

Rewriting Old Age from Chaucer to Shakespeare: The Invention of English Senex Style  
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In *L'envoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, Chaucer, evidently an old man, playfully announces the end of his writing career, declaring that his muse rusts in its sheath and claiming that age stops narration, symbolized by the rust and disuse of Chaucer's "muse." Yet describing in elegant verse this muse's senescence actually reinforces the idea that this old, textualized Chaucer never stops writing, and that age supplies the real subject of the envoy. The posture of an aged writer or speaker composing his end is far from unique in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and indeed defines a set of key elements of literature in that period. My dissertation, "Rewriting Old Age from Chaucer to Shakespeare: The Invention of English Senex Style," explores the connection between literary and material form as it traces the paradoxical treatment of old men from the Reeve in *The Canterbury Tales* to John Gower's reanimated role in Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Incorporating fifteenth century authors, such as Thomas Hoccleve, and scribes and printers, such as John Shirley and William Caxton, together with Chaucer, and Gower, my dissertation argues that what I call senex style connects these images of old men from Chaucer to Shakespeare through a study of rhetorical postures, employing style in a capacious fashion. By focusing on a set of elements, which although shared are deployed differently, I contend that authors and speakers employ in new ways a paradoxical set of characteristics in depictions of old men taken from classical literature.

As a reflection of a historical relationship between impairment and ability, senex style served as a response to a period of history which witnessed media changes from script to print. By attending both to the limitations of patrilinear literary history and the construction of time and history through the images of broken bodies, and, poised as an intervention between early English and disability studies, this examination of senex style demonstrates how the figure of the old man bridges categories of language and body, by examining non-normative and less-than-able selves that are defined not only by bodily impairments but also rhetorical postures of disability and prosthesis.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Youngman, a native Texan, originally started research work on 19<sup>th</sup> Italian Literature at the end of his undergraduate career. He followed a circuitous path to medieval literature through the “selva oscura” of Dante, Petrarch, and the saints, eventually finding a home in late-medieval English literature.

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## The Rhetorical Question of Age: What is Senex Style?

Reading late-medieval and early modern English literature, one frequently encounters the paradoxical status of old age and those things considered old, ancient, or belonging to a past, long dead. On one hand, medieval and early modern authors treasure the past: it is a storehouse of timeless ideals, courageous figures, and monuments to an earlier, golden age. On the other hand, old age might also be feared and viewed in the most negative of light. Indeed, as authorities such as Cicero and Seneca make clear, age might also be hated. Humans might wish to achieve it, but they often regret that their bodies can fail and they are closer to death. The anonymously-authored *Elde Makip Me Geld* animates in the early fourteenth century the refrain voiced in the late republic by Cicero and the early empire by Seneca: if men desire to be old, then why is old age hated?

One might answer this question a number of ways. The desire for old age is actually a desire for extended life, and like Tithonus, those seeking a long life desire a long youth. But as I demonstrate in this examination of the old author and speaker from *The Canterbury Tales* to *Pericles*, it is not as simple as declaring old age to be brutish, nasty, and short. Old age, like the past and the golden age to which it often is tied, can also be viewed as a time of unparalleled wisdom. For Cato of Cicero's *De Senectute*, old age, he argues, has made him stronger, releasing him from the bonds of lust and physicality. For Chaucer and Gower, they imagine the oldness of books and authorities to be a signal that they possess real authority and power; Hoccleve can reimagine Chaucer and Gower, supposedly his old masters and teachers, to be giants upon which newer practitioners of poetry must work; and Caxton repeatedly uses his new technology to print classical narratives of the past.



What remains constant, I argue, for presentation of old age through the period of 1390-1492, the range of the materials which I study, is an emphasis on the impaired nature of old age. Whether a social, cultural, and biological truth is conveyed in these depictions of masculine old age is besides the point. Rhetorical claims of impairment color the use of old age from Chaucer through the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and into Shakespeare's reading of Gower in *Pericles*. This tie between depictions of old age and the embrace of impairment is, however, not merely an old construction. A recent instance is the confusion and speculation that attended the resignation of Pope Benedict. On February 11, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI officially resigned as head of the Roman Catholic Church and God's chosen delegate on earth. That the tradition-loving pontiff resigned in Latin was not out of the ordinary. That he resigned, however, at all was revolutionary and close to unprecedented. The radical self-removal of the highest authority of the Catholic church has now happened just a handful of times, and before Benedict, the last pope to resign was Pope Gregory in 1415, in order to avoid papal schism. Benedict resigned, according to his "Declaratio," "because of burdensome age," ["ingravescente aetate"] and noted that the "both a certain strength of mind and body is necessary" [vigor quidam corporis et animae necessarius est] for managing the papacy, which in the "last months has somewhat lessened in me" [ultimis mensibus in me modo tali minuitur].<sup>1</sup> The explosion of theories that this declaration created deserves some discussion here; nominally, Benedict was following the example of Pope Celestine, the reluctant pope, who resigned, due to his wish to die with a spotless life, and due to "personal infirmity."<sup>2</sup> An apt student of history would definitely notice the parallels: a church plagued by scandal, the machinations of the Roman Curia interfering with the pastoral mission of

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, "Declaratio," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20130211\\_declaratio\\_lt.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130211_declaratio_lt.html). [Accessed April 4, 2013]. Translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> David M. Perry, "Echoes of the past in papal resignation," <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/11/opinion/perry-pope-celestine>. [Accessed April 4, 2013]

the church it governs, and most importantly, the citation of age-related impairments that made the task of shepherding the Church impossible.<sup>3</sup>

The question remains: is the impairment of age the full story here? The skeptics within the secular press were right to press at the contours of this declaration, to attempt to see behind the announcement of debility what rhetorical poses could hide. Perhaps Benedict did grow *too* old, and that burden became too much to carry. The example of John Paul II, Benedict's predecessor, proves, however, that corporeal weakness is no insurmountable condition for the successors to Saint Peter. A cursory glance at papal history in fact proves this: popes are very often very old and frequently struggle with bodies that lack the strength of younger prelates. Whether or not Benedict was truthful, duplicitous, or simply looking for a way out of an admittedly difficult papal posture, his resignation looms large as a continuation of a tradition of complaints about old age that have root in classical traditions. His wistful announcement is contemporary, and should be understood in the context of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Catholic Church defending its positions on orthodoxy and atoning for the systemic sexual crimes of many of its members. Yet, given in a language Benedict was attempting to revive, this declaration in Latin recalls, for me, a classical and medieval rhetorical posture of inability and infirmity, due to old age.

Old age, impairment, and narration serve as the focal point of my study of authors from Chaucer to Shakespeare, and their rhetorical posturings both as old men and as men writing old men. It is, in many ways, a study of a commonplace—a case of repetition. A commonplace, however, need not be avoided as an object of study. Moreover, the claims of this commonplace are precisely that it does *not* change, that it brings the authors to a perspective outside of the vicissitudes of present circumstances. But the reasons for that perspective and the implications of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

their claiming to attain it vary significantly. In this work, therefore, I attend both to the almost-ubiquitous presence of a narrative handling of old age and an authorial claim, based on old age, and to the constant reworkings of that presence.

The narrative portrayal of old age can be found scribbled on the leaves of a manuscript, printed on the pages of a book, projected on the screen of a multiplex theater. These grumbling old men, repeat, in their garrulous voices, a steady refrain chronicling the pain of existence and their disappointment in the present and future. It is a common image, one so frequent that reference to examples seems unnecessary, yet I will supply an extensive catalogue of such depictions. Mournful of their loss of youth and ability, these figures appear to possess a prosthetic of complaint, a verbal and written talent for negative comment and narrative. Even when mindful of the natural passage of time, such as Cicero's construction of Cato in *Cato Maior De Senectute*, these figures of age appear destined to create utterances that bemoan the present and the future, while simultaneously cataloging their pain and impairments. On one hand, these figures of masculine old age reject ability and highlight their corporeal debility, while on the other hand, their emphasis on narrative and texts, both written and spoken, to convey this information position them as participants in a textual economy, as able as the allegorized embodiments of youth who they often debate in medieval and early modern literature.

Poetry that follows the pattern of this debate between the ages appears numerous times in late medieval and early modern literature and presents a fairly static view of masculine old age. While differences certainly exist, for example in the presentation of Elde in *Parlement of the Thre Ages* and Robert Henryson's *Debate Twixt the Ages*, a good amount of dialogue, description, and stylistic and thematic content is shared. This fact should come as no surprise: much literature depicting senescence and old age springs from common sources, a group of

sources that would include From Juvenal's *Satire X* to Cicero's *De Senectute* and Seneca's epistle on old age, medieval authors had a very rich, yet related amount of matter with which to fashion and depict the progression of the body into old age. Not all age-related literature falls into this category of debate between the ages, however, and examples more than one exist for literary depictions of old men that break the confines of this generic category. Strictly speaking, the creation of the old lover in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the insertion of a wise and nameless Old Man in the prologue to Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, and the construction of a sagacious yet impaired old Aristotle in John Lydgate's *Secrees of Olde Philosoffres* do not count as debate poetry. Yet, like the aforementioned age-centered debate poetry, these examples do reflect the grumbling cries of groaning old men, decrying their debility, while producing literature, speech, and drama that undercuts that claim of impairment. Like the debate poetry, these other poetic examples have their roots in some of the same classical forerunners.

The growth and practice of this literary borrowing—from the sources that describe old age in Latin texts—serves as a center to this project, especially where the transmission of that material influences the stylized depictions of impairment that surround certain formations of old age. Taking as its focus the repetitions of claims of impairment in descriptions of old men from John Gower to William Caxton, this examination of stylized old age fleshes out the contours and characteristics of the rhetorical creation of old age. An analysis of the rhetorical claims of impairment, however, cannot and should not substitute for the archaeological, biological, and sociological evidence of aging within pre- and early modern literature, especially considering the recent emphasis on these approaches.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, even with such “hard” evidence, it is clear

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<sup>4</sup> Selections of such an approach would necessarily include Pat Thane's groundbreaking work on old in *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Deborah Youngs's *The*

that such sources demand their own rigorous rhetorical examination. Facts about aging, as with any other contested social and biological process, must necessarily be read with caution and care. Indeed, “Rewriting Old Age” attempts to bracket questions of demographic data, gender identity, and social status, as these factors complicate an already complex portrait of narrative old age. Even within *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath deploys a tale centered on a loathly, old hag, and this tale occurs in a collection of stories that often revolve around old age or age difference. Whereas the impotence of old men in medieval literature might be read as feminizing trait, texts treat old men and women differently. Even the Wife of Bath, depicted in her middle-age, sees sport in attacking and criticizing her old lovers. To categorize how old age works across a continuum of gender is beyond the scope of this examination of senex style.

In a discussion of the function of old age as a textual and metaphorical category in late medieval literature, I will argue that works from Gower and Chaucer to Caxton work not only with a common language of old age, but also use this diction of decrepit bodies and ageing men to reorganize literary history, and illustrate new insights about the role of the poet, in and out of his work, through an enduring, but rarely discussed senex style. A stylized old age, senex style is a particular rhetorical and stylistic set of practices that surround seemingly commonplace illustrations of old age, but mark these texts as resistant to the narrated restraints of what they describe of age. In short, a work participating in senex style paints a contradictory portrait of age as beset by impairments, constraints, and ailments, even as that painting represents an active performance, largely unaffected by the troubles of age. Yet, when I discuss old age and senex style, I do so often in the shadow of late style, exemplified by its celebrations and critiques

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*Life-Cycle in Western Europe, c.1300-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); and Joel T. Rosenthal’s *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). Most recently, Roberta Gilchrist explores the material dimensions of the life cycle in *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2013).

through the work of Theodor Adorno, Edward Said, Russ MacDonald, and Gordon McMullan. McMullan's *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* firmly uncovers the motivations behind late style, offering a balanced view of such a biographical-invested turn to the author's death and his activities *exsequi*. Late style, as a critical category, is the true focus for McMullan, and he addresses what critics have done with late style, rather than the bard himself. While my version of senex style differs from both late style and McMullan's meta-critical view of the construct, what is true for his view is also true of mine: as with late style, senex style cannot be accepted uncritically, and all consideration of old age given over to biography and the genius and intent of the poet, accepting rhetorical postures as portraits of life.

To emphasize senex style is not to write a history or description of the biographical old age of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, Thomas Hoccleve, or William Caxton. Whereas all of these authors and their works seemingly invite this approach through the adoption of an I-persona that extols the wisdom, pains, and effects of personal age, caution is necessary to avoid reading too deeply into the quasi-autobiographical elements of their texts. Yet, I argue it is a mistake to ignore the lives and biographical details of these figures. Postmodernism has not yet killed the author (completely), nor his or her outer life and its effect upon the texts at hand. Following Shane Butler's provocative comments, I, too, focus on the "implicit case for resuscitating the author (or at least of reviving the habit of talking about her as a real person)," while reinforcing that "the author's return, at this point, is scarcely likely to make us forget what we learned during her death."<sup>5</sup> As with Butler's collection of essays, my study of trembling hands and bleary eyes sees in an old image, a new approach, which treads a middle way, prompting answers to questions regarding the uses of these figures of age, both as characters and

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<sup>5</sup> Shane Butler, "Introduction," *Essays in Search of Ancient and Medieval Authors* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011): pp. 3-12 (p. 3)

authorial personae, and the function of old age as a material metaphor and a metaphor of materiality. Binding together the Ricardian poets of the late fourteenth century with three central figures of the fifteenth century—Thomas Hoccleve, a privy-seal clerk and sometime-Lancastrian apologist; John Shirley, a scribe and participation in the solidification of Chaucerian and Lydgatean canons; and William Caxton, first printer of English books—this study of senex style seeks to reformulate views of the fifteenth century, continue the renaissance of attention paid to John Gower, and theorize a new approach to visualizing literary paternity and history from Chaucer to Caxton.

This pose of old age is frequent, appearing from Chaucer and Gower through Caxton, and although varied, maintains similarities that are formal and thematic. Senex style, in my turn of the phrase, refers to a rhetorical pose and a claim upon old age: “I am old,” these practitioners of senex style announce. Senex style often uses a common lexicon that speaks to its embodied condition: images of candles burning to their end, (*The Reeve’s Prologue* and *Pericles*) hairs turned white or “hore,” (*Confessio Amantis* and *The Reeve’s Prologue*) faces destroyed by age (*Confessio Amantis*). The catalogue of common elements also includes features that describe mental decay, such as “dotage,” the importance of memory to old men, even as it fails; and the enduring link between negative emotions and old men, voiced not only in Aristotle but also in Cicero. Many of these characteristics of senex style describe or imply impairment.

Indeed, through its interrogation of a figure of old age bridging professed impairment and displayed ability, senex style offers a reflection of differing strains of tradition and innovation seen in changes in economics, government, and media during the fifteenth century. From the hollowing out of a courtly role of poet and prolonged dynastic struggles to the rise of moveable type, the use of the old man suggests both his utility as symbol of longevity but also innovation

and change, perched as he is at the moment of greatest change in the lifecycle. Keeping with medieval and early modern representations of the “Ages of Man” schematic that display a movement from *senex* to *infantulus* as one which is progressive and cyclical, senex style in my formulation repeats, not identically, but consistently. Indeed, “Rewriting Old Age from Chaucer to Caxton” argues that the old man, in his depiction from Chaucer through Hoccleve and Caxton, illustrates a number of strategies to make sense of a change from old to new, one which is never fully completed or final. In the chapters which follow, I trace senex style as it explains the connections between textual production and retirement; advice, age, and counsel; authorial personae and correction; and age, authority, and historical literature in Gower and Shakespeare.

Employing “style” in a wider than usual sense, I contend that authors and speakers deploy in new ways a paradoxical set of characteristics related to depictions of old men taken from classical literature. Like Juvenal, Seneca, and Cicero, both of whom use old to evoke the past as a golden age with its catalogue of exemplary ancient men and the aging body with its ailments, impairments, and weaknesses, late medieval and early modern English writers employ senex style to advance a more volatile and unpredictable view of old age, which shifts constantly between encomium and o invective. More than just a view of old age, and a set of rhetorical feature associated with garrulousness and complaint, however, senex style (as I develop that notion) is a pose: authors and speakers in these texts style *themselves* as old men, bemoaning a lack of beauty and strength. In this way, senex style is similar to a modesty topos, but unlike the author or speaker proclaiming a false modesty, this stance invokes a past period of power now lost, which itself conveys authority. A young speaker can proclaim claim senex style, as well as an old one. Indeed, this literature from Chaucer to Caxton shows the utility of this the pose of old age to the young and the old. The earliest writings of Gower position him as old and Caxton in



his seventies writings of his well-worn pen and wavering hand. Centrally a set of rhetorical features, senex style, however, also functions as more than a posture of literary and personal authority. As a reflection of a historical relationship between impairment and ability, senex style served as a response to a period of history which witnessed media changes from script to print, including the “paper revolution” and the rise of moveable type, and a series of dynastic and social upheavals. Senex style explains these conflicting images of old and new. By attending to the limitations of patrilinear literary history, my study of senex style continues an ongoing effort to read the medieval through the early modern and vice versa.

Worthy of study and neglected too long, the pose of old age and its ailing authorizations is central to a reimagining of literary history and development that connects more forcefully the authors, printers, and scribes of the fifteenth century to the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Indeed, because of Caxton, the sixteenth century had immediate literary and authorial precedents from which to fashion this rhetoric of old age. Copies of Cicero’s *De Senectute* were in print, beginning with William Caxton’s *Of Olde Age* in 1481. Itself a copy of an earlier Middle English translation, this “rough hewn” imprint of Cicero’s dialogue between old age and youth had numerous descendants and certainly a healthy readership.<sup>6</sup> It is extant in a few editions, one of which shows wear often associated with books that saw extended use. Like the text of old age imprinted by Caxton, the pose of old age known as senex style is too well used. From Ricardian poets Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, through the authors, printers, and scribes of the fifteenth century, these authors in texts participate in some way in the description of old age, and their own autobiographies and rhetorically constructed personae cast doubt on the inabilities of old age. Moreover, senex style claims various afterlives in the sixteenth and seventeenth century,

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Martin characterizes Caxton’s imprint as “rough-hewn” in his *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern Literature from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 2012), p. 18 in his discussion of Thomas Newton’s 1569 edition of *De Senectute*.

and while one might include authors such as Alexander Barclay, Edmund Spenser, or Thomas Wyatt in an examination of this old pose, I choose to closely examine the fifteenth century, and its ties both to the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the latter through Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Although one might fruitfully construct lineages, based on old age style, from any number of permutations of fourteenth-, fifteenth-, or sixteenth-century authors, I take as central the works of William Caxton and Thomas Hoccleve. Hoccleve offers a chance to view not only Chaucer and Gower, but also suggest figures such as later figures, beginning with Caxton. Although Caxton largely ignores a Hocclevean heritage, his embrace of senex style is too an embrace of that "poor old versifier."

