life (79-80). Hypothesizing future late life relocation patterns (including transnational migration) in the, Tony Warnes argues that, despite significant material comfort for some pensioners, these

¹⁴² Gilleard and Higgs make a similar claim in *Cultures of Ageing*, stating that “present-day cohorts of retirees are more heterogeneous than ever before” (43).

¹⁴³ A similar setting is one of the central features of Elizabeth Taylor’s *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont*.

migration patterns will reflect unequal globalization processes, especially with respect to discrepancies between the country of origin and the country of residence, while also being more highly contingent on the accumulation of economic and social resources on the *individual* level. In a pattern I have discussed throughout this study, Warnes predicts that elderly migrants' "welfare situation" ("The Future" 217) will depend less on welfare system in place on the state level and more on the accumulation of resources during their lifetime.

Though the development of gerontology as the systematic scientific study of the "problem" of aging was well under way by the beginning of the twentieth century,¹⁴⁴ it was during the postwar period that gerontology developed a social consciousness. Chris Phillipson and Jan Baars note several trends in the discourse about aging in the postwar period both in Europe and North America. The immediate postwar decades recognized aging as a social problem affecting generation demographics, economics and resources (including income, employment, and pensions), and medicine and health care; the implementation of new pension and welfare schemes was a reaction to these concerns. The relationship of the aging individual to his or her changing social circumstances (such as retirement and declining health) was thus also heavily theorized, focusing, for instance, on the possible psychological adjustments necessary of aging "in society." Whereas Phillipson and Baars describe the 1970s through the 1990s as focused on social provisions for the elderly within the context of nations—especially with declining welfare spending—the last few decades have shown the influence of globalization on gerontology and understanding of aging. They claim that globalization is creating "tensions between nation state-based policies concerning demographic change and those formulated by global actors and institutions. Social ageing can no longer be viewed solely as a national problem

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Crossing Frontiers: Gerontology Emerges as a Science*.

or issue but one that affects individuals, groups and communities across the globe” (81). *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* operates within such epistemological transition, in both its normalization of transnational retirement migration (partially a globalization phenomenon) and its juxtaposition of British and Indian definitions of aging.

On its first page, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* juxtaposes two different epistemologies of age: the experiential, individual view and the statistical, demographic view. In doing so, it highlights the discursive power of popular cultural representation of aging. The novel begins by describing the hospitalization of Muriel Donnelly, “an old girl in her seventies” (3), by focusing on how her experience is sensationalized in the tabloids: “Plucky pensioner, she had survived the Blitz for this? Her image was beamed around the country: Muriel Donnelly, the latest victim of the collapsing NHS, the latest shocking statistic showing that the British health system...was disintegrating in a welter of underfunding, staff shortages and collapsing morale” (3). While this beginning calls attention to a real problem impacting not only the elderly but all British citizens, in ventriloquizing the news account in such a hyperbolic style, the novel also manages to critically distance itself from the problem of declining healthcare funding, thematically matched to the idea of aging as decline in the emphasis on Muriel’s age. The novel juxtaposes the hyperbolic media representation with the more traditionally novelist one, showing us the motivations and inner life of Ravi Kapoor, Muriel Donnelly’s doctor. When interviewed, Ravi is “weary but polite. He said Mrs. Donnelly had received the appropriate care and that she was waiting for a bed. He didn’t mention that he would kill for an hour’s sleep” (3-4); Moggach segues from the media representation of Ravi to the “novelistic” one, transitioning to an exploration of Ravi’s motivations and inner life, as well as critiquing the tabloid representation as inaccurate and simplistic. The media coverage lacks the “whole story,” as Ravi explains to his

wife: Muriel Donnelly's treatment was delayed because of her racist fears of the hospital's doctors and staff. Ravi, too, is exhausted by the decline in financial support for healthcare—he bemoans the closing of yet another hospital in the area—but what ultimately inspires him to begin the business of “outsourcing” British retirees to India is not this social concern but his personal and domestic frustrations with his exasperating father-in-law Norman. Moggach rather emphatically casts Dorothy Miller, one of the more mysterious residents of the Marigold Hotel, as the embodiment of the NHS decline; she eventually passes away at the hotel after explaining several times her early support of Minister of Health Nye Bevan and the postwar Labour government. As in the case of Ravi, this anxiety about declining healthcare and poor treatment of the elderly is deferred via India.