The mention of "poor old versifier," part of Hoccleve's enduring legacy, voiced by Frederick Furnivall, necessarily encapsulates not only Hoccleve's engagement with senex style, but also the broad outlines of that particular stylistic approach. As a rule, senex style attends to a paradox that is inherent in views of old age, oldness, and the past in literature from Chaucer to Caxton. Even as Jacques's speech in *As You Like It* fossilizes the scheme of the Ages of Man, with its predictable view of extreme old age as extremely negative, works from Caxton and before also valorize the past: not only the more recent past but also and especially the time which might be called ancient. As a category of paradoxical treatment of old age, senex style reflects this valuation of the past in its own name. Calling this style senex foregrounds that in my imagination and research the roots of such an engagement are found in earlier Latin source and expressed and expanded in later vernaculars, in particular, Middle and Modern English. The history of senex style then is one that necessarily finds Latin to be central to the style's genesis, while at the same time its practice finds fullest expression in English. From Cicero, Juvenal, and

Seneca to Maximianus, the contours of senex style are found in the works of Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, and Caxton.

Although this pose of the old speaker is related to the modesty topos, it is markedly different in its construction and its aims and consequences. Whereas the modesty topos, like senex style, hides actual ability beneath a posture of inability, senex style is centered within a temporal range and reflects something of the lifecycle: one can be young and be modest, but to work within senex style, is to be old, to feel the emptiness that these speakers often marshal to characterize age. Modesty, in fact, is not tied to time. A young speaker or author might affect it, even as an older authority might also take on the mantle of the modesty topos. Finally, whereas the modesty topos might connect authors over a millenium of medieval textual production, it does so generally. “I cannot express with skill these words,” one can imagine Ælfric or Chaucer writing, but senex style ties more forcefully a smaller window of time, reflecting as it does movement of the lifecycle.

Senex style in this way builds upon a long-attested connection between oldness or old age and style. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, describing the “ornaments of style” in *Poetria Nova* too suggests how old words might be rejuvenated in a section on style. Geoffrey writes

In order that meaning may wear a precious garment, if a word is old, be its physician and give to the old a new vigour. Do not let the word invariably reside on its native soil—such residence dishonours it. Let it avoid its natural location, travel about elsewhere, and take up a pleasant abode on the estate of another. There let it stay as a novel guest, and give pleasure by its very strangeness. If you provide this remedy, you will give to the word’s face a new youth.<sup>7</sup>

Central to the workings of style and its effect on old words is not a revision of the word’s inner meaning, but rather its outward appearance. The process by which the writer gives a word this new appearance is a change in location: by moving these old words to new soil, Geoffrey argues

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<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), p. 43.

that the patina of age will change to “strangeness” and youth. As a study of how one might become a physician to old, ailing words, this short passage speaks to the very nature of senex style. An examination of senex style necessarily by fleshing out an apparent commonplace, too performs similar work: moving these descriptions of old age and markers of years from poem to poem and author to author makes an old posture new again from Chaucer to Caxton.

A connection among the old men and style is not new. Indeed, style and the appropriateness of diction has long been tied to the “Ages of Man.” Before that schematic of age took root, Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* describes the subject matter and characteristics of those speeches told by the old.

The character of Elderly Men—men who are past their prime—may be said to be formed for the most part of elements that are the contrary of all these [of Youth]. They have lived many years: they have often been taken in, and often made mistakes; and life on the whole is a bad business. The result is that they are sure about nothing and *under*-do everything. They ‘think’, but they never ‘know’; and because of their hesitation they always add a ‘possibly’ or a ‘perhaps’, putting everything in this way and nothing positively.<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle’s depiction of elderly diction foregrounds its uncertainty and its negative character. By thinking, rather than knowing, old men and their speech reinforce that a life, long-lived, has not made them sure of anything. Adding qualifiers of fact and truth to every statement, these old men speak of wisdom tentatively. In fact, living by “memory,” rather than by “hope,” old men, according to Aristotle, see life as essentially empty because

what is left to them of life is but little as compared with the long past; and hope is of the future, memory of the past. This, again, is the cause of their loquacity; they are continually talking of the past, because they enjoy remembering it. Their fits of anger are sudden but feeble. Their sensual passions have either altogether gone

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric* printed in *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1984. First Published in 1954), pp. 123-4.

or have lost their vigour: consequently they do not feel their passions much, and their actions are inspired less by what they do feel than by the love of gain.<sup>9</sup>

This emphasis on anger, loquacity, and the feebleness of the former highlight what is common to the speaker in senex style in late-medieval and early modern English literature. Speaking of the past, remembering only the past, these garrulous old men speak too much and say too little.

Aristotle's use of "feeble" and "vigour" recall that senex style brings forth a paradoxical relationship between ability and impairment that too reflects the paradoxical status of the aged: held up for their wisdom, castigated for their greed, old men in both their speech and actions are powerful in the past, and weak in the present.

Precisely because senex style encapsulates time as a layered concept—the present existing with the past—it is a rhetorical posture that finds resonance with the material role of the past in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Faced everywhere—it appears—by the detritus of history, Gower, Chaucer, Hoccleve, and other figures dealt with the weight of literary and civic history, both in a figurative and literal sense, through their poetry. While John Stow, as an old man, explicitly reads and narrates the layers of history in early modern London, the movement is often implied and obscured for Ricardian, Lancastrian, and Henrician poets. Everywhere and nowhere, the English past, in bodies, books, and buildings, looms large in the creative imaginations of these poets as they work and rework senex style. I want to advance that in Gower's "middel weie," between love and lore, past and present, or in Chaucer's obfuscation of his own settings, lies both the impetus of later critics to glaze over the fifteenth century, and a more recent urge to historicize the fifteenth century as essential. Supposedly, tight narratives of mid century scholars convinced us that this poetry was unreadable, and when it was read, it should be read as contradictorily, both a twilight of medieval ideas, and a childish stance toward a more authoritative century. This contradiction in versions of the fifteenth century positions it as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

century *par excellence* for the reading of senex style: both ending/dying, and newly growing—in Seth Lerer’s words, “childish”—the fifteenth century and the rise of early print seem destined to be married. Although there is no room for historical predestination in my thoughts on the fifteenth century, the stubborn view of old man-child—the meeting of senex and infans—maps onto the critical lexicon for describing and cataloguing this early print production. *Incunabula*, those babes in swaddling clothes, with an apparent endless future before their amateur typefaces, disguise themselves as the product of a script culture, often self-conscious in their appearance as objects of the past. As with the cityscape of medieval and early modern London, the fifteenth century and the incunable represent an uneasy blending of new and old and a fitting arena both to examine senex style and to use senex style as organizing principle and rationale for evidence of that uneasy union.

Indeed, as I mentioned, when I utilize senex style as a categorizing tool for late-medieval and early modern literature and as a critical, theoretical and formalistic strategy to examine this same literature, implicitly I am building upon and often attempting to deconstruct an old framework of medievalist inquiry that maintained a certain view of the literature from Ricardian poetry to Jacobean drama. One cannot simply erase the past and deconstruct it into nothingness. Following Faulkner, this examination proves that “the past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past.” As with Chaucer or Gower’s hauntings of the fifteenth and sixteenth century authors, any inquiry of the fifteenth century needs both to acknowledge the strength of previous work, while simultaneously moving away and forward.

Nowhere is this impulse to build and destroy more apparent than in the all-too-familiar waning of the Middle Ages. A translator’s mistake and oversight, this title has destined Johan Huizinga and his work into the dustbin of history and the catalogue of overly-deterministic

historical study. Huizinga, a historian, long out of favor, deserves mention here, both as a starting point to consider old age, and as a reminder that what one audience considered dull and trite, another might consider useful, entertaining, and productive. Even as characteristics of his work are problematic, a kernel of meaning remains in certain passages that demonstrate a prefiguration of what I here call senex style. A historical moment might pass for an author or academic, but the archaeology of the text has in common with an archaeology of the city, a familiar urge to see glimpses of commonality between our present and that past. In other words, even with Chaucer, who the eighteenth century often found either exhausted by age or colored by sin, it is possible to examine, with constraints, those authors who were thought too old, too dull, too dead-end.

The moment of influence for Huizinga's text is, almost without a doubt, over. His tightly drawn picture of the end of the middle ages, with its acceptance of a strict periodization of eras and culmination of medieval planting into renaissance fruits is too unproblematic for current historical work, including my own, which seeks to trouble even further the easy boundaries between what is medieval and what is early modern. But like Caxton, whose translations and editions have been faulted for their stilted style and cumbersome language, new uses for Huizinga can still be found. Moreover, we are heirs to this perspective. As an avenue to further consider what is senex style, therefore, I want to discuss Huizinga's preface to his work, in the recently retranslated *Autumn of the Middle Ages*:

This book is an attempt to view the time around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, not as announcing the Renaissance, but as the end of the Middle Ages, as the age of medieval thought in its last phase of life, as a tree with overripe fruits, fully unfolded and developed. The luxuriant growth of old compelling forms over the living core of thought, the drying and rigidifying of a previously valid store of thought: this is the main content of the following pages. In writing this text, my eye was trained on the depth of the evening sky, a sky steeped blood red, desolate with leaden clouds, full of the false glow of copper. Look back at what I have written, the question arises whether, if my eye had dwelt still longer on the evening sky, the turbid colors may yet have dissolved into utter clarity. It

also seems quite possible that this image, now that I have given it contours and colors, may yet have become more gloomy and less serene than I had perceived it when I started my labors. It can easily happen to one who has his vision trained downward that what he perceives becomes too decrepit and wilted, that too much of the shadow of death has been allowed to fall upon his work.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Huizinga might have written that the late medieval period was one similar to the old men that the Reeve describes in his prologue: “Till we be roten, can we nat be rype.” In the Reeve’s words, old age represents a freedom to enjoy one’s time—limited as it is—reflecting the mature fruits of age and embodying the signs and wear of that age. Mimicking the words of another old man, and one out of time, Huizinga’s preface startles in its adoration of the overripe, the almost-dead. Indeed, Huizinga’s descriptions are pregnant with images of the full and the dying; like the Reeve, the late medieval ages seem to be alive only once they start to die. The durability of this embodied metaphor further suggests that, as in the times of the day or the ages of man, depictions of literary history often utilize natural or corporeal markings of time to delineate schematics of history and progression.

Senex style, in fact, as the gerontological-driven metaphors of Huizinga’s text makes clear can help to elucidate a different formulation of fifteenth century literature; a focus on the writing of old age both helps to continue the reappraisal of the fifteenth century as an important century, not simply a stop on the route to Elizabethan grandeur, but also to add to a growing census of work that examines the life cycle. For indeed, age-related metaphors devil the fifteenth century. Too old in its outlook to be considered part of the Renaissance, too new to be part of a literary mastery that characterizes fourteenth century poets, a often-contradictory stance toward the fifteenth century relegates it to the shadows of a scholarly enterprise often only interested in Chaucer and Shakespeare.

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<sup>10</sup> Johan Huizinga, “Preface to the Dutch Edition,” *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. xix-xx.



Not long ago, the fifteenth century was overshadowed both by the century that spawned the father of English poetry, and the beginnings of the English canon (if one ignores Anglo-Saxon literature, and early Middle English-poetry)<sup>11</sup> and the century that followed with the development of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. What was once true, that fifteenth century literature has long suffered from neglect and disparagement, is no longer. Douglas Bush and his agricultural metaphor picturing the field of fifteenth century literature as “sterile,” and a “seedtime” for the “abundant promise to come”<sup>12</sup> would have been a common appraisal of the century, a shade of which still appears in Seth Lerer’s book on Chaucerian reception, published in 1993. This judgment of fifteenth century literature maintains the century’s middle position, even as it advances its middling stature, and the evocation of sterility points to the brokenness of literary greatness that would result if the poets of the fifteenth-century were not so dull.

The evocation of agricultural metaphors, sterility, and the failed promise of generation haunt this field, as surely as the figure of the old man populates its texts, even (and perhaps especially) in studies that seek to overturn this image of sterility. In a now-dated reassessment of John Lydgate, A.S.G. Edwards contends that the “time seems to be slowly passing when Lydgate can be seen as a particularly arid stretch of desert interposed between the hanging gardens of Chaucer and the manicured lawn of Wyatt and Surrey.”<sup>13</sup> In the defense of a long-ignored poet, Edwards reverts to the use of a metaphor of sterility, quite common in descriptions of Hoccleve and Lydgate, but his formulation actually reinforces the historical progression of literary studies

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<sup>11</sup> See David Matthews, *Writing to the King: Nation, Kingship, and Literature in England: 1250-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), page 159. Matthews succinctly summarizes the apotheosis of literary talent in Ricardian literature: “If the early fifteenth century is a time of awkward filiation of childish poets learning to live without their fatherly master, as Seth Lerer has it, then the early fourteenth century is the even more embarrassing primal scene of Ricardian writing, from which it is best to avert the gaze.”

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1932; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), page 46.

<sup>13</sup> A.S.G. Edwards, “Lydgate Scholarship: Progress and Prospects,” *Fifteenth Century: Recent Studies*, ed. R.F. Yeager (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984): pages 29-47, here 29.

and worth that has marginalized Hoccleve and Lydgate. To think of Wyatt and Surrey as “manicured lawns,” and Chaucer as more wild and uncultivated “hanging gardens,” places the movement from Chaucer to Wyatt and Surrey as one from East (Babylon) to West (a fashionable estate outside London, no doubt) from ancient to more modern.<sup>14</sup> In that journey, one must pass through the deserts of the middle. So while the sterility of this period cannot be shaken, the fifteenth century is necessary, as formulations of poetic genealogy typically utilize Lydgate, that old desert.

The sterile images of desert and unproductive fields are key to the examination of imagery of old men in the fifteenth century. As an enduring representation of this poetry, the alleged sterility of this period instead points to the non-normative advancement of literary modes through other means. Looming large, here, I argue is the cultivation of sterility that instead produces in a real mastery in literature, printing, and canon formation through the depiction of the old body. The introduction of printing, and the work of William Caxton proves invaluable to the creation of an English literary canon, as the works of Chaucer, Gower, and their poetic heirs and forbears are disseminated in slightly more regular and slightly more frequent ways. The introduction of new technologies in textual creations and recurring foundation and destruction of royal dynasties, beginning in 1400, create a century marked by political intrigue and upheaval, even as new technologies solidify the historical and literary material of the fifteenth century, ushering in what is arguably a medium that is more arguably more stable. This century also produces more than a few notable poets, among whom one would include Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate. In spite of the frequency of this age-related metaphor, innovation and poetic

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of a prevailing transfer of civilization and culture from East to West, and its complications, see Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, “Signifying Gender and Empire,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34:1 (2004): 1-16.

creation do not end, but perhaps rhetorically, signaling the frequency of the doddering old man, is characterized as older, duller, and less masterful.

Unfortunately, the fifteenth century has further been characterized not only as dull, but also as a reification of those values that a certain understanding of Renaissance historicism and humanism classifies as pejoratively medieval, hence the characterization of sterile. David Lawton's widely influential essay, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," summarizes what was then a prevailing view of the fifteenth century poetry: "dull, dull, dull, dull as plainsong,"<sup>15</sup> and seeks to dislodge the century from scholarly inertia and produce more varied, more nuanced, and just more readings of fifteenth-century poetry. From Derek Pearsall to A.C. Spearing, the then-scholarly consensus was that Chaucer's fifteenth century heirs had done their best to turn back the clock, and re-medievalize what was for Chaucer an expression of individualistic virtues and values. Implicitly, these critics read Hoccleve, Lydgate, and the rest of the fifteenth century, as bad readers, fossilizing what had been innovative into yet more "medieval" drudgery.

It is interesting that Lawton's article, which seeks to recover the fifteenth century from dustheap, is titled as "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," using "and" instead of "in." Lawton's title expresses the close connection between the fifteenth century poetic model and dullness, offering to view that dullness as productive and useful. His words suffice here:

The "dullness" of my title does not, however, refer primarily to the received reputation of the fifteenth century, but rather to the favorite guise in which its poets present themselves: as "lewed," "crude," "lacking in cunnyng," "innocent of rhetoric and social savoir-faire," "bankrupt in pocket or brain," too young or too old," "feeble," "foolish and fallen"--in a word dull. This is a humility topos of an intensely specific kind. It owes much to Chaucer, but it is used to a very different end. Chaucer's disclaimers are a playful means of making authorship and authority textually and intertextually problematic: they claim a space for fiction that is apart from the public world of truth. His successors in the fifteenth century develop a similar guise to reclaim access to the public world. The development,

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<sup>15</sup> David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century." *ELH* 54:4 (1987): 761-799.

albeit in an extreme form that finds no full-blooded imitator is the work of one writer--Hoccleve.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Hoccleve does embody as various times the full spectrum of this dullness, as he processes a formidable amount of material not only from Chaucer and Gower (in Lawton's view, more Gower than Chaucer), but also by extension, Petrarch, Cicero, and other continental vernacular and Latinate writers. Dullness serves as a way to channel the enormity of his poetic inheritance into a vessel that he frequently derides as too poor, too old, too small for the material. In fact, Lawton calls attention to the very specific nature of the modesty topos in the fifteenth century. These cries of dullness and oldness are, in fact, often more the cries of senex style than a generalizing modesty topos. Hoccleve's engagement with the politics and depiction of age go further than an admission of age, followed by his work. Yet, Hoccleve's reworking of these various stances of dullness deserve more attention.

Fortunately, while a generation of scholars dismissed Hoccleve, Lydgate and Chaucer's other followers in the century of his death, much recent work has altered this state of criticism. Works by Ethan Knapp, contextualizing Hoccleve in his London environs as a Privy Seal clerk, and by Maura Nolan, asserting a remaking of public culture in the wake of Lancastrian crisis in the works of Lydgate, are making the fifteenth century increasingly less dull in the broad aims of their single-author studies.<sup>17</sup> Many edited collections exist, mainly on Lydgate, but multi-author studies also have created new avenues of inquiry for Hoccleve, Lydgate, and to a lesser degree, John Capgrave and Reginald Pecock.<sup>18</sup> In addition, many conceptually-based studies are producing a more complete picture of a fifteenth century textual ethos and practice, among

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<sup>16</sup> Lawton., pp. 762-763.

<sup>17</sup> Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> A number of edited collections exist including: *Form and Reform: Reading Across the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 2011); *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, eds. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006); *Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, eds. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and *Nation, Court, and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Helen Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001).

which studies on counsel, time, and masculinity figure prominently.<sup>19</sup> These new contributions explicitly reframe the discussion of Hoccleve and Lydgate in the context of contemporary events, reaping the rewards of a “critical turn toward historicism of the past two decades,” recuperating the status of the fifteenth century as “the wasteland through which one must pass to get from the medieval genius of Chaucer to the glories of the English Renaissance.”<sup>20</sup> The metamorphosis of this wasteland, articulated and attempted by Robert Meyer-Lee in *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* has not been fully exhausted. In a curious turn of events, the endurance of a view of sterility instead has produced over two decades of impressive work. It is here in the place of sterility, that I examine the discourse of age in Hoccleve centrally, with its attendant relationship to the body, health (both physical and mental), authority, and poetic creation. Demonstrating Hoccleve’s reflections of age as integral to a linkage of poetry from Chaucer to Shakespeare illumines the troubling nature of generative literary lineages, even as they create a new network of possibilities for viewing the fifteenth century not as wasteland, desert, or fallow field, but as rightfully masterful in its own aging terms. While the fifteenth century is essential and central to this study, it is not blind to the debts of the past. In the sections that follow, I flesh out the contours of an age-related discourse from Chaucer and Gower, and past Hoccleve to John Shirley and William Caxton reproducing a new genealogy out of old materials.