The tabloid sensationalism that Moggach depicts relies heavily on anxieties about aging on a population level, as a threat to social and financial stability. As an example of this panic rhetoric in relation to aging, Paul Wallace's 1999 book *Agequake* uses the metaphor of an earthquake—a natural disaster—to describe the “seismic shift [under way] in the age profile of populations” (2). *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* depicts popular sentiment using almost identical rhetoric: In one scene early in the novel, while the dyspeptic Norman is living with, and exasperating, his daughter and son-in-law, he listens to the radio: “*The pensions time bomb*,” it said, “*is a disaster waiting to happen*.” In this example, the anxiety about the aging population conflates the language of natural and man-made destruction. The phenomenon of demographic anxiety, what Andrea Charise calls “apocalyptic demography,” has been well documented. In “‘Let the Reader Think of the Burden’: Old Age and the Crisis of Capacity,” Charise demonstrates that the long tradition of describing aging in metaphorical terms of “capacity” is perpetuated today both in the rhetoric of “successful aging” (pertaining to the individual) and

demographic aging (pertaining to the population). She traces the “coalescing of individual and societal metaphors around what we might call a volumetric aesthetics of aging” (6) from the Old Testament descriptions of Abraham and Job, both obtaining “full” and fulfilling old age, to the imagery of the “glacialization” of population aging in Matthew Arnold’s 1867 poem “Growing Old,” to contemporary media accounts of social aging, including an analysis of ageist discourse in *The Economist* (such as the use of the phrase the “silver tsunami”) published by the *British Medical Journal* (3). Most importantly, Charise calls attention to the contradictory uses of this metaphor when applied to individual versus population aging: The qualities of “resilience, accumulation, and adaptation” that work in favor of the individual in late life, when viewed from the population level appear threatening, and thus “[b]y migrating away from the person-based bodily container full of days toward modern anxieties concerning a ‘massified’ gray tsunami, agedness has become synonymous with a threat to the integrity of an emphatically non-old social container” (6). The contradiction is an ideologically important one, and it helps us make sense of not only of the contradictory representations of aging in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* but also of the problem of representation of aging more generally. The novel attempts to move conversations away from social, demographic anxieties about aging and toward individual, subjective experiences of aging, but it effectively can only do so by displacing those anxieties elsewhere, onto a neo-colonialist fantasy space in India.

The world inhabited by the characters of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* initially seems comfortably transnational and globalized. Ravi’s cousin Sonny, the Marigold Hotel’s financial backer and organizer in India, emphasizes the way that global travel has become normalized, with Ravi himself acknowledging advances in technology that have made global communication possible. For Ravi, this is an uncomfortable thought because it relates to his frustrations with his

family in India: “His Auntie Preethi in Chowdri Road, Delhi, would be phoning her sister, his mother, who was at present visiting his brother in Toronto (*The world’s shrunk, my friend*)” (17). More importantly, the novel’s characters understand globalization as enabling a certain vision of retirement. Ravi considers that “Sonny was right; even older people were sophisticated traveler nowadays, visiting children in Johannesburg, playing golf in Florida” (23). This vision of the pensioner as a “sophisticated traveler” employs an idealistically third-age understand of aging and retirement. It accomplishes such an idealism through the rhetoric of globalization, the attitude that “we’re all global travelers now, old boy” (22) that Sonny employs to justify his retirement hotel scheme to Ravi. In the context of the novel’s knowingly problematic immersion in colonial nostalgia, Sonny and Ravi’s attitudes come closer to what Kavita Daiya labels in her feminist literary critique of globalization as the “celebration of global migration” (392) in the style of writers such as Salman Rushdie, who writes in *Imaginary Homelands* of the “great possibility that mass migration gives the world” (394), a view of migration as a metaphor—or in fact literal vanguard—for cultural renewal. Moggach is aware that international retirement migration rests on a system of global inequalities that serve the former colonial centers most of all, as when, for instance, Ravi imagines if “Perhaps, at this very moment, retirement homes were being built in developing countries. Sunshine, cheap and plentiful labor, low costs. The elderly could be looked after at the fraction of the price, thus unburdening the social services” (22). Yet the novel remains insufficiently critical of the ideology of globalization and the accompanying rhetoric of the universal “migrant condition” (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 394).