Concentrating on the figure of the old man, as embodiment of impairment and narrative action, with invites an approach which privileges both the rhetorical construction of that old body in old materials and in historical contexts that emphasize the body’s connection to that

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<sup>19</sup> See for example, Isabel Davis, *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996); Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Robert J. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Karen Elaine Smyth, *Imaginations of Time in Lydgate and Hoccleve’s Verse* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Meyer-Lee, p. 5.

history, and privileges a reading of that body's complaints, afflictions, and impairments, as both personal and political, social as well as historical. The aged bodies of textualized authors, the I-persona of writers from Gower to Caxton evince a voice that is often apparently personal, highly political, and emblematic of a desire to translate received history and literature from the past through the depiction of the old body (often in concert or contrast with the young body). This figure of age suggests itself as curative to the development of literary histories as solely reproductive and patrilineal imaginings of history, demonstrating that in the reoccurrence of this familiar image, certain authors, scribes, and printers illustrate a deeper meaning to these old men than figures of comic relief. These images of disturbing or disgusting older men, with or without debilitating infirmities and impairments, in their frequent brokenness can reincorporate authors considered sterile, dull, or impotent.

History that organizes and fractures, and a figure that illustrates that contradiction: these are the rewards of an examination that focuses on the old, sometimes-impaired body, and its function in vernacular works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Hazards abound in writing about age, its effects (as numerous as they are different), and the possible afflictions and impairments as well as advantages associated with age. It seems that writing something concrete about the workings of aging, and the progression of time should be straightforward. People are born, they age with the passing of time, and given a life relatively free from accident, illness, hunger or other outside circumstances, they die older, even if that definition of old age is culturally-constructed. Aging is both biological process and cultural phenomenon, with multiple levels of interplay between biological and cultural meaning.<sup>21</sup> Even that biological fact of aging

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<sup>21</sup> The field of gerontological studies is both an old one, evidenced by the pseudo-Baconian *De Retardatione Accidentium Senectutis* and Gabriele Zerbi's 15th century *Gerontocomia*, and fairly recent evidenced by works such as *A World Growing Old*, eds. Daniel Callahan, Ruud H.J. Ter Meulen, and Eva Topinková (Washington, D.C: Georgetown UP, 1996).

is tenuous, connected to cultural attitudes, economic considerations, and genetic markers.

Whereas genetics might have been a foreign concept to ancient and medieval authorities, the difference in experience in aging based on outside circumstances was not. Cicero's *De Senectute*, mentioned above, presents old age as affected by one's amount of wealth, serenity, and character. Age, like gender, sexuality, and class, is so foreign a concept between different cultures and periods, that it defies easy categorization. And that is, in part, the point of a new inquiry into age depictions of late-medieval and early modern England: how might figures of old age function beyond their assumed and common roles (which must of course include comic figures, figures of wisdom, and in certain love narratives, the role of procurer or obstacle)?

To explain the usage and meaning of the metaphorical body of the old man offers a suggestive answer to this enormous question. Positing that a particular history (that of texts, authors, and scribes and the movement from manuscript to print) and a larger one (the uneven narrative of the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) in which foundational texts and foundational bodies are utilized to cycle through the mass of historical developments, poses a different relationship both to that past and a new relationship to literary and historical heirs. To use the old body as metaphor for the cultural and historical state of the fifteenth century assumes that the shifting meanings that inhere in depictions of the aged: while the aged figure might be wise, be measured, and depart various cultural inheritances to a younger audience, he might also be physically and mentally impaired, be envious or avaricious, or hold on perversely to his youth, wasting the time of his age. This range of connotations is available in this project from its very inception and explores a dizzying array of generic and expected behaviors, emotions, and desires of the aged. If the fifteenth century can be described by the figure of the aged, it is both

as a century of increasing innovations and developments in the literary canon and textual production, as well as a litany of terrible political and social upheavals.

By highlighting a metaphor of broken bodies and tortured *corpora*, senex style avoids a structure of literary relations that threatens primarily the figures of the fifteenth century; indeed, in using senex style to both examine individual authors but link those of the Ricardian era to those of the Henrician era through the fifteenth century, I am very much making a conscious decision to follow the newest views of the so-called sterile field of fifteenth century literature. The alternative to using senex style or a similar approach would be a much denuded figure of literary history; stripped down to the bare bones of fathers and sons, what would happen to poets such as John Audelay or John Clanvowe? But the effects would be even more far-reaching. Organizing literary relations around the strict replication of texts through paternal influence would effectively keep John Shirley and discard Thomas Hoccleve, but the problems of that strategy go further, and the most central one is that it denies the examination of the figure of the old man. To use fathers and sons, as Seth Lerer unintentionally has shown reproduces Father Chaucer and reduces to infants the mastery of the fifteenth century. It keeps *incunabula* but refuses a widespread discourse of old age and impairment, by robbing the fifteenth century of a claim to oldness, lateness, and age.

Separated from a central paradox of old and new, dotards and youths, the fifteenth century might in fact seem a sterile field, but this examination of senex style, and its existence and centrality, this approach highlights an area of inquiry which has witnessed attention that is wide, but not deep. How else can one account for the existence and continued copying of Cicero's *De Senectute*; Caxton's gossipy accounts of his age-related infirmities; Hoccleve's complaints about old age, along with self-interested appraisal of the importance of that period;



Shirley's connection of retirement, the place of that retirement (with its own history of age-related concerns), and the literary activities in that time and place; and Chaucer's repeated usage of the variously physically and sexually disgusting old body, the wise old body, and the old body of texts to which he feels allegiance and obsession? The answer, according to this study, is that one function of the rhetorically-imagined old body in the fifteenth century was both to signify a rupture in historical progression and continuity and to offer a remedy for that rupture. The figure of the old man can represent a way to heal those ruptures of history, including breaks in a literary succession that stretches from Gower to Caxton, and also a lingering reminder (and remainder) of the failure of normative depictions of history. Contextualizing old age as impairment, bodily condition, requirement for wisdom and counsel, and temporal restraint against folly and heresy, this study moves from John Shirley's compilation of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 59 and Caxton's imprinting of Cicero's *De Senectute* in 1481 to Hoccleve's posture as *discipulus senium* and *magister senium*, then to Chaucer's use of *rust*, *sex*, and the old body, and finally to Gower's late-in-life literary activities to his reappearance from the grave in *Pericles*.

The mention of Cicero's text reinforces that any discussion of old age within late-medieval and early modern literature must, it seems, begin with the classical sources to which the literary depiction of old age is indebted. A dated, but foundational essay by George Coffman depicts the "protean" dimensions of an old age discourse as it is bequeathed from a Latin tradition to a later, vernacular one. His examination ties lines from a Horatian source through Maximianus to Pope Innocent's *De Miseria Humanae Conditioni* to *Pricke of Conscience* and Chaucer. That this article itself shows the contours of my present emphasis is obvious: an old discussion of an even older topic, one thought rusty and well-worn, yet still applicable and useful. While later work has been performed on the topic of old age within vernacular English

works, Coffman's article is singularly positioned as a survey of literature, even as it concentrates on the reflection of no more than a few lines from Horace.

Rather than pick specific lines from Horace, I will describe briefly imagery from three classical sources in order to trace what might be called the patrimony of senex style. Turning to Juvenal, Cicero, and Maximianus reinforces that the material upon which these later medieval writers depend is borrowed from authors whose work spans hundreds of years. It also suggests some continuity in the literary representation of old age, a characteristic that I argue writers such as Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, and Shakespeare maintain. Senex style is certainly different in each of the classical authorities whom I describe below, just as the reflection of this stylistic practice maintains differences in these later authors. It is not monolithic. Commonalities and similarities abound, as do differences, but the basic contours of senex style, lifted from Latin sources, maintain coherence in the years 1381-1609.

Just as Gower and Chaucer are rhetorically constructed by later authors as the first flowers of vernacular English literature, Juvenal might carry the same honor for narrating the pains and horror of old age. While works predate his *Satire X* that touch upon old age, his contempt of human wishes, in particular, the wish for a long life, finds voice in later medieval works, voicing a familiar refrain of contempt for the world. In *Satire X*, at line 188, Juvenal writes that man asks for long life. "Da spatium vitae, multos da, Iuppiter, annos."<sup>22</sup> With these words—Give me a spacious life, Jupiter, give me many years—man unwittingly repeats the mistake of Aurora, who wishing for a long life for Tithonos, forgets to wish for eternal youth. What is the use of a long life, if that long life produces misery, pain, and debility. This question is precisely the one that animates lines 188-288 of *Satire X*. Juvenal's reflections on *horror*

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<sup>22</sup> Juvenal, "Satire X," in *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), line 188. All citations of Juvenal refer to this edition by line number.

*senectutis* begin naturally with a close up on the old face, and its purported jowls, wrinkles, and waste. Juvenal's powers of description here are general, and rightfully so, for as he argues each young man is different and varied—one is less handsome, one has a different body—but every old man resembles the other. His comments that old age looks the same reinforce that my investigation of senex style is a rhetorical strategy that in addition to tying impairment together with ability, foregrounds old age as a period of sameness, where difference melts away through the years.

In his 1749 poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes, The Tenth Satire of Juvenal Imitated by Samuel Johnson*, Johnson mimics the refrain of *Satire X*, lampooning the futile wishes of humanity and the often negative and unintended consequences. But the eighteenth century does not find this basis for contempt of the world without earlier medieval and early modern precedent. Innocent III's *De Contempu Mundi* revels in many of the same themes, and seems to have borrowed extensively from *Satire X*. It is Innocent's text that seems to have exported many of this imagery of decrepit and impaired old age to Chaucer, his contemporaries, and poetic descendants. Indeed, Chaucer mentions his own translation of Innocent's text, not extant, in *Legend of Good Women*. Further printed copies of *De Contempu* date from 1473 and over 500 manuscripts exist, and a 15<sup>th</sup> century Irish translation survived.<sup>23</sup> *Satire X* and its contempt for worldly vanity, then, is undoubtedly a source for medieval authors, refracted through Innocent's text and his survey of pains and effects produced by extreme old age. Innocent's *De Contempu Mundi* offers a brief summary of what Juvenal has written, and the difficult position of being in the world, while railing against that world reflects the contradictions inherent in senex style.

But even then, if any one does reach old age, his heart weakens, his head shakes,  
his vigor wanes, his breath reeks, his face is wrinkled and his back bent, his eyes

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<sup>23</sup> Donald R. Howard, "Introduction," in *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, ed. Donald R. Howard, trans. Margaret Mary Dietz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), xiii-xliii. [xiii-xv]

grow dim and his joints weak, his nose runs, his hair falls out, his hand trembles and he makes silly gestures, his teeth decay, and his ears get stopped with wax. An old man is easily provoked and hard to calm down. He will believe anything and question nothing. He is stingy and greedy, gloomy, querulous, quick to speak, slow to listen, though by no means slow to anger. He praises the good old day and hates the present, curses modern times, lauds the past, sighs and frets, falls into a stupor and gets sick. Hear what the poet [Horace] says:

Many discomforts surround an old man.

But then the old cannot glory over the young anymore than the young can scorn the old. For we are what they once were; and some day we will be what they are now.<sup>24</sup>

Innocent's judgments of the *horror senectutis* concentrate first on the physical infirmities of the old man: weakened throughout, his body shows the visible signs of age. In language that is repeated throughout the literature of late medieval and early modern England, Innocent's treatise demonstrates that eyesight is dimmed and the hands waver. Old age is a collection of visible impairments that strike foremost at those organs of sense and movement. However, in the second part of his meditation on old age, Innocent strikes at the heart of what is at the center of the old age experience, according to figures of age such as the Reeve, whose texts are examined in Chapter Two. A propensity to anger, together with a gullible nature define the old man. He argues with everything, yet accepts everything: a creature of praise for the past and condemnation for the present and future. The confines of senex style are clear here: though he is weakened, with head shaking and hand trembling, the performance of the old man is centered on movement and sound. He speaks, in sighs, and frets, always "quick" to speak.

This portrait is clearly influential. One need look no further than the anger and "grucche" of Chaucer's Reeve, or the dim-eyed, enfeebled Elde of *Parlement of the Thre Ages*: these characters perform and flesh out the skeletal themes of Innocent's judgment on old age. More timely, however, might be the ending lines, a reflection, one might argue, of Innocent's own

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Innocent III, *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, ed. Donald R. Howard, trans. Margaret Mary Dietz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), 13.

tender age when he composed this text. He was never, according to a modern cultural standard or to his own, old. At 39, he was the youngest member of the curia when he was elected pope, and unlike the most recent abdication of Pope Benedict this year (2013), Innocent died a fairly young man still pope.<sup>25</sup> These are the “facts” of biology. But Innocent’s ending line—“For we are what they once were; and some day we will be what they are now”—posits a cyclical nature to old age and youth, and gives perspective to the grouchy old man and the young man, who feels no sympathy for the former. Innocent’s text makes the importation of a rhetorical depiction of old age possible—his descriptions of extreme old age surely foreground Chaucer’s and Gower’s postures of old men who complain of impairment but still produce action—and more difficult to trace, as this depiction is furnished in a text from a young man writing about old age. Can the young produce works steeped in senex style? *De Contemptu Mundi* suggests they can.

However, for an examination of senex style in a work that is both about old men, and written by a man who self-consciously uses that writing to mark his age, one need turn no farther than Cicero’s *De Senectute*. *De Senectute* centers on the imagined dialogue among Cato the Elder, Laelius and Scipio, in a work that self-consciously seeks to elevate the status of old men. Later in Cicero’s text, Cato produces a short digression on the orator as an old man in which he speaks first of his worries about the old orator, together with the advantages of old oration.

Orator metuo ne lanuescat senectute; est enim munus eius non ingeni solum, sed laterum etiam et virium. Omnino canorum illud in voce splendescit etiam nescioquo pacto in senectute; quod equidem adhuc non amisi, et videtis annos. Sed tamen est decorus seni sermo quietus et remissus, facitque persaepe ipsa sibi audientiam disertis senis compta et mitis oratio. Quam si ipse exsequi nequeas, possis tamen Scipioni praecipere et Laelio: quid enim est iucundius senectute stipata studiis iuventutis?

[I fear that the orator weakens through age; oration, indeed, is not only the duty of talent and knowledge alone, but also of the lungs and bodily strength. Yet, all that’s melodious in voice brightens by someone who’s in agreement with his old

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<sup>25</sup> Howard, xxii-xxiii.

age; because, verily, of time, I am not sent away and you see my years. But nevertheless, it is fitting that the speech of the old man should be quiet and relaxed, and it often creates its own audience, mild oration so arranged through its arguing. To what degree the old man might be capable of doing this to his end, you can nevertheless, teach a Scipio or a Laelius. Indeed, what is more pleasurable than old age pressed together with the study of youth?]<sup>26</sup>

Cato, in the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> sections of *De Senectute* explains both a fear, which he apparently has, and apparently, one which he has no cause to have. He fears the orator weakens. Yet this fear, while apparently true, has no bearing on the actual consequences of the oration he gives. Indeed, as Cato is wont, he explains away corporeal weakness and decay by changing a bitter tune of impairment to a sweet melody of influence and strength. The old orator, because his voice has become more mild and constant, renders his speeches in such a way that they win not by level of sound or gesticulation of the body, but rather by appearing and sounding “quietus et remissus.” The lack of what one can only call lung strength produces a contradiction in the description of bodily impairment: impairment causes the old man to sound harmonious, as he is in agreement with his old age, and the lilting sounds of his voice match the quiet range of his topics and assertions. In this sense, senex style fully meets one of its most canorous depictions in this short description of the orator, as Cicero and Cato present him. Rather than fight against what is lost, in the context of claims of impairment, the old man manages to continue to win favor and success. Cato, himself, personalizes this bargain, as his speeches continue to drive the agenda of the Senate—a point he makes elsewhere—in spite, or because of his years. And finally, as my continuing examination of senex style will show, it is both the personal and quasi-universalizing impulse of Cato, to see in criticisms of old age both an attack on his mode of existence, as he uses that specificity to advance how *all* old men should conduct themselves.

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<sup>26</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Senectute* printed in *M. Tulli Ciceronis*, ed. J.G.F Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): pp. 267-315, (283-284). Translation is mine.

At the end of his assertions cited above, he both gives room for old men to both be unable to do as he does—owning audiences with his well-measured senescence—and to do something that touches upon the same territory. It is the teaching posture of the old man with which Cato consoles those cantankerous colleagues of age whose voices and presentations are not sonorous and who wear age more roughly. Cato locates pleasure, an undergirding concept of *De Senectute*, in the instruction of young men in the vein of Laelius or Scipio, as nothing is perhaps more enjoyably than the arrangement of youth and age together. This celebration of pedagogy colors, if negatively at times, the deployment of old age as teaching tool in literature of the later Middle Ages and Early Modern period. The gruff and grizzled speaker whose litany of woes and cries about a life well-wasted demonstrates that Cato's lesson is learned, in a fashion, perhaps differently than this speaker would have liked. But the centrality of impairment and loss to the position of old teacher in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Hoccleve's works and Shakespeare's Gowerian resurrection prove a Cato-like content for tutelage and instruction that often defines senex style.

The context of Cato as advisor of old age and old age man both is reflected and twisted in important ways in works that follow Cicero from the late-antique poet Maximianus to alliterative works of late medieval England which focus, in part or whole, on old age. Indeed, the existence of a sort of anti-Cato, which is nevertheless defined by him through opposition and negation is certainly well attested in late medieval and early modern English literature, as the late antique poet Maximianus proves. For Maximianus, the defining characteristic of old age, its simultaneous destruction of corporeal health and creation of literary record of that bodily decline, finds widespread and influential expression through the *Elegies of Old Age*, a series of narrative poems that chronicle the old age pains of the I-persona of the poet. It is likely that from *Elde* to

Chaucer, Gower to Shakespeare, the poems of Maximianus were well known and influenced the narrating of old age.

Harley MS 86 preserves a single copy of a poem that has been editorially titled, *Le Regret de Maximian*, which is curious in that it first contextualizes who Maximianus is, with three stanzas in the third person that describe in hazy terms the life of the poet, describing both as impaired (“feble weren his bone”) and productive in his speech and his writings (“He makede mony a word”).<sup>27</sup> The fourth stanza highlights the dimensions of senex style that animate my discussion of literature from Gower to Caxton.