This idealized view of the sophisticated elderly traveler is currently under revision by sociologists studying a transnational pattern of migration termed international retirement migration. It is also a relatively new and thus understudied phenomenon. The phenomenon of

moving within the country for retirement began in the early twentieth century (B. S. Johnson's description of Bournemouth as a retirement community in the south of England is an example), then expanded to include more permanent moves to what were originally vacation spots, like the South of France, and now have increased to migration to other countries. British citizens notably participate in this trend. According to Tony Warnes, "The exodus of British pensioners is considerable and probably unmatched from any other country" ("International" 349). Warnes calculates that by 2015, over 1.5 million UK pensioners will be living abroad, a number representing approximately 11% of the older population (349). Dhananjayan Srisikandarajah and Catherine Drew estimate that by 2050 the pensioner population abroad will reach 3.3 million, with accompanying rises to both pension payouts to overseas UK pensioners and to European Union states providing their healthcare (2).

In defining international retirement migration, Warnes cautions that it must necessarily encompass the variety of individuals who decide to retire to another country for various reasons, at various ages, and with various means of state and personal support. In making this claim, Warnes explicitly seeks to broaden the stereotypical view of retirement abroad. According to Warnes's revision, "international retirement migration [involves] a much more diverse population and a wider range of motivations and types than suggested by the 'go-go' stereotype of the fully-fit 'third-age' couple that is flaunted by 'retirement living' advertising" (Warnes, "International" 342). According to the stereotype, these "not-poor" retired couples in their 50s or 60s "epitomize the healthier, more active and innovative members of the latest cohorts of older people" (353). Moggach's novel is alert to the popular representation of the third-age retirees who decide to live overseas. Notably, it is one of the younger characters—the son of the retired Ainslees—who voices this romantic stereotype: "People were sloughing off their responsibilities

and decamping to warmer climes where the living was easy. No more leaky roofs! No more chores!” (61). Moggach’s novel contrasts this attitude with some of the more difficult realities of international retirement.

In addition to these “amenity-seeking,” physically and financially healthy retired couples¹⁴⁵ who represent the values of successful aging (and successful retirement), retired people are migrating overseas for various reasons, including family-orientated migration and “return migration,” the move made by retired laborers to their country of origin (Warnes, “International” 354). According to Warnes, India is twentieth on the list of countries populated by British pensioners. This is consistent with findings that indicate that retirement migration patterns reflect migrations patterns made in the past, “many of which are legacies of commercial, colonial and military connections” (355). Thus, Warnes concludes, the number of British retirees in India has decreased since independence.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel enacts the subjective experience of international retirement migration, working to show the discomfort and displacement frequently felt by migrants. This portrayal is complicated in the novel by the deliberate evocation and reversal of the colonial past. The Marigold Hotel attempts to cater to its residents’ cultural tastes, Moggach recalling how the hotel attempts to recreate “home” for its residents, mostly based on stereotypes of aging and English middle-class taste: “Outside in the garden, budgerigars chirruped in the aviary and the flower beds were planted with marigolds and roses; really you could be in Tunbridge Wells” (26). Despite these attempts at recreating “home,” like many emigrants, the hotel residents initially feel uncomfortable in their new cultural surroundings; the novel repeatedly emphasizes the slight irony in juxtaposing their discomfort with the astounding

¹⁴⁵ In *The Silvering Screen*, Sally Chivers notes the ideological importance of the married couple to promoting an image of late life identity and the shouldering of care-giving responsibility.

comfort of the more traditional immigrant figure, Dr. Ravi Kapoor, who enjoys living in England and “hates” India. Seventy-three-year-old Evelyn Greenslade, for instance, attempts to adjust to life in Bangalore, but does not always succeed, especially when her children visit her during Christmas. Like Forster’s Mrs. Moore, she feels that the romantic and marital problems of her middle-aged children only upset her further: “Tonight, India felt alien to Evelyn, alarmingly so. Her efforts to tune herself into the place during the past weeks felt phony and misguided. Having no option, she had willed herself into feeling at home. In fact this country had transformed her children into strangers” (275). A 2006 sociological study of the phenomenon of return migration argues that this kind of migration must necessarily create a hybridized experience between past and future homes (Ramji). The study focused on a group of Indian immigrants who desired to return “home” to their native Indian towns after having settled in the UK in the 1960s and 70s. These retirement plans were often planned for well in advance both in London and in Gujarat, India (the homes of the study’s subjects). Hasmita Ramji argues that this experience of “returning home” was complicated by the ways that the process of migration itself had altered both the migrants’ expectations and desires, as well as the “home” itself (in, for instance, the creation of businesses in the Indian towns catering specifically to the needs of the returnees). Ramji describes the return experience of this group as a negotiation of expectations and of changing material realities, “[highlighting] the ambivalent tension between the desired and lived, which marks diasporic and transnational spaces” (659).