Ofte ich grunte and grone,  
Wen iche wondri hone,  
And þenke on childes dede.  
For þissen ille wone  
Nis her boten a lone;  
Her beþ blissen gnedede.  
To wepen and to wone,  
To maken muchele mone,  
Al me hit deþ for nede.  
An ende ounder þe stone  
Wiþ flesse and eken wiþ bone  
Wormes shulen we fede. (37-48)

The last lines imagine the fate of humankind: grown old, these bodies become little more than compost and food for worms. Even as that fate is preordained, Maximianus, as the assumed speaker, explains his state of complaint. He is very often preoccupied with his own miseries, especially when he thinks on “childes dede.” And this evocation of his younger days and what he has lost create a frame for viewing old age as both limiting factor and expansive stage for expression. This production of his groaning actually embodies what I have called senex style. Indeed, these lines both express a common theme—old speakers lament their fate—and the view of senex style within that lamentation. Even impaired and close to death, Maximianus rages

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<sup>27</sup> *Le Regret de Maximian*, in *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950): pp. 92-100. All citations of this poem refer to this edition, by line number. Above, respectively, are ll. 32 and 29.



against the dying of the light: the two guaranteed activities the lines leave to him are survival and bemoaning that survival.

Scholars have noted that the afterlife of Maximianus would have been apparent for writers such as Chaucer and Gower, as grammar school curricula would have made his *Elegies* widely know. Winthrop Wetherbee states, for example, that

By the later eleventh century a literary canon has been established which includes traditional beginners' texts like the *Disticha Catonis* and the Fables of Avianus, now often augmented by the *Ilias latina* and the elegies of Maximian, together with a higher group commonly consisting of Virgil, Lucan, Statius, the Horace of the Satires and Epistles, Persius, Juvenal, Terence, and finally Ovid, who had been little studied in earlier centuries, but is now frequently represented by the *Metamorphoses* and *Ars amatoria*.<sup>28</sup>

Supported in this claim by Wetherbee, Vincent Gillespie too finds evidence of Maximianus's elegies as matter used to teach grammar, metrical line, and Latin poetry. In the same volume with Wetherbee, Gillespie states

The most common grouping of texts in the thirteenth century is now often known as the *Liber Catonianus* or the *Sex auctores*. Invariably headed by the *Disticha Catonis*, such collections often included the Ecloga of 'Theodulus', the Elegies of Maximian, the Fables of Avianus (or sometimes 'Aesop', often the elegiac Romulus attributed to 'Walter of England' [Galterius Anglicus]), Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* and the Achilleid of Statius.<sup>29</sup>

Like Wetherbee, Gillespie notes the structure of these schoolbooks as one that includes both *Disticha Catonis* (the "Distichs of Cato") and the *Elegies*. And though these books are obviously meant for schoolboys, their influence can be felt in my examination of senex style. Chaucer's Reeve, for example, is responding to *The Miller's Tale*, a work that is introduced by the Miller's observation that youth and age are ever at debate. Tellingly, the Miller states in his tale that his

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<sup>28</sup> Winthrop Wetherbee, "From late Antiquity to the twelfth century," *The Cambridge History of Literature Criticism, Vol II: The Middle Ages*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): pp. 99-144 (p. 122).

<sup>29</sup> Vincent Gillespie, "From the Twelfth Century to c.1450," *The Cambridge History of Literature Criticism, Vol II: The Middle Ages*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): pp. 145-235 (p. 153)

constructed Reeve does not know his “Catoun” and it is clear, I think, that Chaucer is advancing a subtle joke here. Indeed, the Reeve, outside *The Miller’s Tale* seems to know is his Cato, or at least one of those *Sex autores*, namely, Maximianus. His prologue is an extended reflection of materials on old age and its lamentations, many of which appear identical to those contained in *Le Regret de Maximian*, found in Digby MS 86. In fact, as a source for teaching the young, the *Elegies* with their plaintive tone and frank discussions of sexuality and disgust are somewhat of an oddity, as much as *The Reeve’s Prologue* is, according to the Host, ill-suited to their narrative needs. Gillespie notes as much.

The *Elegies* of Maximian, for example, with their laments for old age and lusts for young flesh, are not the most obviously appropriate subjects for study by impressionable schoolboys. Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae* offers similar hermeneutic challenges. Vincent of Beauvais worried about this: while recognising that knowing the metrical rules was valuable, he fretted that the content was unprofitable, indeed even calamitous for young readers to be exposed to ‘the teaching of the poets’ (*De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, written 1246–9; 5.57–60). Hugo von Trimberg, recognising the profanity of Maximian, nevertheless praised the skill of his verse and his technical innovations.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the lesson these *Elegies* might reflect is one which Hoccleve as teacher might also demonstrate: old age can be both a source of folly and wisdom, powerless and potent, and in spite of claims of impairment, an able source of learning and knowledge.

The *Elegies* maintain their utility, as print culture of early modern England makes space for these poems. Two separate imprintings of the poems are extant from the seventeenth century, one of which is attributed to Cornelius Gallus, a contemporary of Vergil and entitled *The Impotent Lover, Accurately Described in Six Elegies Upon Old Age*. However, this poem is indeed the sixth-century work of Maximianus. At the end of the first elegy, the speaker of the poem frames old age as life stage, linguistically productive:

Doubtfull, and trembling, credulous of Ill,  
And fearfull of my own best Actions still.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

Yet in my Notions obstinately wise,  
 I praise the *past*, the *present* Age despise;  
 None learn'd but me, or skillful I believe.  
 Of my own Prudence only positive,  
 By wilfull Dotage most my self deceive.  
 Much do I talk, and talk it o'er, and o'er,  
 And yet am troublesome by telling more.  
 I drivle out a flav'ring Speech so long,  
 You'd wish a present Palsie seiz'd my Tongue.  
 To *Death* y'are tired, yet unweari'd I  
 Persist to kill you with *Garralitie*.  
 Oh Miserable *Age*, which canst but give,  
 Strength to Mankind to become talkative!

Indeed, this description of the grumbling, grucching, old man continues for many lines.

Although called an elegy, this series of poems concentrating on the horrors of old age, is not strictly elegiac. It mourns, yet in its mourning, creates a shocking image of advanced age that is both impaired and able; the *Elegies* participate in the affective wish for a lost youth, but alternatively seem to revel in the horror of age. According to the speaker of the poem, no one is more learned than him, for his sermons go on and on. It is hard not to read in these lines an implicit critique of a Ciceronian reflection on age's primacy in oration. Here is the old man presuming, like Cato, to be learned and dominant, all while being dominated into foolishness by his own garrulousness. But the production of endless talk, tied to age, does connect this passage to Cicero's own statements, cited above, while also presenting narrative action as the alone activity, untouched by age.

The echoes of Maximianus and of old age's destruction of a bodily corpus and creation of a textual one can be heard in several poems Middle English poems. While scholars have attempted to link Pandarus and Chaucer's *Boece* to Maximianus, the genealogy of Maximianus is much easier to trace in a short allegorical work which predates Chaucer, Gower, and Langland. *Elde Makip Me Geld* is a short allegorical work, detailing in plaintive tones the aging process. Found only in MS Harley 913 (along with the more famous *Land of Cokayne*), *Elde* is in some

ways a highly conventional poem about the nuisances of aging. The artistry of the poem, particularly in the fifth stanza that amplifies the state of complaint about age to a collection of onomatopoeic woes, combined with its common lexicon with other more famous age-related complaints, however, renders the poem worthy of further study. Paired in a manuscript with the better known *Land of Cokayne*, the alliterative *Elde Makip Me Geld* depicts the speaker of the poem as an old man who condemns the horrors of old age through graphic descriptions of a failing body and the narrative of grief which this body produces: “I grunt, I grene, I groan, I gruche.” The alliteration of the verbs signals their near equivalence. All words denoting verbal or written complaint, they are tied together in a constellation of negative affects, affected by age. Indeed, the speaker is clear: “And al þis wilneþ eld.” *Elde*, that allegorical construction of old age is the active agent who desires this degradation of the speaker’s body, and the language of complaint which issues forth.

*Elde Makip Me Geld* fully describes the pains of old age, the earlier wish of the speaker to reach his later years, and his regret for having desired so hard a fate. Stunningly concise and powerful, *Elde* advances a naturalness and inevitability to aging through affect and desire, and a ill-fated human contest against that age, through the emphasis of complaint against age. The first stanza of the poem ends with a couplet that foregrounds the inevitability of aging, and the futility of resistance: “Al we wilniþ to ben old--/ wy is eld ihatid?” (15-16). Indeed, if everyone wishes or is willing to grow old, then why is Old Age hated?

Although these lines do express inevitability, they do so in an odd way: the use of “wilniþ” imbues the lines with a sense that the speaker has been willing to age, or that he actively desired it. These lines cannot help but recall the Ciceronian judgment about old age and man’s desire for it, offered through Cato in *de Senectute*: “Everyone hopes to attain an advanced

age; yet when it comes they all complain! So foolishly inconsistent and perverse can people be.”<sup>31</sup> Like “Elde,” *de Senectute* is a work that approaches old age from an affective frame of reference: *De Senectute* attempts to make old age more palatable, to give ease and respite to those in old age, and to raise the esteem of the elderly in the eyes of the young. The affective approach to old age that *Elde* takes, however, cannot be more different. Although it refracts some of the Ciceronian heritage on age, the focus of *Elde* is firmly on the negative affects of the aging, and the negative effects of Elde working on the speaker’s body. The lines preceding the wish for and hatred of old age reinforce the strength and power of Old Age, even as that entity reduces the speaker to impotence and debility. The first lines, “Elde makip me geld/ and grownen al grai” accuse Old Age of causing visible signs of aging, such as grey hair, and some that are not visible, such as literal sexual impotence (geld).

The definition of old age was most likely as hazy in late-medieval England, as it is today. The effect of socioeconomic position, gender, and location all bear and bore upon the nature of what it means to be old. Part of the confusion surrounding the depiction of age is programmatic and lies in the varied linguistic background of the word. While “elde,” “alde,” “olde,” and other ME forms of the word that signifies age have their root in Old English, other Middle English words for age, such as “villesse” and “viellar,” a related, pejorative adjective, have origins in Old French and witnesses in the fifteenth century. The range of words that are fit to describe old age match in some way the array of systems and categories that describe age. Even as “elde” has wide purchase in ME texts that discuss the familiar schematic of the Ages of Man, owing to its Germanic background, its applicability within the Latinate structure of age is limited. In “The Challenges of Quantifying Youth and Age in the Medieval North,” Shannon Lewis-Simpson asserts that in “the north, whether one is defined as young or old depends quite a lot on

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<sup>31</sup> Cicero, *On Old Age in Selected Works*, trans. Michael Grant (NY: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 211-247 (p. 215).

individual circumstances and not chronological age as is the case in the south.”<sup>32</sup> Lewis-Simpson concentrates here on Scandinavian sources, but ties her concerns of Latinate structures of age to Old English as well, which constitutes some of the thematic material loosely and spectrally available to ME authors of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries.

Chaucer, Gower, and Hoccleve then inherited a mass of information for which to understand and confuse age. The so-called “Ages of Man,” that existed in various formats, was meant to give some clarity to an otherwise individuating set of bodily, mental, emotional, and social conditions that together constitute old age. In J.A. Burrow’s *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*, Burrow describes and catalogues these various schematics of ages, known commonly as the Ages of Man, that classical, Medieval, and Renaissance authors, doctors, and astrologers used to classify and integrate human aging into an existing natural order. Burrow argues that his study “concerns itself with this idea of naturalness as it appears in medieval writings, mainly from England, from the time of Bede to the end of the Fifteenth century.”<sup>33</sup> While this schematic indeed appears regularly throughout this period, and roughly conforms to the pattern that Burrow describes, treatment of age certainly can and does exist outside this paradigm, a fact seen in Burrow’s final chapter on transcendence of the scheme. Even with Burrow’s acknowledgement of transcendence, much medieval material on age cannot be organized so strictly around either fealty to or transcendence from this organizing principle. Age, old or young, is not automatically presented in the pattern of the Ages of Man in all medieval texts. As an example, parts of Cicero’s *De Senectute* serve as foundation for that

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<sup>32</sup> Shannon Lewis-Simpson, “The Challenges of Quantifying Youth and Age in the Medieval North,” *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), p. 1.

schematic, yet Cicero's comments complicate it to the point of confusion, as the rather tidy notion of separate stages grapples with a multitude of individuating factors.<sup>34</sup>

This study, of course, cannot accurately describe in detail the lived experience of age, the reality of social structures, medical treatments and therapies, or even the number of aged men and women living in London, or elsewhere in England. Records do not exist in great enough numbers for any of these categories, and if they did, the conditions and pressures associated with their production would be enough to cast a shadow of doubt upon their veracity. Knowing these tensions, of course, does not obviate the need for historical inquiry, and a small survey of those materials suffices to underscore the extent of new and old thought about age in late medieval England. Joel T. Rosenthal's *Old Age in Late Medieval England* offers a study of "the contemporary perceptions of age and the assertions, made time after time and case after case, about its precise nature," and engages with various documents, pointing to a cultural preoccupation with age.<sup>35</sup> Deborah Youngs reconsiders and continues the research of issues, raised in part by Rosenthal's book in *The Life Cycle in Western Europe, c. 1300-1500*, and her work represents both the promise and peril of examination of the reality of age.<sup>36</sup> Primary source material that concerns old age of a scientific or sociological bent is in short supply for the time that her book considers, and the dearth of materials that might shed light on demographics is largely anecdotal, limited, or non-existent.<sup>37</sup> The value, then of literary depictions of age then

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<sup>34</sup> See in particular Chapter 4, where I discuss William Caxton's 1481 imprint of William Worcestre's translation of Cicero's *De Senectute*.

<sup>35</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), page 11. Rosenthal's book attempts a complete, and often comprehensive view of old age.

<sup>36</sup> Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe, c.1300-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Although it is no longer strictly considered part of Roger Bacon's body of work, "On Tarrying the Accidents of Age," remains one of the most well-known medical or scientific works that discuss old age. See a ME translation of the original Latin work, which is printed in *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, 2 vols., ed. M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), vol. 1, pages 133-247.

cannot be overestimated, but then cannot also pass as a literal reflection for the experience of age.<sup>38</sup> Even as what counts as old age is amorphous and defies boundaries, the metaphor of old materials or old bodies often colors the literature of the fifteenth century, and the later, scholarly studies of this literature.

The aged body is one that is fully imbricated in some kind of history, whether personal, political, or social. It presents a somatic metaphor for the processes of time, by which time writes its narrative upon that corporeal object, rewriting without fully erasing the previous text. Then it seems obvious that a study of the old body as figurative, but also as evocative of a particular kind of textuality is not only justified in its logic, but also necessary in its absence heretofore. It offers beyond the examination of sources or textual resonances of old age discourse, a view that old age represents a reflection not only of the obscured lived reality of the old body, but also of its afterlife in material objects that serve from their beginning partly as reflections of a textual practice. In short, examining old age this way offers both a diachronic view of old age, as it might reflect a particular manner of textuality in a specific moment of historical time, and synchronic one, as it demonstrates how old age narrates a life and text over time.

Beginning with Caxton and working backwards, I examine depictions of the old man in terms of the literary production of retirement, tutelage, sexuality and narrative, and revision. Opening with Caxton clarifies and compounds: he is the central figure of the later fifteenth century in terms of print production; yet as the range of these materials make clear, his activities as worker of senex style are positioned after Chaucer, Gower, and Hoccleve. This anachronism is

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<sup>38</sup> See Lewis-Simpson, quoted in n. 10, page 6: “Literary sources provide the most compelling accounts of personal experiences of the young and old within society, speaking as they often do of the functional, social, emotional, and cognitive ageing of the individual.” Besides J.A. Burrows work on the Ages of Man and the edited collection, *Youth and Age in the Medieval North* (cited in n. 10), other examples of literary studies of age include the edited collection, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007) and Mary Dove’s *The Perfect Age of Man’s Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).



deliberate. Functionally, by focusing on the theme of retirement, Chapter 1 upends a chronological rendering of time, making apparent that the depiction of the old man within time often defies normative expression. Concentrating on William Caxton's revision of script and print in terms of his rhetorical claims of impairment and his use of quasi medical terminology to convey translation, I read his imprint of *De Senectute* as a late example of the earliest roots of senex style. Reflecting the contradiction of old age as evocative of ability and impairment, Cicero's text in translation serves as a makeshift continuation of John Shirley's copies of *Secretum Secretorum*, which in their exposition of Aristotle as aged counselor foregrounds old age as both period of activity and repose. Chapter 1 makes explicit the connections between Shirley's scribal labors in their age-related context and William Caxton's exposition of print as necessary prosthetic in his age.

Chapter 2 takes as central the most learned role of the old body in this study, that of the tutor and advisor. Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* suggests that the role of the tutor is one that both assumes and troubles the category of old age, as Hoccleve inhabits simultaneously the role of student and teacher, youth and old man. Indeed, old age becomes the standard by which counsel given is considered good, even as emergent political developments hazard the position of tutor, as my brief discussion of Simon Burley, Richard II's tutor demonstrates. Contextualizing *Regiment* with Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* and excerpts from his *Series*, I argue one lesson Hoccleve learns is the contradictions present in depictions of old age, tutelage, and youth.

Chapter 3 theorizes that senex style for Chaucer reflects in his presentation of the old man as dirty, sexually and otherwise, which I introduce through a reading of the Reeve alongside three of Chaucer's late, short lyrics. I demonstrate that Chaucer's depiction of the old body in the Reeve's *General Prologue*-portrait, prologue, and tale functions as a stand in for a certain

personal, literary, and historical relationship that the I-persona of Chaucer often embodies. Focusing on Chaucer's own rhetorical presentation of himself as author and old man in the *Complaint to my Empty Purse*, *L'envoy to Scogan*, and *Chaucers wordes unto Adam his owne scriveyn*, this chapter describes the use of the old man as narrator and plot mover in terms of persona theory.

Chapter 4 interrogates the role of Gower in Shakespeare's *Pericles* as reflection of Gower's own construction of himself as old man in *Confessio Amantis* and "Quicquid homo scribat." Criticism of Gower's in text personae have not treated them in relation to early modern readings of the old poet as prosthetic, a task Chapter 4 accomplishes by reading this material through Shakespeare's construction of Gower in *Pericles*. Throughout this final chapter, I argue that a emergent definition of "prosthesis" as textual addition in the 16<sup>th</sup> century guides Shakespeare's reading and use of the old author, imbuing his choral construction of Gower as a revisionary figure, both in Aman's new vision of himself as both old and in-text Gower in *Confessio Amantis* and Gower's textual revision in "Quicquid."

Concluding this examination of senex style, the Epilogue concentrates on an edition of Thomas Berthelet's early modern printing of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, held in the Rare Books Library at Cornell University. Reflective of layers of history and oldness, it is a 14<sup>th</sup> century work, reprinted in the 16<sup>th</sup>, rebounded and collected in the 19<sup>th</sup>. This material object reminds its viewer that in the age of new media, old *corpora* still affect contemporary views of the text and reading. Old bodies of authors, speakers, and the text are linked in this volume. Thus, by attending to the utility of the impaired old man as trope of textuality, this dissertation connects authors from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Skelton to Spenser and interprets an older instance of New Media as reflection of a newer, contemporary shift from the codex to computer.