The hotel residents feel doubly “unhomed” at the Marigold Hotel, however, because the hotel’s deliberate reminders of India’s colonial ties to Britain re-directs the residents’ anxieties about their new surroundings toward a colonial nostalgia. The Marigold Hotel is performing a self exoticization; it vainly attempts to recall to its elderly English not the developing,

postcolonial, independent India outside the streets of the hotel, but a previous version of India under British colonial rule. Sonny, for instance, tells Vinod, the director shooting the promotional video for the hotel, to “Focus on the Raj aspect—the clock tower, the statue of Queen Victoria. My theme will be: there’s a little corner that will forever remain England” (30); the hotel itself was built in the mid-nineteenth-century by the British when garrisoned in Bangalore. Moggach is deploying the particularly literary arm of “Little Englandism” that Jed Esty describes in *A Shrinking Island* as peculiar to the competing tensions of British modernism; describing the term in relation to E. M. Forster, whose “narratives, like the protagonists within them, require the symbolic crunch and frisson of cultural difference provided by metropolitan perception as well as the lingering allure of insular landscape” (25), Esty demonstrates that the nostalgia for a culturally and politically insular England requires the multinational “other” (in this case, under the banner of globalism instead of imperialism) to serve as the impetus for its existence. For Moggach, this particular deployment of neo-nostalgia, or repeated nostalgia (a nostalgia for the original nostalgia) is strategic, for as long as its source is ostensibly attributed to the Indian characters, its problematic overtones can be more safely contained (displaced), while at the same time maintaining that tension between ideal (the welfare state; social care for the elderly) and political reality (globalization; interdependence).

Of course, Moggach is keen to admit that the hotel’s organizers’ occasional complicity with this nostalgia is problematic. Hotel owner and manager Minoo, for instance, feels a nostalgia for a colonial past that he barely experienced:

Minoo had a deep respect for the British—not the young backpackers who used to frequent his hotel but those of a different class and generation, one that was now dying out. He was only a year old when independence was declared; over half a century had

elapsed since the British had ruled his country but, to him, the elderly English would always possess an innate superiority and an elegiac air hung over their imminent extinction. What an honor it was, that they were to spend their last years under his roof, in the country to which their ancestors had given so much—even, sometimes, their lives! You had only to look at the gravestones at St. Patrick's church. (101)

It is worth noting the class element in Minoo's idealistic description; he admits that his hotel only caters to a "well-heeled" clientele. This self-selection was somewhat necessary, as "plans for state assistance had long been abandoned as unworkable; this was a purely private enterprise" (64). Minoo's nostalgia, which Moggach here connects to his British classicism, recalls the novel's beginning, with the tawdry tabloids calling Muriel Donnelly a "plucky pensioner" and referring to her survival of the Blitz. Minoo's romanticized vision of colonialism, and, specifically, the generational connection he makes between his group of residents and the colonial past, is indicative of an underlying anxiety about changing cultural norms. For Minoo, this anxiety is connected to his disordered relationship with his wife; he regrets marrying for love (the more modern or western vision of marriage) and vainly wishes he had gone through with a more traditional arranged marriage. After all, it is the internalized voice of his wife that immediately criticizes him for his romanticization of the British Empire: "*What piffle! Razia's voice was in his head. You silly old snob!*" (101). The misplaced nostalgia for the colonial past is also reflective of a wider uncertainty about social changes within India; the hotel's location within the "Silicon Valley" of India, Bangalore, reinforces this unease. Sonny acknowledges that India is trying to reposition itself economically, "She [India] has led from agriculture straight to the service industries," (296), and both the hotel itself and the call center located across the street perform this change, but, again, not without some misplaced nostalgia for a

colonial past. After Evelyn Greenslade mistakes the call center for a telephone service, she and the other hotel residents befriend some of the young, ambitious call center employees, who have taken on English-sounding names and biographies in order to make their calls. In a mutually beneficial cross-generational meeting, the hotel residents tell the call center employees stories about their younger days, whereas the employees brush up on their attempts to perform “Englishness” to the customers they call, and in doing so commodifying English cultural identity into a re-exportable object.