No Texts for Old Men? Caxton's *Of Olde Age* and Shirley's MS Ashmole 59

Almost without exception, and certainly to my knowledge, all special collections at research and university libraries in the United States catalogue books printed in 1500 or before as *incunabula*. In this context, *incunabula*, as a term that refers to a stage of childhood—babes in swaddling clothes—can be traced to Bernhard von Mallinckrodt's 1639 pamphlet *De ortu et progressu artis typographicae dissertatio historica*. A celebration of the printed word and those artifacts dated to 1500 and before, von Mallinckrodt's text, though obscure today and untranslated from Latin, still influences how one accesses works printed by Caxton, de Worde, or Pynson. Because collections of early printed books still characterize these early works of print as babes in swaddling cloths, suggesting the persistence of a link between material object and point in the lifecycle, histories of the medieval and early modern book might necessarily also reflect concerns of a body beyond the *corpora* of texts. This chapter, focused on William Caxton and John Shirley, in fact, argues that other areas of comparison between the late-medieval and early modern book and the depiction of the lifecycle exist. William Caxton, the father of the first English *incunabula*, through his autobiographical accounts of his own old age, inscribes on these youthful works a discourse that connects printing and texts to old age, ability, and impairment. Caxton throughout his printed corpus, uses a technological innovation—the rise of moveable type—to continue the use of old age as a pose and posture that at once announces its impotence and simultaneously uses that lack of power to claim authority.

Indeed, the terms of the material objects produced by Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, and Richard Pynson, among other famous named printers remain stuck in conceptions of age and generation. Incunabula, those books printed before 1500 generally are the infants of the printing era. Not yet characterized by the purported precision and regularity of later printed editions,

these children populate the fifteenth century. They are not the old masters of the Ricardian era, nor the full-fledged adults of the sixteenth century. “The category of incunabula assures us that these paradoxes will be resolved, that the frustrations of childhood will be worked out with age, and in doing so, it labels childhood as simply remarkable, fascinating but ultimately inexplicable.”<sup>39</sup> Following Kuskin’s skepticism, I want to move beyond a view of the *incunabula* as simply remarkable for its newness, remarkable for its fidelity to the manuscript form, and inexplicable in its balance of the two. As an introduction to a study of the manuscript form’s reflection through textual figures of age (and youth), I imagine that like the *puer senex*, the incunabula’s unique position stuck in between two methods of textual production highlights each equally.

Age can also form a kind of inscription and re-inscription, as narratives that describe or depict old age depict corporeal markings and changes over time. Readings of these representations of age in a manuscript context produce moments where the subject, its narrative, and the material on which this narrative is written are intertwined. Isolating depictions of age within a manuscript-context, I argue that these representations of age reflect their medium, producing a narrative of age and time that inscribes and re-inscribes upon the (often) flesh of the vellum page, even as the narrative of age is one of bodily signs inscribed on a human body. This narrative depiction of age is both embodied in the corporeal signs it can produce on the subject of the narrative, but also in the allegorical representation of that aging process as Elde, an embodied being. The embodiment of such a process carries with it certain biological and naturalistic overtones, but these argument cannot substitute for the non-normative elements at the heart of a project that represents old age. Markings on vellum as they are seen today signal their

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<sup>39</sup> William Kuskin, “Introduction,” *Caxton’s Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, ed. William H. Kuskin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006): pp.1-31 (p. 5).

age, and the descriptions of the vellum page could in fact substitute for a fairly widespread discourse about the old body in late medieval England: its skin is loose (or taunt), fraying at the edges, cut down from its original size. These biological palimpsests--both the narrative representation of the body and its material occurrence imprinted on the vellum--should not obscure what is not natural or normative in the depiction of old age: that old age is often portrayed as weak and feeble, but almost always performs duties, including the production of a certain narrative about that inability; that the depiction of old age necessitates both the passage of time, in order to show how time affects the aging body, and the stopping of that time, to illustrate a body at a certain moment; and finally that old age is no more absolute than any other contested biological or social frame that is used to categorize and identity.

Working backwards temporally, I read Caxton as both translator and creator, and link the lexicon of translation, refreshment, and retirement (from parchment) that lie at the center of Caxton's prologues and epilogues to a printed version of senex style. Central here is his imprint of a previously-translated version of Cicero's *De Senectute* and its difficult position as a book on old age as *incunabula*. Moving back into the fifteenth century, I uncover a related expression of senex style in the *Secretum Secretorum*, copied in MS Ashmole 59. The manuscript, I argue, is a practical exercise in the theoretical suggestions given in Caxton's *Of Olde Age*, and functions as something of a compilation of age. I conclude with a short reading of Henry Scogan's own retirement from youth into "sodeyne age" and discuss it as a continuation of Shirley's and Caxton's own complaints of age and impairment.

The depiction of early printing and its twists and turns, as recorded by William Caxton, occur within a framework of old age and aging bodies. Caxton and his import of the printed word to England is a well-handled topic. Much ink has been spilled on the supposed difference

between script and print as textual technologies, and the gulf of contrasts that their use supposedly produces. This is by now an old view; recent work has dismantled what Joseph Dane has termed, “the myth of print culture.”<sup>40</sup> Like all myths, however, it has proven resilient, and surfaces in odd and small ways. Like many myths, it has a structure of belief behind it, and it has creators, one of whom is William Caxton, the first printer of English texts in England, and one of the most successful printers whose work and choices in production span *both* late medieval ideas of texts and early modern ones, if such a distinction is even possible. Recently, critics like Daniel Wakelin, too, have warned against reading too deeply into a course of events that for Caxton were not connected into the hegemonic Tudor myth, created by Henry VII and VIII. “Yet we must be cautious in finding teleology in the supposed transition from ‘medieval’ to ‘Renaissance’: could Caxton know, in 1491, that Henry VII’s dynasty was secure and advancing toward absolutism?”<sup>41</sup> What is sure is this: Caxton’s prologue, epilogues, and other extra-textual apparatus deserve ever more attention, here and elsewhere, for they demonstrate not only the origin of a supposedly original discourse on the use of print, and its gradual super-succession of script, but also how senex style can be viewed within a changing textual tradition. Senex style dismantles the fiction of total innovation of print.

This examination of senex style begins rather pointedly at the end. Reflecting the twisting of time, and the classical roots of the stylistic pose, this first chapter finds in the reworking of style and “stylus” an apt vision of how to approach the depiction of the old man in the fifteenth century. Bookended by William Caxton at the beginning and John Shirley at the end, these figures of print and script define how senex style and its reflection in the image of the worn

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographical Method* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature: 1430-1530* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 148.

stylus connects the old man as prosthetic implement and site of bodily impairment. Stylus, with its connection to style, is an apt object and metaphor for foregrounding the role of the old man as text, as impaired and prosthetic that alleviates that impairment. In Middle English “stile” refers both to the pen and the form of writing that the pen creates.<sup>42</sup> Linking both the formal elements of a stylized old age, together with the portrayal of an old pen and hand, “stylus” reflects the role of the old man and old text as impaired object and prosthetic addition.

By showing a continuous deployment of the old man as prosthetic and impairment, this study of Caxton and Shirley both outlines the movement from script to print, even as it reinforces the incompleteness of that development. Caxton himself could view the stubbornly new and old dimensions of print. Indeed, nothing of Caxton’s writing participates more fully in senex style than the first book that he printed, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, the first book printed in English and the beginning of a printing enterprise. In particular, the epilogue of its third book makes explicit the pains of Caxton’s body, even as that epilogue serves as prologue to a printing career. According to N.F. Blake, Caxton’s output was tremendous after this epilogue.

The various works he issued can be divided approximately as follows: eighteen he translated, printed, and published, though three works he translated he did not print; sixty-eight he printed and published, though these often included his own prologues and epilogues, and some were edited by Caxton; ten he printed; and a few texts printed abroad were published by him.<sup>43</sup>

This amount of work makes Caxton’s reader suspicious of his claims of impairment. After all, this epilogue justifies the future use of type as opposed to script on the grounds of age-related ailments and creeping old age.

Thus ende I this book whyche I haue translated after myn Auctor as nyghe as god  
hath gyuen me connyng to whom be gyuen the laude & preysyng/ And for as  
moche as in the wrytyng of the same my penne is worn/ myn hande wery & not

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<sup>42</sup> stylus, n. See definition A: *Middle English Dictionary* <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED42945&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (Accessed June 1, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> N. F. Blake, ‘Caxton, William (1415x24–1492)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4963, accessed 1 July 2013]

stedfast myn eyen dīmed with ouermoche lokyng on the whit paper/ and my corage not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hath ben/ and that age crepeth on me dayly and febleth all the bodye/ and also be cause I haue promysid to dyuerce gentilmen and to my frendes to adresse to hem as hastely as I myght this sayd book/ Therefore I haue practysed & lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne this said book in prynte after the maner & forme as ye may here see/ and is wretton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben/ to thende that euery man may haue them attones/ ffor all the bookes of this storye named the recule of the historyes of troyes thus enpryntid as ye here see were begonne in oon day/ whiche book I haue presented to my sayd redoubtid lady as a fore is sayd.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of Caxton's first imprint are the first lines of the epilogue, functioning both as an apologia for print and an explanation for the innovation of textual technologies. Central to Caxton's decision to move to typesetting and printing is the labor necessary to write, pains that he equates implicitly with age. His pen is worn, his hand weary, and his eyes dim and unclear from hours spent staring at white parchment. Following this catalogue of cares is a signal that labor is not the only pressure upon Caxton, but also age, which "crepeth" on him daily and enfeebles his body. Age, like the labor of manuscript practice, ages the body. This early apology—both in terms of defense and defensive posture—for the use of print seems very much scripted. As a farewell to script and an announcement that Caxton's body is worn and used, this epilogue in the *first* book Caxton prints encapsulates perhaps too perfectly the movement between impairment and ability involved in the use of senex style.

Caxton's description suggests a link between old stories and old writers, as that writer is beset with age-related impairments. More than simply an argument that old writers produce material on old stories, the connection seems to be more active: old stories and the effort they require produce age, along with age-related impairments. In a twist of the logic of *Elde Makib Me Geld*, work both makes Caxton impotent, as a different kind of work gives him power again. A good deal of caution should be utilized in reading this epilogue, which is also something of a

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<sup>44</sup> William Caxton, *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye: Written in French by Raoul Lefevre*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, Ph.D., vol. 2 (London: David Nutt in the Strand, 1894), 701.



prologue to a good deal of printing and textual production for Caxton. As the hazy terms of prologue and epilogue here signal, the use of age as an excuse is clearly no excuse at all.

Evocative of the rhetorical turn contained within senex style, this bit of text reproduces the old body as site of impairment and inability, while also implicitly using that old body as impetus to use new technologies.

The fiction that Caxton implies in this short statement on printing is one that has colored many histories of fifteenth century literature: first that type supplanted script, immediately and totally, and second, that the latter was labor-intensive and the former less so. To my knowledge, no one has viewed Caxton's view of print as prosthetic as precisely as this epilogue introduces it.<sup>45</sup> As Caxton continues, however, it becomes clear that printing, while certainly in his view more time-efficient, is also laborious and time-consuming. Learning to print took practice and was achieved at his "grete charge and dispense," and even with its advantages, Caxton apparently still is burdened with great demand from "dyuerce gentilmen" and "frendes" to send this book to them as quickly as possible. Printing, it turns out, is just as toilsome as the script Caxton's wavering hand has left behind. Behind this twisting of logic for choosing type builds upon other previous descriptions of the weariness of writing.

Caxton's writing and textual production links in many ways with depictions of the aged body. In fact, the centrality of old men to Caxton's activities, especially in the role of old books and ancient sources is everywhere apparent. Caxton concentrates on old sources, and if not old sources, then new retellings of old sources. Ever the successful merchant,<sup>46</sup> his printings witness

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<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of prosthetic, one which has proven invaluable to my use of prosthesis within textuality, see David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) and David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan University Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> Alexandra Gillespie, "Folowyng the trace of mayster Caxton," *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, ed. William H. Kuskin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006): 167-195. See 168, where Gillespie summarizes prevailing thought about Caxton's business model. "Several scholars have examined the

the continuing popularity of classical translations. Indeed, the lure of old texts characterizes much of Caxton's extant copies. This reliance on the past and old authorities colors the beginning of print in England, as Caxton dramatizes through his prologues the beginning of antiquarianism. Yet at the same time, these beginnings live with the end, as Caxton's retirement from print offers the beginning of his print career. He is interested not in the production of a past technology—as he “abandons” script—but in those objects which history has both obscured and preserved. In as much as the bodily urge to print is positioned as prosthetic to a failing body and a means of preserving ever-diminishing ability in the epilogue to the third book of *Recuyvells*, print is also positioned as a way to find, conserve, and disseminate the old *corpora* of the classical and medieval pasts.

Caxton's level of thinking out loud about the uses of print and script in his work appear over and over in the material which he often supplies to older works, both in and out of translation. According to Wakelin, in “his famous prologues and epilogues, Caxton also expresses zeal to reproduce his works and accumulate readers, no doubt through a keen mercantile spirit.”<sup>47</sup> While he is rarely indicative of an author-function in the same way as Gower, Chaucer, Hoccleve, or Shakespeare, he does create texts that illustrate how a posture of age-related impairment, coupled with an ability borne out through texts, is used and changed in the decades following the Ricardian and Lancastrian poets. This persistence of the pen in print,

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relationship between Caxton's presentation of his books and the pressures of mass, mechanized production. His famous prologues and epilogues have been described as sales pitches—complex texts in which the aureate diction of a fifteenth-century prose writer is put to work on behalf of a new invention, with a view to both a traditional audience of noble, gentle, and wealthy merchant-class readers and anyone else interested in getting books ‘good chepe.’ See also Lotte Hellings's “Tradition and Renewal: Establishing the Chronology of Wynkyn de Worde's Early Work,” in *Incunabula and Their Readers: Printing, Selling, and Using Books in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Kristian Jensen (London: The British Library, 2003): 13-30. In her discussion of Caxton's estate, she notes the “[d]ocumentation...is very incomplete and difficult to interpret, merely suggesting that the settlement was protracted and complicated.” After all, as she states, “the going concern must have represented substantial value.” (13). Indeed, unlike many of his continental contemporaries and predecessors, Caxton never had to declare bankruptcy.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

its simultaneous role of and reason for prosthesis, indicative of senex style, recalls too that early printing cannot shake the specter of script and must be understood within a hazy frame of old and new. Indeed, Caxton alludes to the prosthetic function of old age, as it concerns medieval and early modern textualities in his prologue to the second edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. In one of the most curious narratives that William Caxton relates, he writes of the tortured state of the text, including his own first edition, and the remedy for that textual situation. Writing of the proliferation of editions, copies, and imprints, Caxton describes

bookes so incorrecte was one brought to me vj yere passyd/ whyche I supposed had ben veray true 7 correcte/ And accordyng to the same I dyde do enprynte a certayn nombre of them/ whyche anon were sold to many and dyuerse gentyl men/ of whome one gentylman cam to me/ and said that this book was not accordyng in many places vnto the book that Geoffrey chaucer had made/ To whom I answerd that I had made it accordyng to my cople/ and by me was nothyng added ne mynusshyd/ Thenne he sayd he knewe a book whyche hys fader had and moche louyd. that was very trewe/ and accordyng vnto hys owen first book by hym made/ and sayd more yf I wold enprynte it agayn he wold gete me the same book for a cople/ how be it he wist wel/ that hys fader wold not gladly departe fro it. To whome I said. in caas that he coude gete me suche a book trewe and correcte/ yet I wold ones endeuoire me to enprynte it agayn/ for to satsfyfe thauctor/ where as to fore by ygnourance I erryd in hurtyng and dyffamyng his book in dyuerce places in setting in somme thynges that he neuer sayd ne made. and leuyng out many thynges that he made whyche ben requysite to be sette in it/ And thus we fyll at accord.<sup>48</sup>

Speaking of his own labor on Chaucer's main work and his first and second editions, Caxton mentions two copies, the provenance of the first unclear and not supplied, with only a passive construction, "was one brought to me," used to explain its origin. The suggestions of this narrative about the first copy and subsequent edition are tantalizing. This first copy is used as Caxton's exemplar, for he thought it "veray true 7 correcte," and the copies that it produces are sold to "gentyl men," a marker of social distinction still useful and pertinent in the fifteenth century. It is precisely this trade to "gentyl men" that results in one such man returning to

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<sup>48</sup> William Caxton, "Proheme," *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W.J.B. Crotch (London: Oxford University Press, 1928. Published for the Early English Text Society, no. 176.), 91.

Caxton, complaining of the errors in Caxton's work. This "gentyl man" knows that the copy is not a true witness to the original work, because his father has a better copy.

Invented or not, this exchange of texts and copies highlights another important feature of Caxton's imagined relationship to texts and history. The second, good copy, which returns him to the "true" meaning of the text (nothing added and nothing subtracted), has a circuitous journey, but ultimately is held by the "gentyl" man's father, positing the old as de facto custodian of literary history. But this is not a straightforward reproduction of literary genealogy that one finds so often in discussions of the Chaucerian canon. Indeed to posit as somehow central the old man to the transmission of history, culture, and literature is to conceptualize that transmission as non-reproductive, tangential, even sometimes non-productive. The good copy is held by the man's father, and only is borrowed and must be returned. While copies are made, and reproduction of *The Canterbury Tales* occurs, it does so in a circuitous way, with at least one false start. Caxton's narrative indeed foregrounds the oddness of old age as a metaphor for cultural transmission. To use the old body as the linkage between these texts upends some critical assumptions about the nature of literary history, and the status of history as a conceptual framework in the fourteenth- and fifteenth centuries. Depictions of the passage of time as embodied and history old are extremely common, but this frequency obscures how the use of that old body as a metaphor for time, history, translation, and source texts conveys the non-normative status of these conceptions of the past, texts, and history.

This copy, held by the man's father, is promised to Caxton if he will run a printing of the *Tales* again. The terms of this borrowing are unique here, and suggest both the emotional parameters of the transaction, along with the affective economy in which the father has placed the book. In a prologue that seeks to define Chaucer as first "auctour" and to redress the harm

done to his corpus, the second copy, “moche louyd” by the father, maintains the level of affection and emotion that Chaucer engenders in Caxton. The definition of the father, assumably a man advanced in years, according to his emotional attachments recalls a contemporary correlation between the old and affect. Often allegorical depictions of avarice take the form of old men and avarice is tied to old age, peculiarly in Petrarch’s estimation,<sup>49</sup> but this attachment to a material object seems motivated by positive affect. The old father guards the text, for its own good and enjoyment. This prologue goes further than a rehearsal of the avarice of the old or the articulation of a non-linear transmission of texts, as it illustrates the close connection between the correct text, the previous exemplar of a more faithful *Tales*, and the old man who seems to jealously guard it. Caxton is not advancing a one to one correspondence certainly, but through images of affection for and violence toward a more perfected copy of Chaucer’s text arranges a connection between the old father and his text, that is imagined as an object of love. Caxton’s characterization of the old man’s positive affection for his text is implicitly compared to Caxton’s earlier violence for his text, and in that comparison, it cannot be forgotten that according both to his life records, and to his authorial persona, Caxton himself was then an old man. The agency of both toward the text is organized according to love or violence, but most importantly, central to textual transmission, imprinting, and dissemination is the role of the old man.

If senex style is defined partly by rhetorical impositions of infirmity, which disguise actual ability, then precisely a reading of old age which assumes its inutility while occluding the very able agency of those aged men to correct and make better the old texts which Caxton wishes to publish then firmly reflects the contradiction inherent in depictions of senex style. It is not to

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<sup>49</sup> Petrarch, *Res Seniles* 1.2 in *Letters on Old Age*, trans. and eds. Aldo S. Bernardo, Reta A. Bernardo, and Saul Levin, vol. 1 of 2 (New York, NY: Italica Press, 2005), p. 4.

innovation and youth that Caxton turns for assistance and improvement, but actually to an old man, a persistent metaphor for history and pastness in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. But this rhetorical construct—the dependence upon the material and corporeal reminders and remainders of history—of the old man as guardian of true meanings is problematized by Caxton’s own usage. One salient fact remains that Caxton, in the text, in a moment of autobiography, turns to an old man for help in correcting his text. These remarks cannot be read separately from Caxton’s other performances in prologues: indeed, his turn to printing, as I discuss both in the Introduction and in this chapter, is tied rhetorically and firmly to his body’s own dimmed strength and bodily wear. He turns to print precisely because the stylus takes too much effort, and the demand for his texts too great. While this remonstrance against his body could be yet another example of Caxton using his voice autobiographically in the text as a sort of marketing technique—“I can’t copy enough texts, because so many want the works; perhaps I need to print.”—I want to caution against reading Caxton too literally.

For indeed, Caxton might not be telling the whole story. His move toward a newer textual technology, while at the same time, grasping at a previous book production style in the body of a ventriloquized manuscript owner confuses a purely progressive attitude toward print. And the material conditions of print at the time rule out any possibility that a change to print amounted to a much easier process. Indeed, I follow Joseph Dane, in highlighting Caxton’s own role in construction of the “myth of print culture.” The paradox of early print, to rehearse Stephanie Trigg’s formulation, is to achieve authentication of a new technology through impersonation of the older one.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious, I think, to view this paradox in terms of books and texts, but what about bodies? As the above narrative, furnished by Caxton makes clear, the status of the old

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<sup>50</sup> Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002), p. 115.

body was, for him, close to the old book: both serve as authorizations of current and future textual endeavors.

In order to both clarify and complicate Caxton's copying, a turn to another foundation myth seems appropriate. Like the story of the old manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*, this myth offers a corrective for Caxton's own occluding of effort in early printing, and demonstrates how old age might be presented both as the site of power and inability. In the prologue to *Eneydos*, the story of Troy's fall and Rome's foundation, Caxton's prologue rehearses a familiar refrain of his mercantile situation:

And whan I had advysed me in this sayd boke, I delybered and concluded to translate it into Englysshe, and forthwyth toke a penne and ynke and wrote a leef or tweyne which I oversawe agayne to correct it. And when I sawe the fayr and straunge termes therin, I doubted that it sholde not please some gentylnen whiche late blamed me sayeng that in my translacyons I had over-curyous termes whiche coude not be understande of comyn peple and desired me to use olde and homely termes in my translacyons. And fayn wolde I satysfye every man, and so to doo toke an olde boke and redde therin; and certaynly the Englysshe was so rude and brood that I coude not wele understande it. And also my lord Abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late certayn evydences wryton in olde Englysshe for to reduce it into our Englysshe now usid.<sup>51</sup>

The range of old as a description of language is appropriate for Caxton. He continues after these lines recording how changeably the English are and how like their language, differences across regions and periods of time proliferate. *Eneydos* demonstrates the weighted meaning that old has for Caxton: he mentions what is presumably some form of historical English earlier than Chaucer's Middle English. Perhaps it is Anglo Saxon literature and writing which the Abbot of Westminster presents to Caxton; that is unknowable. But this ancient writing serves as outer limit for Caxton's discussion of "olde" terms. Caxton is defending the use of his vocabulary, which is often "straunge" and "over-curyous," but more understandable than the language of the abbot's book. His words are new, and as he argues in the prologue, it becomes

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<sup>51</sup> William Caxton, "Prologue," *Eneydos in Caxton's Own Prose*, ed. N.F. Blake (London: André Deutsch, 1973): pp. 78-81, (p. 79).

clear that old terms will not become any clear. Lines later he will say the language used when he was born is now indecipherable.

In this confusion of old and new, however, I want to stress that the prologue to *Eneydos* reinforces that Caxton's retirement from print is in many ways a rhetorical construction, at odds with his actual practice. *Eneydos* is printed in 1490, an Caxton will be dead by 1492, and yet contrary to the declamation of inability concerning his pen in *Recuyvells*, here Caxton alludes to handiwork. Taking his pen and ink, he proceeds to translate *Eneydos* into English. That Caxton would compose and translate using his own hand and then produce type and print a text is obvious, at least to the historian of print. But the recognition by Caxton that his pen, while deficient, still writes serves to remind the reader, both early and modern, that the excuses given in *Recuyvells* for a retirement from script disguise that retirement is mostly rhetorical and never complete.

The portrayal of Aeneas's aging father and his contribution to history reinforce the staying power of old age as metaphor, even as he laments that the text contains new terms that he cannot understand fully, and so must make use of "olde and homely terms" as a substitute. Within lines of mentioning Anchises, the "olde fader" who is instrumental in the foundation of Troy, Caxton pivots to a negative mention of age. As with Joseph Addison who will comment upon Chaucer's rude language, Caxton points to a unfashionably old language which he has at his disposal, one that is unequal to the innovative tongue of the source text. Even as old can be read as rude and homely in Caxton, however, it remains true that old age cannot simply be thought of as temporal overhang of a less advanced age. Indeed, Anchises's role in transmitting culture in *Eneydos* transforms the deployment of old as qualitative measure.



In Chapter Two, Caxton writes that Anchises is impaired due to age and is therefore unable to walk. “[B]y olde age and luyng manye yeres, his blood was wexen colde soo moche that he myght not walke ne helpe hym selfe by moeuynge.”<sup>52</sup> Dryness of the body and coldness of the humors and fluids are symptomatic of age-related toil upon the body. Owing to this advancing age, Anchises cannot move himself, and so sits upon Aeneas’ shoulders. Yet, Anchises, like history, is not merely (nearly) dead weight. He carried with him,

a coffre well rychely adourned wyth many precyous stones in facyon and manere of a shryne, In the whiche were the goddes of Troye, and grete and diuerce relykes/ which were the thynges/ In which the famylye of Troye/ the people and comynalte of Asie, had fixed theyr socoures/ and thalegement of theyr anguysshous heuynesses.<sup>53</sup>

Although Aeneas must carry Anchises, literally, his own personal “heuyness,” Anchises takes with him as his load, the accumulated and extant history of the Trojans. Carrying the only source of solace, hope, and healing for the Trojans, Anchises becomes the focal point of positive affect for the Trojans. He is an old man holding old materials, literally guarding their past, as he embodies it, impaired and torn from their place of origin. Anchises plays then a similar role not only to Cato, but also to *De Senectute* as a whole, as a personal and political symbol of the right relationship to the history and the past. Anchises demonstrates that the impaired old body often links to the images of the past, even as it maintains some measure of ability. Viewing this pose of senex style further requires a move to *De Senectute* and its connection among old bodies, old texts, and the detritus of history.

While complicated, the use of old age in Caxton is not only in his imprint of *De Senectute*, but also his Trojan materials reflect a view of old age that is bound in discourses about healing, medicine, and history. As a metaphor for the past, old age can function in impaired relationship to history as it rewrites and reproduces that history (Caxton as translator); as a

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<sup>52</sup> William Caxton, *Eneydos*, eds. W.T. Culley and F.J. Furnivall (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1890), p. 14

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

healing connection, in physical, political, and affective realms (Cato, for example); and as a way to heal the break with the past, even as that break creates a new future (Caxton's Anchises). Caxton's work demonstrates that discussions about old age are necessarily strange: its existence is relative to culture, its value is never absolute, and its use suggests an ever-present level of metaphorical thinking about age. These odd qualities are structural; the imperative to depict a body in time, as affected by the passage of time creates imagery that is necessarily contradictory and confusing. Much of this strangeness filters through to medieval depictions of age through Cicero's *De Senectute*, which I argue is both an intensely non-normative text and also one that seems to establish very normative guidelines for age-related representations. I concentrate here, not on the text itself, in Middle English or Latin, but rather discuss the work's added materials, textual additions made by Caxton, offering the opportunity to view how Caxton positions an old text with a long history and tradition of translation, for which the old body can serve as symbol. That the old text is characterized by prosthesis, in its rhetorical meaning of additions to its beginning, is clear. Yet, the text also maintains another prosthetic impulse: as a way to organize history and increase pleasure felt toward and by old men, *De Senectute* augments the position of the elderly man.

Caxton's imprinting of Cicero also foregrounds that the extra-textual material introduced by Caxton imagines translation and the movement of texts through time as a process similar to that of the aging of a body. Indeed, the thematics of these material objects—the discussion of old age and depictions of old age elsewhere in his corpus—demonstrate that Caxton's understanding of translation and printing is tied, perhaps implicitly, to the rewriting and erasure that age itself performs on the body. This connection between the corpus of the old man and the corpus of the old text often positions Caxton's prologues, epilogues, and translations as evidence of the old

body's power as metaphor for the written text. Central to a new reading not only of the Middle English translation of Cicero's *De Senectute*, but also and especially William Caxton's prologues and epilogues is the semantic range of the verb "reduce" and the related gerund "reducyng." The *MED* lists several definitions of the former and examples. The gerund has a more precise definition, and consequently fewer examples. Common to both is the denotation of a return to an original source and a surgical shade of meaning that refers to the setting of fractures and reduction of swelling. Indeed, the Middle English translation of Guy de Chauliac's book of surgery utilizes reduce and reducynge frequently in more than one usage. According to the *MED*, "reduce" as it is used there refers not only "to bring (a part of the body) back to health; restore (a quality); reinstate (sb.) in the possession of a right; surg. set (a broken or dislocated bone), restore (an organ) to its natural place," but also "to change (sth.) back; change (sth.), transform; alch. reduce; translate (a book); apply (sth. to a new or specific use); (b) to diminish (sth.); summarize (a discussion); (c) to reduce (a town to subjection)."<sup>54</sup> Both usages of "reduce" in de Chauliac's work (or rather the translated, interpreted, and intermediated work of de Chauliac) refer to specifically medical contexts; however, in the second example, it is clear that the ME word can also refer to more textual situations such as summation and translation.

Reducing the layers of meaning around a text by Cicero becomes analogous to the healing and retardation of age and age-related ailments. In this context of medical text, I argue the metaphors that can attach to Caxton's work flesh out further Caxton's own body, and the textual position he assumes. In *Recuyvells*, Caxton is clear when he blurs the boundaries between the page and his body, linking them together as surely as his pen and hand are connected. For *De Senectute* and *Eneydos*, Caxton's use of "reduce," allows old age to be not only as a medicalizing

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<sup>54</sup> Middle English Dictionary (MED), online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED36361&egs=all&egdisplay=open>.

corrective, but also as a return to textual beginnings, moral clarity, and earlier times, all connotations that the Middle English “reduce” carries. The French version of *De Senectute*, according to de Premierfait, is made into French for the Duke of Bourbon, the Middle English, according to Caxton in his prologue, is composed for John Falstof, whose will and estate figure large in the famous letters of the Paston family.<sup>55</sup> John himself is characterized in terms of age and time:

whiche book was translated and th’storyes openly declared by the ordenaunce and desyre of the noble auntyent knyght Syr Iohan Fastolf of the countee of Norfolk banerette, lyuyng the age of four score yere, excercisyng the warrys in the royaume of Fraunce and other countrees for the diffence and unyuersal welfare of bothe royames of Englund and Fraunce by fourty yeres enduryng / the fayte of armes hauntyng, and in admynystryng justice and polytique gouernaunce under thre kynges, that is to wete Henry the Fourth, Henry the Fyfthe, Henry the Syxthe; and was governour of the duchye of Angeou and the countee of Mayne, capytayn of many townys, castellys and fortressys in the said royaume of Fraunce, havyng the charge and saufgarde of them dyverse yeres. occupyeng and rewlyng thre honderd speres and the bowes acustomed thenne,<sup>56</sup>

Falstoff is called “the noble Auntyent knyght,” which recalls not only his great lineage and parentage, but also his age. Living to the age of eighty, John was indeed ancient by any measure. And within the already-extant framework surrounding *De Senectute*, Fastolf’s commission follows the aims of the text by its own measure: a book about old men, for old men. As with the original, Caxton’s imprint, both the earlier translation and later prologue, is both political and personal, related not only ideals of politics but also governance of the body. The old body should be regulated wisely, just as the state. Like the Roman senate, so called for the age of its members and their connection, implied and implicit, to age and wisdom, *De Senectute* both in

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel Wakelin discusses the translation by William Worcestre in *Humanism, Reading and English Literature: 1430-1530*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>56</sup> Caxton, ed. Blake, pp. 120-121.

Latin and in Middle English appears positioned as a text exalting age as a period of wisdom, centering itself as an old corpus that speaks to old *corpora*.

Directly following the description of the text's commission to Fastolf, who is implicitly situated as a modern-Cato, Caxton reveals how he views this translation. The syntax becomes confused, as Caxton muddles whether it is John Fastolf; Thomas, Duke of Clarence; or John, Duke of Bedford and regent of France who compels the translation. It is impossible to parse because of the lack of internal guidance. Equally, none of these figures is alive and involved with Caxton's literary activities in 1481. Nevertheless, he writes of the "commission"

to take this reducyng pacyently and submyttyng me to the amendyng and correction of the reder and understonder that is disposed to rede or have ony contemplacion in th'ystores of this book which were drawn and compyled out of the bookes of th'auncyent phylosophers of Grece, as in th'orygynal text of *Tullii: De Senectute* in Latyn or specyfyed compendiously, whiche is in maner harder the texte. But this book reduced in Englyssh tongue is more ample empownd and more swetter to the reder, kepyng the juste sentence of the Latyn.

Thenne for as moche as this book thus reduced into our Englyssh is with grete instaunce, labour and coste comen into myn honde, which I advyedly have seen, overredde and considered the noble, honeste and vertuous mater necessarily requysite unto men stepte in age and to yong men for to lerne how they owght to come to the same to which every man naturelly desyreth to atteyne.<sup>57</sup>

Caxton gives much information here, and it is worth considering just what he may mean. Most importantly, for discussion of senex style, is the use three times of "reduce" and "reducyng." First, however, is the confusion of history and chronology, fitting enough for a text that means to unite men "stepte in age" with those desirous of the same years. Caxton cannot possibly have been commission or received a call to print this text from any of the figures that he lists, any more than he could have received patronage from Cicero. Yet, I would argue, that is precisely the point. The text has, indeed, not only become Cicero but also the long string of early fifteenth

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

century political figures that he mentions. In fact, as an old man, steeped in age himself, Caxton seems to write that he submits not to any man in preparing this text but the text itself.

Indeed, as he changes into the writer and aged man which *De Senectute* demands, he also creates in himself the paradigm of the reader whom he explicitly evokes. This reader is “disposed” to amend and correct and to have “contemplacion” with the ancient stories in the work. As the quotation above demonstrates, that portrayal of the reader occurs lines before Caxton claims to have done the same: Caxton has “seen, overredde and considered” the text and its material. But for what purpose? It is clear that contemplation involves more than reading; it also seems to signify the act of identification with *De Senectute* and its morals and aims. I would like to return to the act of “reducyng” which is a word, thick with meaning. Indeed, the semantic range for the Middle English “reducyng” however is much richer and offers many more avenues than textual summation.<sup>58</sup> William Kuskin has drawn attention to Caxton’s use of “reducyng” and its unique force in his prologues and epilogues. “Reducyng’, on the other hand, is at once exclusively related to translation, and a more ambivalent term in general.”<sup>59</sup> Demonstrating that “reducyng” seems tied solely to translation, Kuskin also acknowledges the other, different meanings that inhere in uses of “reducyng.” A translation, correction to original text or idea, healing: all of these senses are carried in the word, and this “reducyng,” can and should be seen not only as the trace and development of the original theses about old age in the Ciceronian work, but also the textual healing which results from this text. For as the text moves along, it is clear that the vision of old age it presents is about health of the government, health of the individual, and the solace that accompanies recognition of and attention to a life, well lived. This

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<sup>58</sup> “Reduce.” Middle English Dictionary (MED): <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED36361&egs=all&egdisplay=open>

<sup>59</sup> William Kuskin, “Reading Caxton: Transformations in Capital, Authority, Print, and Persona in the Late Fifteenth Century,” *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (1999): pp. 149-183, (p. 181).

choice of word for a translation of a foundational treatise about old age locates the text at the crossroads of several discourses about old age: old age in an affective sense, old age in a biological and medicalized context, old age as a metaphor for texts and knowledge, and old age as a political category. This “reducyng” rather than restrict the metaphorical image of old age instead produces a wider set of semantic and contextual meanings and associations for old age, vivifying the depiction of an old body.

Reinforcing that the detritus around the original source text must be cleared as it is transferred from one language to another, even as that target language must retrieve it from an intermediary, Caxton’s positioning of translation as “reducyng” demonstrates that the pastness of a text can be both a blessing and a curse. Indeed, the current textual nature of *De Senectute* is at once old and cluttered; only through a return to first principles and true meanings, can the old body of the book be reduced, back to an even more ancient form. In a fitting expression of senex style, the reduction of a text as a translation positions the oldness of a text as both impairment and prosthetic, central to both its debilitating present state and key to its revival. Again, as with figures of old age in history, Caxton presents how a proper relationship to history and its materials can heal the old body, even as that old body holds the key to health for its readers. In other words, old age is both health and cure here.

Caxton’s use of “reducyng” is not unique to this work, however. His imprint and translation of Virgil’s *Eneydos* too makes use of this same construction of translation. Out of Latin and French, he has produced a reducying of the text, presumably to clear the meaning of the text for his English readership. Caxton’s use of words to describe translation encompass more than simply this “reducyng,” including “translated and drawn out of frenshe” (*The Recuyvell of the Historyes of Troye*); “translated out of frenshe into maternal tonge,” (*Cordayle*); and, among

others, “this book is maad for nede and proufftye of alle god folke” (*Reynart the Foxe*, 1st ed., 1481). His use of “reducyng” suggests that Caxton’s labor was more intimately involved, as its use often precedes his admission that the translation is his own. Indeed, considering the medical connotations attached to “reducyng,” Caxton’s own translating seems less a textual act, than a medical one: an incisive cut into literary history that produces texts that will heal, and are healthy.