Moggach makes it clear that the veneer of colonial nostalgia is thin, and masks deeper social anxieties on both sides. Its one benefit is to promote a kind of generational and cultural tolerance. On the one hand, Ravi Kapoor feels he is able to understand the racism and prejudice of Muriel Donnelly, willing to justify it on account of her age; he no longer considered her a racist bigot, more a “plucky old bird. After all, the world had changed so profoundly; it must be confusing for somebody of her age” (79). On the other hand, the middle-class and culturally naïve Evelyn Greenslade uses the reversal in her circumstances to also appreciate the injustice and loneliness of social marginalization: “She herself had never really spoken to an Indian. Until recently, the only ones she had met had been behind the counter at the post office... They were in a position of servitude. Once the British had ruled this place. The Raj, however, like her certainties, had long since crumbled. Now it was she herself who was the ethnic minority” (112). It is most important to note that *age* is the crucial lubricant in these processes of mutual understanding. Though in this last passage Evelyn attributes her greater cultural sensitivity to her ethnic minority status in India, her *age* has likewise marginalized her. Before leaving for India, she feels that “No longer a human being, she was a problem to be solved by the local authority, like a drug addict or one of the homeless. She *was* homeless” (48). Moggach attributes

Evelyn's feeling of abject exclusion to the apocalyptic and bureaucratic discourse of population aging that dehumanizes individuals into problems to be "managed."

The ideological implication of the hotel's colonial nostalgia is that responsibility for the aging British citizens is displaced away from Britain and British support systems—be they state, community, or family—and ironically toward its former colony.¹⁴⁶ The novel's connection to the NHS, Dr. Kapoor, even uses the language of "unburdening the social services" (22) to describe the benefits of residential retirement hotels like the Marigold. The novel manages the anxiety about being burdened by the financial and medical demands of the graying population by displacing that burden onto India—which conveniently finds it no burden at all, in fact, as voiced by Sonny, seeing in it an economic opportunity to cash in on "the gray pound, it's called. Or the white pound" (31).¹⁴⁷ But the rhetoric of capitalist enterprise masks deeper fissures with Indian notions of aging. On the one hand, the Indian characters emphasize their cultural and social difference from British definitions of aging. One resident, Evelyn Greenslade, compares the seeming permanent presence and service of Jimmy, the elderly Indian water at the Marigold, to his hypothetical contemporary in the UK: "In England, no doubt, he would long since have been

¹⁴⁶ The 2012 film *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (UK; dir. John Madden) displaces this anxiety even more problematically. The film works to legitimize this displacement by instating Englishness as a desirable cultural commodity. In a cinematic deviation from the novel, Evelyn Greenslade (played by Judi Dench) arrives at the call center not by accident but in search of employment. She is hired, but not for the job she originally imagined; she is hired as a kind of cultural attaché or mentor to the young call center employees. This plot point aims to resolve several anxieties. The first is the anxiety about older people becoming a financial burden on society; Evelyn resolves that by herself obtaining employment. Furthermore, Evelyn's work at the call center is to perform Englishness; Englishness itself becomes a valuable commodity. This is augmented by the metatextual element at work here—Evelyn is played by Judi Dench, a British film icon, so her iconic cinematic and cultural status, and not just her character, are working to sell this idea of cultural Englishness. The film legitimizes outsourcing British retirement to India if the British characters have a controlling stake in the process. In another important example of this, by the end of the movie, the racist Muriel Donnelly has not only overcome her prejudice but has become a co-manager of the hotel. These changes represent a larger pattern at work in the adaptation of the novel into a film, as when the novel's middle-aged characters are replaced by a younger romantic couple; the film only manages to legitimize "outsourcing retirement" by a series of problematic ideological displacements, substituting younger for older, postcolonial for troublingly neo-colonial, capitalist enterprise for social welfare.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Gilleard and Paul Higgs have frequently examined the relationship between consumerism and aging; in fact, they have argued that contemporary elderly cohorts are distinguished in particular by the role that consumerism plays in their social roles and self-definition. See, for instance, "Old people as users and consumers of healthcare: a third age rhetoric for a fourth age reality?", as well as their longer works, including *Cultures of Ageing*.

put out to grass. In India, however, people seemed to carry on until they dropped” (119). Aging is inscribed as a cultural difference in India; the expression “put out to grass” expressing Evelyn feelings about her own treatment as an elderly citizen.