The aged agency of the anonymous father and owner of *The Canterbury Tales* together with the impaired Anchises suggests the utility of the impaired old man for Caxton, who connects his reworking of a extant literary text and tradition to the body of the aged man implicitly through his repeated mentions of “reducyng.” The figure of an old man, central to literary production, but like Caxton removed from writing the text themselves, offers clear similarities to John Shirley. In this second half of this Chapter, I continue to trace how figures closely connected to the development of early English history are also figures who work within the contours of senex style. The continuing importance of style and “stylus” position Shirley as a appropriate subject. Much information is known about Shirley; his exemplars—both extant and lost—seem to have driven much of the growth of Chaucerian and Lydgatean reception. Finally, like Caxton, Shirley’s extra-textual materials, including his prologues, asides, and digressions, demonstrate an enduring link between the old body and old text, as both site of corporeal impairment and prosthetic addition.

Introducing Shirley’s tomb posits something about the influence of a metaphorical and figurative authority who symbolizes both bodily decay and lasting additions. The repetition and persistence of the importance of the old body, the resilience of the old text, and the ties among funeral inscriptions, manuscripts, and print productions are central to an examination of Shirley’s



late-in-life copying. Like Cicero, Shirley's life is seemingly supernaturally long. It is one that is textually lengthened by prosthetic of the pen, and he evokes senex style with his descriptions of pain and labor that color how he depicts manuscript preparations. His tomb, described by John Stow in his *Survey of London* posits the importance of Shirley's pen.

Behold how ended is our poore pilgrimage  
Of Iohn Shirley Esquier, with Margaret his wife,  
That xii. children had together in marriage,  
Eight sonnes and foure daughters withouten strife  
That in honor, nurtur, and labour flowed in fame,  
His pen reporteth his liues occupation,  
Since Pier his life time, Iohn Shirley by name,  
Of his degree, that was in Brutes Albion,  
That in the yeare of grace deceased from hen,  
Foureteene hundred winter, and sixe and fiftie,  
In the yeare of his age, fourescore and ten,  
Of October moneth, the day one and twenty.<sup>60</sup>

This tomb inscription is the only one which Stow enumerates partially or in full from the list of notables he gives who are buried in St. Bartholomew's. It seems rather commonplace mentioning the age of Shirley—he died at 90—and the year he died, 1465. Between the beginning, which lists in an ordinary fashion, his wife and children and the end, which describes his age and year of death, comes clues about his importance for John Stow and his book, illustrating the sites of medieval and early modern London. Noting that Shirley's "pen reporteth his liues occupation," Stow offers a reading of Shirley's importance, one which is tied up in the consolidation of the canon of English literature during the fifteenth century, and in the copying and lending of manuscripts, even in his quasi-retirement at St. Bartholomew's. After quoting this inscription, Stow then demonstrates Shirley's own value, which is emblematic of Shirley's importance for history, the then-current state of the arts in England, and Stow's own personal enjoyment.

Calling to mind obliquely Shirley's first career as diplomat and courtier, attached to Richard

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<sup>60</sup> John Stow, *A Survey of London: Reprinted from the text of 1603*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp. 23-24.

Beauchamp—whose father the Earl of Warwick was one of the Lords Appellant and the one figure of that triumvirate to survive the Revenge Parliament—Stow calls Shirley, “a great trauller in diuers countries.”<sup>61</sup> But beyond that footnote to military and political history, Stow remembers through the permanent citation of Shirley’s tomb, a greater accomplishment. According to Stow, Shirley “painelessly collected the workes of *Geffrey Chaucer*, *Iohn Lidgate* and other learned writers, which workes he wrote in sundry volumes to remayne for posterity. I have seene them, and do partly possesse them.”<sup>62</sup> This scribal act, repeated through Shirley’s life, together with his lending of manuscripts constitutes a performance of textual preservation that is near to unequaled in the fifteenth century. Indeed, Stow’s judgment that the creation of these manuscripts is one that creates objects for posterity is no hyperbole. While Shirley’s manuscripts rarely carry unique copies of texts, they seem to have made possible not only the transmission of certain texts throughout the fifteenth century, and into the sixteenth, his textual activities leave behind a trace of material practice showing how Chaucer’s and Lydgate’s canons cemented into their ongoing states. Provocatively, however, Stow’s reading of Shirley, through the supply of his tomb and inscription, and foregrounding of the man within a place, St Bartholomew’s, where both his tomb and his description within Stow’s volume lie, suggest something about Shirley and his last manuscripts that tie into senex style.<sup>63</sup>

If one is to accept the truth of tombs and their inscriptions, then Shirley’s posits both a very old man, old even by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, with its ever-increasing life expectancies. With this figure of Shirley in mind, and the range of his activities known at St. Bartholomew’s—he

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<sup>61</sup> Stow, 24. For a brief discussion of the performance given by the Earl of Warwick at the Revenge Parliament, see Chapter 3’s discussion of *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> In *Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Angus Vine catalogues the parallels among excavations of Stow’s London, an early modern interest in funeral rites and objects, and Stow’s own writing which details the excavation of the past.

not only seemed to have let rooms for the purpose of copying, but he also definitely copied MS Ashmole 59 here—the shape of senex style begins to emerge: the old man, possibly impaired, and definitely aged, still working, even as the position in a priory or monastic institution comes as close to retirement as someone slowing toward death in the late medieval period was likely to see. Shirley's acts of retirement, in retirement, where he tirelessly copies a very extensive manuscript recall that senex style is a rhetorical pose of age, either with explicitly-given impairments or not, that either is self-affirmed or grafted onto the subject by narrator, or here, monument to death. I read Shirley's engagement with the central paradox of senex style: while old and complaining of infirmity, the old man can and will continue to create and work, even if only in the crafting of these complaints of debility. This blending of impairment and ability foregrounds that, for both the old body and the old text, old figures created through senex style or ones that reflect this stylized old age, create impairment while simultaneously offering its cure or salve. In consideration of Henry Scogan's *Moral Balade* and these two copies of *Secretum*, I will show how these texts reflect the many dimensions of senex style, as it concerns copying and creation of texts, both through script and print, demonstrating through the shifting contours of counsel, reading, and morality. These texts advance that the aged body often continues to work and persist in those things thought impossible, even by the old figure himself.

It seems then appropriate then that, beyond the poetic pieces and histories which Shirley copied there and then at St. Bartholomew's, one notable text that Shirley executes and disseminates from St. Bartholomew. This text, a noted example of the *speculum principis*, posits that Alexander the Great needs advice from Aristotle, a former counselor, courtier, and tutor. On the battlefield, Alexander is ascendant, but Aristotle has aged and grown infirm. Asked by Alexander to join him in his campaigns, Aristotle supplies the excuse of his disabled body as

reason he cannot come. Instead, Aristotle sends both his excuse and a written text that becomes the basis for the *Secretum Secretorum*-tradition. While this advisory text dramatizes itself as a prosthetic replacement for a living counselor, it also creates a power dynamic that implicitly favors a subordinate position. According to Judith Ferster, the tradition of the *Secretum Secretorum* crystallizes in the tradition of the *furtenspiegel* a notion of paradox that is based upon power relations.

On one hand, it is widely agreed that the mirrors for princes take the ruler's point of view because the ruler is subordinate to and wants favor from the ruler. He consequently humbles himself, flatters the ruler, and promotes the appropriately hierarchical view of society in which rulers exercise power and subjects obey. But on the other hand, the contrary premise is equally and more subversively fundamental to the genre: To rule well, the king must be ruled.<sup>64</sup>

Central to the dynamic which this much copied and retranslated text produces is the show of power, both from the advisor, who, while holding the secret of secrets has great advantage, and the prince, who rules the advisor and the kingdom, with the right advice. It is precisely the sort of work from which one might expect the shadow of senex style to emerge, as it plays with different shades of inability and ability. And it is, indeed, the textual tradition of the *Secretum* which demonstrates that senex style is alive and well in Shirley's copying at St. Bartholomew.

At least two versions of *Secretum Secretorum* exist which are copied in John Shirley's hand. In the next chapter, which stresses an affective accounting of Chaucer's depictions of old age, I attend to the controversy surrounding Chaucer's lyric, "To Adam Sciveyn," and the possible changes made by John Shirley, a participant in the "Beauchamp Affinity," and resident till his death at St. Bartholomew's in London. In this concluding this chapter, I continue the investigation of senex style through an extended reading of Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 59, an anthology compiled by Shirley at St. Bartholomew's. There is no shortage of historical materials that relate to the founding of St. Bartholomew's. The archive, located at the still-

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<sup>64</sup> Ferster, p. 40

functioning, though much changed hospital in West Smithfield contains a seal from Rahere, the 12th-century founder. Documentary evidence abounds for the priory and hospital had an seemingly ever-contentious relationship, one that ends in the fifteenth century, a century before the priory's dissolution. It is equally true that scholars have investigated MS Ashmole 59 and also Shirley's scribal activity and his time at St. Bartholomew's, but what is missing is the emphasis of the relationship among age, place, and text. The consequences of that relationship are wide-ranging for late-medieval English literature and a new conception of literary history founded upon historically-old bodies and the imagery of them.

Both Shirley and St. Bartholomew record a movement figurative and literal from court to city, to saintly and scribal liberty outside the walls. The vita of Rahere, founder of St. Bartholomew's chronicles a move from youth to a more sober age, and the bequeathing of control of St. Bartholomew's to an aged canon, Alfun. The founding of St. Bartholomew presents a literal reworking of the lifecycle as a reflection of material practice, as the foundation narrative depicts movement from youth to age, a narrative enriched by Shirley's own retirement there. A center for corodies in the 14th and 15th century, St. Bartholomew's was not always so, as the palimpsest of topographical spaces is imagined in the founding document of St. Bartholomew's. Originally part of the king's demesne, St. Bartholomew presents an anointing of this space, that is dedicated to the punishment of criminals. This layer of history never disappears, as the textual object that attests to its presence persists, and the rupture of brutal history onto the priory and hospital doesn't end. In 1381, Wat Tyler, nominally head of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, dies at St. Bartholomew, at least according to chroniclers such as Henry Knighton. The examination of Shirley at St. Bartholomew then frames a retirement from court, which is not complete, as the presence of Shirley, former employ of Richard Beauchamp,

reputed kingmaker of the early and mid-fifteenth century, at St. Bartholomew makes clear.<sup>65</sup>

Contextualizing Shirley's decision to rent rooms and retire at St. Bartholomew is fairly easy.

Considering Hoccleve's complaints tying age and poverty in *The Regiment of Princes*, Shirley probably would have found the alternatives, if any existed, less than appealing. St.

Bartholomew's was one of the richest and largest institutions of London. While located outside the walls, it served as a center of scribal activity, owing to its status as one of the liberties of the city. It is speculated that Shirley's ties to the Beauchamp affinity procure for him a place at Bartholomew, and while there, Shirley continues to record the hardening boundaries of the Middle English canon.<sup>66</sup>

In *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages*, Richard Firth Greene briefly discusses the then-available evidence and examinations of Shirley's life at St. Bartholomew's. While Margaret Connolly's book was not yet written, his conclusions and tentative suggestions for Shirley's life still largely obtain.

Shirley rented the shops as part of a property in Saint Bartholomew's Hospital Close, in which he lived from 1444 until his death twelve years later, but, in common with a number of other elderly and well-to-do tenants, he may have chosen this residence because the hospital precinct was a pleasant and salutary place to retire to, rather than any commercial opportunities it might have offered.<sup>67</sup>

Referencing the argument of Miss Hammond, for whom the Hammond scribe is also named,

Firth Greene casts doubt on her argument "connecting these shops with the copying and selling

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<sup>65</sup> Christine Carpenter, following K.B. MacFarlane's innovations on "bastard feudalism" discusses the Beauchamp Affinity in "The Beauchamp Affinity: A Study of Bastard Feudalism at Work," *English Historical Review* 95 (1980): pp. 514-532. "The outer circles of the affinity included annuitants apparently holding no office—several of these were lawyers, presumably retained for their professional expertise—minor estate officials, receivers, bailiffs drawn mostly from the lesser gentlemen and yeomen, and finally a more indefinite circle of well-wishers and personal connections, whose existence can usually only be inferred, principally from frequency of association on legal documents, but is sometimes confirmed by their appearance as co-defendants or fellow plaintiffs with the earl." (p. 516). Her view of several concentric circles of influence with the earl stationed in the center is an enduring one.

<sup>66</sup> Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), p. 164.

<sup>67</sup> Greene, p. 131.

of manuscripts,” calling it “speculative.”<sup>68</sup> It is clear, nonetheless, in spite of the hazy picture of commercialism or amateurism that might define Shirley’s activities, the view of St.

Bartholomew’s as a place of retirement is both upheld by Firth Greene’s description, even as the record of Shirley’s continuing activities poses somewhat of a qualification to that ceasing of work. For as he later notes, the texts that can be connected to Shirley can also suggestively be tied to his former existence as a retainer within the Beauchamp affinity. Affirming the non-commercial aspects of Shirley’s production, Firth Greene advances that as a figure connected to the earl of Warwick, “it seems quite possible that the scribal activities of his later years were in large measure inspired by a love of courtly literature and an antiquarian’s concern to rescue it from obscurity.”<sup>69</sup> I want to further these speculations. In fact, the material that Shirley copies and produces at St. Bartholomew’s not only posits the role of that former life in his choice of texts but also his current position as retiree from court and aging man. That Ashmole MS 59 is a book about counsel seems fitting in light of Chapter Two’s engagement with age and advice. Further that *Secretum Secretorum* takes the shifting relationship between power and advice to a corporeal level of simultaneous ability and impairment—Aristotle is too old and feeble to produce his advice in person but his textual prosthesis supplies the same result—makes Shirley’s choice to reproduce this text at least twice significant.

For indeed, as these examples show, Shirley offers a layered vision of how manuscripts were produced, used, copied, and passed along. Reframing what has been a fruitful discussion of Shirley within the boundaries of this study results in an examination that looks closely at Shirley’s own age, his location at St. Bartholomew’s, and manuscripts of *Secretum Secretorum* to demonstrate that Shirley’s old age both symbolizes a more expansive view of literary history

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

and a recognition that in terms of impairment and prosthetic, the old body mirrors the old text. As a past reflection of Caxton's enlargement of the old man to account for literary history and transmission, Shirley's old agency too suggests that senex style can enlarge what is known and described by literary inheritance and progression. By presenting his embodied age alongside the transmission of historical and literary information, Shirley bequeaths a literary canon refracted through the lens of an old man. While no one view of Shirley's role at St. Bartholomew is conclusive—was he renting professional book shops or just retiring and informally helping to solidify the foundations of late-medieval English?—his position in the literary inheritance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is by no means normative generation and re-generation. He is no father to Lydgate, and no son of Chaucer, but rather a side figure, important in his lateral dimensions, but not central in a reproductive and generative sense of progression. It is telling that Shirley's manuscript work *can* be understood in the language of filial piety, reproduction, and the creation of heirs, but this move is meaningful, as it highlights the shortcomings of such language.<sup>70</sup> In order to highlight how senex style reflects in the production of these manuscripts and qualifies a strictly paternal understanding of literary progressions, I turn first to *Secretum Secretorum* and its depiction of the ailing Aristotle.

In one version of *Secretum*, contained in British Library, MS Add. 5467 ff. 211-224<sup>v</sup>, the narrative rehearses the story of its origination, in terms that date the work and its subject. From the beginning of *The Gouvernance of Kynges and Prynces Cleped the Secrete of Secretes*, John Shirley dramatizes the journey of *Secretum* from Greek to French to English. It is posited implicitly as an old story, unsurprisingly to anyone familiar with the textual issues surrounding the *Secretum*. The number of manuscripts and copies available for this work, as well as the

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<sup>70</sup> See for example, Linne R. Mooney's provocative use of the language of inheritance in her discussion of Shirley's manuscripts as exemplars in "John Shirley's Heirs," *Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): pp. 182-198.



number lands, languages, and years through which the text travels are numerous.<sup>71</sup> From Greek to French, Shirley writes, and “out of Frensh into oure moders tonge by your humble suget and seruyture Johan Shirley in the last | dayes of his grete age,” the book has been prepared, in “his ignorant feblesse.”<sup>72</sup> Continuing, Shirley advises his presumed noble reader “to correct, adde, and amounse, there as youre fauourable gentylesse best liketh.”<sup>73</sup> This beginning, and the subsequent discussion of Shirley’s textual choices and methods should make clear that while Shirley is not working in print, the terms of his manuscript production as he presents them are remarkably similar to what Caxton does with his own prologues, epilogues, and extra-textual material. But there is another story here as well. The gesture toward Caxton recalls that like Shirley, Caxton’s later works exhibit a portrait of the artist/compiler/printer/scribe as an old man, and together the usual invitation to correct, add, or improve, even as age is portrayed implicitly as a revision of the printer or scribe’s body. Seth Lerer, in his book-length study of the fifteenth century reception of Chaucer’s work, remarks extensively on John Shirley’s scribal activities *and* his age, including this passage, noting, “Shirley was anywhere from sixty-five to eighty when these texts were written, and it has long been assumed that he began his scribal enterprises as an old man.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the link between Shirley’s great age and his great works is one that is quite enduring. We might term John Shirley’s tenure at St. Bartholomew’s Priory, *Of Olde Age*, as his advanced years compel both the scribe himself and later critics to concentrate, at least on the surface, on Shirley’s age.

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<sup>71</sup> Consult M.A. Manzalaoui, “Introduction,” in *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. M.A. Manzalaoui, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): pp. ix-l.

<sup>72</sup> John Shirley, *The Governance of Kynges and Prynces Cleped the Secrete of Secretes*, in *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. M.A. Manzalaoui, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): pp 229-313. (p. 229) The text is printed on the bottom half of the odd pages, with the French version which Shirley presumably translated, printed on facing pages. I have also had the good fortune of seeing the original manuscript and checking these quotations against my own transcriptions.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>74</sup> Lerer, p. 129.

More accurately, I will argue that more than inscribing his own age onto his manuscripts, the age of his manuscripts and their subjects have been inscribed on him. Shirley's own age and his work confirms what his manuscripts themselves suggest. In other words, Shirley is read as a figure would be according to my accounting of senex style, because he himself fits the profile of an old man, claiming impairment, complaining of it, and continuing to create. Like Aristotle, his infirmity not only is at the center of his role as copier, but also authorizes that role. MS Ashmole 59 makes this movement clear, beginning as it does with a version of *Secretum Secretorum*.

Unlike Ashmole MS 59, Add. MS 5467 places its version of *Secretum* at the end, where unfortunately the manuscript breaks off, and the text remains incomplete. Like Ashmole MS 59, however, Add. MS 5467—though not in Shirley's hand—could be described as having a similar range of texts devoted to didacticism and counsel, which include John Lydate's *Stans Puer Ad Mensam*, the *Boke of Gode Maners*, and a translation of a chronicle of King James of Scotland and his death. Central to all these texts is the position of the learned advisor, counselor, or teacher, who very often is old. Connolly dates this manuscript to ca. 1460, and like Ashmole, counts numerous errors which she traces to Shirley's translation practice.

Both for Ashmole MS 59 and Add. MS 5467, one central focus of the versions of their respective *Secretums* is the presentation of Aristotle, introduced at the beginning of both texts. He gives excuses why he cannot answer Alexander's queries in person and gives as a primary explanation the pain of his body and the extent of his age-related impairments. The debility that Aristotle *always* claims in the versions of *Secretum* maintain the opportunity for the text itself. The *Secretum* is a text born out of a wise man's desire to leave the arena of power, and the younger ruler's insistence on having that counsel. The letters between Aristotle and Alexander are without any historical basis; they are an invention of the *Secretum*-tradition. Yet, they also

serve as requirement for the text to be written; like Shirley, Aristotle must write his way back to power having retired from the environs of action and in-person counsel.