One key way that the novel uses age to express—and challenge—cultural differences is through representing caretaking behaviors and definitions of senility. As discussed in previous chapters, contemporary models of aging tend to distinguish between true “old” old age (the fourth age), characterized by physical and/or mental frailty, and “young” old age (the third age). In “Ageing Abjection and Embodiment in the Fourth Age,” Gilleard and Higgs frame the gap between these two “ages” in terms of Kristeva’s theory of the abject. As in Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* depicts Alzheimer’s as the “abject” switchpoint that separates the third-age residents of the hotel with an abject, excluded old age. Like Geoffrey in Spark’s *The Comforters*, the hotel residents feel a telling Schadenfreude in suspecting Dorothy Miller (misguidedly) of Alzheimer’s because of her tendency to sing nursery rhymes to herself: “The residents of The Marigold, suffering the usual afflictions of age—memory loss, general vagueness—were alert for symptoms of more advanced senility in others. There was shamefully triumphant feeling when this was spotted” (176). They do so because, as Gilleard and Higgs point out, the “fourth age” has been rendered so abject as to cause “third-agers” to try to distance themselves from it as much as possible (138). Their anxieties are not unfounded. Sonny performs the same act of abjection himself when he discusses the plans for preparing the hotel for pensioners: “‘A little updating is needed,’ said Sonny, ‘some minor alterations, but we’re not talking old crocks here; these people won’t be on their last legs, incontinent and senile—’” (27). Pressed to imagine such a future, Sonny answers “Then I will make arrangements for them to be transferred to the Victoria Hospital or to be sent home—these are the conditions that operate in

British establishments of this kind” (28). Sonny’s attitude is curious for several reasons. First, Sonny confirms the residents’ fears that the transition between healthy and “young” old age and “true” old age performs an act of abjection and exclusion, in which residents are dismissed and sent “elsewhere.”

Moreover, it is significant that it is the Indian Sonny who expresses this sentiment, and moreover that he projects it onto his English customers and that he describes it as a behavior particular to “British establishments.” *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* carefully contrasts the differences in Indian attitudes toward aging, particularly caretaking and senility. When the elderly Indian are no longer able to work or care for themselves, the assumption is that it is the duty of the family to care for them. Sonny, for instance, initially clearly delineates the difference between Indian and British treatment of the elderly: ““In my country we care for our elders and better—know what our pension scheme is called? It’s called the family!”” (20).¹⁴⁸ This assertion signifies more than a critique of British culture and social welfare, or a statement of cultural difference. In *No Aging in India*, Cohen explains that the western definitions of aging, which particularly includes its medicalization through gerontological practice and through such diagnostic categorization as Alzheimer’s, now spread through globalization, are fairly recent discursive or even epistemological objects within Indian society. Cohen points to a 1985 *India Today* article that claims older Indians lack the biological markers of Alzheimer’s disease, in short, that Indian brains are better, more resistant to aging and dementia. Though this is not the official disciplinary consensus, for Cohen, this popularized notion of Indian difference with

¹⁴⁸ It becomes clear that Moggach means this to be above all a pointed critique of British society when she also attributes this social quality to cultures other than Indian. Christopher Greenslade, Evelyn’s middle-aged son, describes his wife as sharing Sonny’s sentiments because of her ethnic “otherness”: “Marcia was an exemplary daughter in this respect. Christopher attributed it to her Jewish and Italian blood. She came from a large achieving family where it was taken for granted that children cared for their parents” (148).

respect to aging marks a desire to reverse centuries-old stereotypes. Specifically, it is a reversal of the “tropical softening” pseudoscience favored by westerners, and to which I referred earlier in this chapter: in this reversal of the colonial case, “Indians and not Englishmen get to play the great detective” (No 19). Thus, we can understand Sonny’s assertion of Indian and British difference as participating in a deliberate correction of a longer tradition connecting aging and British colonialism in India, as we saw earlier in the example of the Mallahs.

Cohen furthermore argues that the Indian “better brain” discourse is itself set against both the rise of Alzheimer’s as a recognized diagnostic of aging *and* changing conditions of modernity and globalization in India. Because, as Sonny exclaims in outrage, the family traditionally assumes responsibility for the elderly in India, the presence of senility or problematic aging thus signals a moral punishment; it is the mark of a “bad family.” Cohen explains the philosophy of the “bad family” as a conceptualization of modernity intersected by cultural difference, played out on the background of aging; that is, that senility is caused by disrespect of a family’s elderly members, a devaluing attributed to the pace of modernity (No 19). But, as both Cohen and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* demonstrate, these tensions are still being negotiated. Sonny and other Indian characters may want to definitively delineate cultural difference based on aging, but the notion of the “bad family” relies on a social norm that may be disappearing. Although Sonny begins by defending social ideals, he later acknowledges the influence of British practices: “In England people dumped their parents in places like this; it was perfectly acceptable. Then they got on with their own lives. Sonny imagined this. It gave him an airy feeling, as if somebody had cut his strings and up he floated, into the sky” (169). He acknowledges the attractiveness of rebelling against social norms; despite picturing his mother’s “outrage—total incomprehension” at such an action, he thinks that “Just for a moment, however,

it seemed an excellent idea” (169). Where Sonny only daydreams, however, another character, Vinod, believes the younger generation will continue the rebellion against cultural norms: “Who will look after me when I’m old? Vinod wondered. Not his sons, that was for sure. Their treatment of him was shameful; had they no sense of family responsibility? Of respect?” (33). If, as Cohen argues, the phenomenon of the “bad family” is a response to a perceived moral decline resulting from conditions of modernity (globalization; capitalist enterprise), then its use by Moggach represents a kind of slight of hand by which similar anxieties in Britain are displaced onto their articulation in the Indian context, from which Britain is absolved of responsibility because the spread of Western definitions of aging (and attitudes toward the elderly) is blamed on the larger, diffused workings of global capitalism and technology.

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, in enacting the international retirement migration on a neo-colonial stage, aims to present an uplifting alternative to anxieties about aging and retirement, but in doing so tends merely to displace the problem or erase it completely. The novel ends with Vinod the photographer performing this act of erasure. Finishing a picture of the newly married Evelyn and Douglas Ainslie, he congratulates himself on his own air-brushing skills: “He had taken years off their age. A certain artistry was required, to restore the ravages of time. With modest pride Vinod gazed at the photograph of the bride and groom, sitting side by side against the faded wallpaper of the Marigold lounge. In its small way, it was a miracle. With their blushing cheeks and pink lips, the elderly couple looked quite young again” (320). A worshipful homage is placed toward the creative endeavor, youth, and the restorative properties of the Marigold Hotel itself.

Chris Phillipson has argued that “globalization is now seen as an influential force in the construction of old age” (“Ageing” 201). In focusing on the troubled relationship between aging,

transnational migration, neo-colonialism, and globalization in Moggach's *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, I do not want to suggest that this is the only way in which the relationship between aging and globalization can be imagined. On the contrary, J. M. Coetzee's 1999 novel *Disgrace*, for instance, imagines an entirely different relationship between these two phenomena, with David Lurie's forced retirement from his position as literature professor at a Cape Town university a catalyst for actively confronting his own complicity in the still-living legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa (as well as the legacy of the English literary canon).

Rather, in this brief conclusion, I mean to sketch out the outlines for a new way of thinking about both the changing definitions of aging and of twentieth-century literature as they intersect with discourses of colonialism and postcolonialism, and even disrupt the colonial project. Just as age became a social (and literary) problem to be "managed" in the twentieth century, accompanied by the construction of particular aging subjects and of the elderly as a category of difference, so too is the construction of colonial and postcolonial subjects a twentieth-century social and literary problematic. Such a combined critical lens can also help us understand the nature of this very "difference." Much of this project has focused the material effects that create aging subjects, but Homi Bhabha's critique of such Foucauldian methodology (which makes a "visible and transparent mark of power" (158)) in the *colonial* context may suggest another angle of analysis. In "Signs Taken for Wonders" in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha suggests that we re-think the *kind* of difference that colonial processes of differentiation make: "What radically differentiates the exercise of colonial power [from Foucauldian "power through transparency"] is the unsuitability of the enlightenment assumption of collectivity and the eye that beholds it" (158). Applying such a critique of colonial discourse to aging studies may mean that we approach the study of models of aging from other than as "purists of

difference” (158). Although the historical development of ageist stereotypes and retirement policies is only occasionally (and certainly not exclusively) connected to the practices of imperialism, decolonization, and globalism, a thorough understanding of these historical conditions, I suggest, has far-reaching consequences for reading colonial legacies and discussing postcolonial futures, as well as re-valuing the centrality of aging and old age to twentieth-century thought.

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