This rationale for creating the book goes farther. In fact, as the words of Aristotle make clear, not only does his body make the creation of the book possible, as the collection of old wisdom and counsel, it *becomes* the body of Aristotle. Chapter 3 of the *Decretum Aristotelis*, the title given to the version of *Secretum* in Ashmole MS 59, explains Aristotle's reasons for avoiding an in-person meeting with Aristotle

And as I have vnderstonde, glorious lord, þat I were with þee by þi gret desire and wille, and þat þou mervylest þee howe I may absteyne me from þee and þi presence, and þat I am nought tendre ne desirous for to here of þe gode spede of þine so honorable conquest and prudence þe wheoche þou haste emprysed and thenkest to perfourne, for þe whiche cause I purpose to make þee a litel boke canonet, þat shall yif þee myn avise inne, þe which shall muche helpe for to enhaunce, and beo valliance for to instructe þee tacomplisshe all þyne enperiale desirous courages, and suffiaunte excuse for me þat I come not to þyne hye emperial presence, þe whiche shal beo to þee opun and verray instruccion of alle þy doutes and demandes as aughe I were in persone eche houre with þee...But wit þou it weele, incomperable conquerour, þat I let not for none yvell wille þat I bere to þine conqueste and enhexaltacion of þine honour, but by cause in especiall boþe of gret age þat I am charged with, and feoblesse of my weyke persone, haue made me hevy and ful vnable for to goo any longe weye.<sup>75</sup>

And what will this book contain, but “þe knowlegge and þinvestigacion of gode dedis and þe olde secretes and doctrines of olde worþy men, filosofrus, and juges, þe wheoche God hape chosen, and given them sapience for to introduce oper.”<sup>76</sup> The book, the advice, will come from an old man and concentrate on old figures and figurations. While Aristotle is “tendre” toward Alexander, he tenders the book instead, as his “feoblesse” and “gret age” preclude any other sort of visitation. It seems from this rhetorical positioning of the book, however, that Aristotle is in fact unnecessary, as both he and the book appear to be the same: old *corpora* necessary for the

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<sup>75</sup> Shirley, p. 205.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

execution of proper rule. This yoking of “feblesse” and “gret age” recalls that these words are an almost exact reflection of the same language used by Shirley to introduce the text of *Secretum* in Add. MS 5467. Indeed, the activities of Shirley confirm that like the textualized Aristotle, in spite of an apparently weak body and great age, he continues to produce, advise, and direct the dissemination of these literary texts.

This valuation of the impaired old man, as important and central for empire building will occur again, and outside of this textual tradition. The chapter’s previous investigation of Anchises suggested that in spite of that figure’s feebleness and decrepit nature, he was positioned within the text as the holder of tradition and history. His body, too, was “hevy” with pain and impairment, like Aristotle’s, but his weight was light for the young Aeneas, who able, needed the addition of his father to continue his journey. And Aristotle’s additions to Alexander’s counseling and teaching are born out of impairment, which reflects back not only on Shirley, but also the texts he copies. This connection between Aristotle and Shirley is more than skin deep: in the only book-length study of John Shirley, Margaret Connolly organizes her work according, partly, to his own scribal canon. In Chapter 7, she examines MS Ashmole 59, the last extant anthology, and the manuscript copied at St. Bartholomew’s. Followed by a chapter on lost manuscripts and Shirley’s successors, Connolly is self-conscious in this section of Shirley’s physical body: “This means that by the time he compiled Ashmole 59, Shirley must have been over eighty, if the reports of his age are to be believed, and even if they are not, he would still have been a very old man. It is perhaps not surprising then that the volume’s organisation is somewhat haphazard and the state of its texts flawed.”<sup>77</sup> Further, Shirley’s eyesight might have been failing by the time he compiled Ashmole 59, and his other faculties might have been waning. Like the old men described the Aristotle of the *Rhetoric*, Shirley too lived apparently by

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<sup>77</sup> Connolly, p. 152.

memory, living in the past, depending on his recollections of past exemplars to create a text, that in MS Ashmole 59, is marked not only by the manuscript's incomplete nature but also its many mistakes.<sup>78</sup> He would certainly have been much advanced in years by this stage, and the combination of physical or mental decrepitude might well account for some of the textual discrepancies in misreading. But should we take that story for granted? Even as senex style highlights these stories of debility and bodily impairment, works that reflect this stylized old age regard old age as stylized. The Reeve, Gower in *Pericles*, Caxton on the page: these figures speak of a plural old age, shared by all and common to each. Like Aristotle in *Secretum* and Shirley at St. Bartholomew's, they all participate as disabled figures who use their bodily woes to authorize, create, and extend the reach and power of the printed word.

Apart from the use of scribal memory and the workings of age, the dimensions of scribal practices and scribal locations might describe these characteristics of haphazard organization and apparent "misreadings" in both Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 59 and British Library, Add. MS 5467. Diffusion of texts through different yet related exemplars could affect his copying, as Yeager demonstrates in his investigation of Chaucer's *Complaint*. Perhaps Shirley had access to exemplars that are now lost or unidentified and these unknown manuscripts might explain what Connolly and others ascribe to the failings of age. This explanation is as plausible as one centered on age. Indeed, scribal locations such as St. Bartholomew's were close to St. Paul's, a center of London book trade and Bartholomew's itself was a scribal liberty, an oasis of textual production outside the walls of the city. At Bartholomew's, the Hammond scribe among others labored, and given that Shirley lent manuscripts out at this location, it is a small leap to think he borrowed them as well. Connolly is careful to allow for such a possibility, even as she maintains always in discussions of Ashmole MS 59 that age *probably* explains its copying. "Such variation

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

might of course signify a different textual tradition, or a conscious process of emendation by Shirley himself as he worked from his exemplar, but a faulty memory playing tricks on an old man might also explain the alterations.”<sup>79</sup>

While Connelly is sufficiently skeptical of using Shirley’s age as too great a crutch for understanding the genesis of this book of counsel, for her, his age is an important factor. “Although Shirley’s age and infirmity are factors which need to be taken into account when considering the state of the texts in Ashmole 59, they need not be relied upon to explain every discrepancy.”<sup>80</sup> I wonder here if we as readers have taken the rhetorical excesses of a topos of infirmity and age too much at face value. In fact, as I have shown and will continue to do, this rhetorical pose of age as impairment and inability is common for these writers, and perhaps reflects a realization of its own historicity as a claim and as an authorizing gesture. Like pseudo-Aristotle who gives his own infirmity as explicit excuse for not giving advice and as implicit gesture of authorization, scribes such as Shirley surely understood that the pose of oldness and being old was one that placed one in a historical progression from at least Maximianus, writing in the sixth century.

In view of this authorizing gesture—retiring from the center of power, only to gain power—an extended look at the role of Aristotle within the text illuminates how Shirley’s age reflects Aristotle’s own description, and perhaps serves as an in-text rationale for the construction of the text itself. Shirley exists in the wider expanses of suburban London and is in his age somewhat disconnected from the centers of power at court. Indeed, what Connelly sees in the marginal qualities of Shirley’s introductions and notations of personal information on his manuscript page is a reflection of this distance. “One no longer has the sense that Shirley is

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 156

closely involved in a network of court and civic connections; though still the receiver of occasional snatches of gossip, he more often seems to be remembering circumstances from years past.”<sup>81</sup> These intrusions from the past mark Ashmole 59, and the other texts he produces and copies in his last, great age. This bleeding of the personal onto the edge of the page is nowhere more apparent than in Shirley’s copying of Henry Scogan’s *Moral Balade*.

Scogan, at least in the context of this study of senex style, should be entirely familiar. It is Chaucer’s short lyric to Scogan that comprises, I argue, Chaucer’s own involvement in senex style, and marks its narrator as one close to the Reeve in narrative strategy. Scogan, Chapter Three will argue, was part of a coterie of courtly figures whose investments in poetry and patronage somewhat defined late medieval English literary culture. As a tutor to the royal children of Lancastrian England, Scogan seems an appropriate figure with which to end this discussion of claimed impairment and actual ability, which is so often given in the genre of the *speculum principis* in the fifteenth century, and to showcase the slippage between the old body and the text, both impaired, both prosthetic.

In Robert Epstein’s study of Chaucer’s *L’Envoy to Scogan* and Scogan’s *Moral Balade* which subsumes Chaucer’s *Gentillesse* in Ashmole MS 59, he writes of the topos of inability that prevades the poem. “This is the age of poets like Hoccleve and Lydgate and, somewhat later, George Ashby, with their exaggerated topoi of inability, and their chronic and conspicuous impecuniousness.”<sup>82</sup> It seems natural then to open with a declaration of one’s faulty hand or wavering pen or bleary eye. In spite of the gesture’s programmatic nature, I do continue to insist that the gesture, while commonplace, offers something of a linkage from Chaucer to Caxton, even as it suggests the hollowness of the claim of impairment. As Epstein’s choice of words

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<sup>81</sup> Connolly, p. 161.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Epstein, “Chaucer’s Scogan and Scogan’s Chaucer,” *Studies in Philology* 96:1 (1999): pp. 1-21 (p. 15).

show, the specter of inability is not simply lack of talent or want of words. Exaggerated, chronic, and conspicuous all are words that might in fact justifiably be used within the recently-constituted field of Disability Studies. Exaggerated and conspicuous could be used in examinations of passing and visible and invisible impairments, while chronic with its denotations of time could be utilized in studies of illness and bodily pains and disorders which occur over time and are characterized by their rhythmic or repetitious nature.

Aware as I am that I am both stretching Epstein's meaning and the nature of impairment in premodern texts, a look at Scogan's depiction of age within the poem seems a necessary and salutary corrective to charges of overreading or overreaching.

For verray shame, knowe yee not, by raisoun,  
That affter an ebbe there comethe a flode rage?  
Right even so, whane youthe passethe his saysoun,  
Comthe croked and unweldy palled age;  
Soone affter that komthe kalendes of dotage;  
And of youre youthe no vertue have provyded,  
Alle folke wol seye: "Fye on youre vasellage!"  
Thus hathe youre youthe and slouthe you al misgyded.<sup>83</sup>

In his poem, which seeks within a Ciceronian vein, to motivate those youths hearing or reading it to preserve their moral power and gird for a coming age, Scogan fashions old age in terms that are equally evocative both of power and impairment. After the ebb of youth, he writes, comes a violent flood. This flood is likened to the onset of age, "croked and unweldy palled age," that comes roaring in, like waves following the ebb of the sea, even as its description dramatizes its appearance in terms that foreground physical impairment. "Unweldy" limbs reflect the power of Old Age to destroy and maim the body: the Reeve uses this exact image and a form of this adjective together with limbs to record the withering of bodies in old age. Yet, even as

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<sup>83</sup> Henry Scogan, *Moral Balade, The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Selection*, ed. Kathleen Forni (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), ll. 142-149. All citations of *Moral Balade* refer to this edition by line number. The introduction is presumably by Shirley, as it is in his hand in Ashmole MS 59. For purposes of clarification and brevity, I cite the entire poem, including Shirleian introduction with the same notation.



impairment describes this age, it comes crashing down on one as a wave, prompting Scogan to warn his listener to prepare for age.

Within the first lines of Henry Scogan's *Moral Balade*, he displays both the audience to whom he writes the poem and the self-deprecating pose that characterizes the entire text of the work and the theme of youth misspent and old age grievous and hard which he attempts to convey from the beginning

My noble sonnes and eke my lordes dere,  
I, youre fadre called, unworthely,  
Sende unto yowe this balade folowing here,  
Writen of myne owen hande ful rudely; (1-4)

Shirley attempts in his colophon before to flesh out these "lordes dere," and his text has proven influential in later investigations of the coterie of men who perhaps, with Scogan, participated in an informal group of noble men who exchanged poetry. Regardless of the audience, the responsibility for the sentiments which this ballad present are claimed within the first stanza by Scogan. The image of these lines "Writen of myne owen hande ful rudely" recall the modesty topos as it has been examined in this study. Scogan's *Moral Balade* further ties this hande not merely to postures of modesty but specifically to age. Indeed, following Scogan's portrayal of old age as crooked, the poem summarizes in terms of ability what has been the subject of the entire poem: a call to order one's youth correctly to produce "a parfyte floured age." (48).

This impulse to correct and to advise within the constraints of age both produces the image of old age as debilitating, even as it shows old age to be the impetus for the poem's entire narration.

I compleye sore whane I remembre me  
The sodeyne age that is upon me falle;  
More I compleyne my mispent juventé,  
The whiche is impossible ageine to calle;  
But comunely, the moste compleynte of alle  
Is foreto thenke that I have been so nyce,

And that I wolde no vertue to me calle  
In al my youthe, but vyces ay cheryce. (9-16)

Thinking upon his own age makes Scogan complain sorely, as his body sorely feels the effects.

The change from young man to old man is one which the poet calls “sodeyne” and irreversible.

Central, however, to this construction of old age is that it does not impair Scogan’s memory, and

this continuation of mental power is at the forefront of his poetic and didactic enterprise. While

he cannot recall his youth in the sense of embodying it again, he can mentally recall it and this

inability on one hand to possess youth and power on the other hand to touch it in memory

appears a grievous burden. Thinking of what he has lost and what he retains serves as a

motivation to warn others and to complain of his own misfortune.

Indeed, his last stanza makes this continuation of complaint a promise.

I cane more, but hereby may yee se,  
Howe vertue causethe perfyte sikurnesse,  
And vyces done exyle prosperitee;  
The beste is eche to cheesen, as I gesse.  
Dothe as yowe list, I me excuse expresse;  
I wil be sorye if that yee mischeese.  
God you conferme in vertuous goodnesse,  
So that thorughe necgligence yee nothing leese. (182-189)

Scogan’s list of disadvantages to a misspent youth and a grievous old age that can but remember

the lost opportunities of a moral youth is both capacious and concise. But, in keeping with senex

style and its celebration of impaired ability, he writes he “cane more,” even as Scogan states that

his reader or hearer can “see” the wisdom of his own folly.

### Occluding Hoccleve? Fully Lacking in Senex Style

It seems clear that in spite of brick and mortar tombs, presumably containing decaying bodies, the fifteenth century inaugurates a period of haunting literary influence that defines, both through affirmation and denial, much of the poetic output produced through King Henry VIII's reign. Although not discussed in this study, John Skelton's earlier creation of Ricardian poets and their afterlives as judges in the court of the Queen of Fame is one of many which one might catalogue as indicative of the haunted poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But haunted now by the specter of dullness—Lerer calls fifteenth century poetry “practically unreadable”—this position of the undead in poetry of the fifteenth century is connected to old age and the lifecycle. The role of the dead, it has been argued, is an important one for the medieval view of the lifecycle, constituting almost a separate age group. Following Roberta Gilchrist, who has argued that “the medieval life course was conceptualized as a continuum which spanned life, death, and the afterlife,” I want to advance some suggestions about Chaucer's finger in Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* and Gower's ghostly presence in the same text.<sup>84</sup> The resurrected Chaucer and gravely Gower, by their presence in Hoccleve's *Regiment* and the effect of their poetics on Hoccleve's corpus of work from the *Regiment* to the *Series* gesture to the role of old age, death, and senex style, as Hoccleve learns from two masters. The visual image of a pointing Chaucer, drawing one's attention to Hoccleve's words on the page has been well-discussed.<sup>85</sup> It was an important moment for Chaucerian reception. Yet, the question remains: is

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<sup>84</sup> Gilchrist, p. 19.

<sup>85</sup> For example, see Nicholas Perkins, “Haunted Hoccleve? *The Regiment of Princes*, The Troilean Intertext, and Conversations with the Dead,” *Chaucer Review* 43:2 (2008): pp. 103-139; Knapp, “Eulogies and Usurpations: Father Chaucer in the *Regement of Princes*,” in *Bureaucratic Muse*, pp. 107-127; and David R. Carlson, “Thomas Hoccleve and the Chaucer Portrait,” *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization* 54:4 (1991): pp. 283-300.

there more to learn about Hoccleve's use of the young man, the old man, the dying man, and the dead man?

This mirroring of two masters finds reflection in Hoccleve's own use of senex style, in which he creates a in-text persona which is both autobiographical in nature but also inhabits a position on the lifecycle opposite that of Hoccleve outside the text. Hoccleve's in-text personae, in fact, often reflect the inverse of what is known of his autobiography. In *La Male Regle*, for example, Hoccleve, as a weary old man in his poem, castigates his younger (and past) self for his profligate ways. This poem is almost certainly not a product of Hoccleve's mature age but rather his youth. The *Regiment* defines Hoccleve as a poet in the middle of his life and development, containing both his childish wisdom to his younger patron, and the creation of an old man, who has been described both as a "figure of wise counsel" and "an embodiment of exactly the future Hoccleve tells us he fears."<sup>86</sup> Later works, such as *Lerne to Dye* and *The Tale of Jonathas* suggest through their construction of youthful figures the breaking of a correspondence between Hoccleve's real age and his textual one.

Hoccleve's poetry echoes workings of the life cycle in late medieval England, by incorporating all available stations, from child to corpse, into his poetry. Senex style, as stylized old age, can at first seem inappropriate for such a wide range of available and embodied temporal positions. But, viewing Hoccleve within senex style makes clear that even his young persona create positions of impaired old age, which through its depiction, becomes yet another way to authorize poetry and position in the fifteenth century. Critics have characterized Hoccleve's practice as "beggar poetics," but, without supplanting that name, I suggest his ties to senex style produce a kind of "elderly poetics," that reproduce a figure that is both ailing and

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<sup>86</sup> Knapp, 115.

able, and simultaneously old even when he describes young Hoccleve, characterizes his wit as childish, or depicts a young man dying young.

In spite of a lingering view that Hoccleve's poetry is dull and drab, this examination of his poetic corpus demonstrates how he positions himself as a unique poet in the fifteenth century, producing a stylized old age that reflects even in youth. In order to avoid a self-reinforcing view of Hoccleve's poetry as barely poetry, childish, and inferior, readers should be cautious of accepting *prima facie* Hoccleve's claims to dullness. Dullness is merely a tool and rhetorical posture which allows him to tie himself to past poets, by way of his own inferiority. Old age, likewise, is a position that haunts his youth, even when young, and in the specter of broken and poor old age, Hoccleve seeks both advancement and authorization. Central to this elision of difference among the ages is the figure of the Old Man and the long exemplum of John of Canace in *Regiment*. I read *Regiment of Princes* within a context of tutelage, a position in which a rhetorically young Hoccleve in *Regiment* assumes to give an realistically much younger prince advice. Reading Hoccleve's dominating submission to Henry, in a reversal of age roles, reflects on the confusion of roles between poet and master and suggests tutelage as a charged context. It can result in good government and religious orthodoxy, but can also lead to disastrous consequences, as the example of Richard II's own tutor proves.

The role of senex style in the posture of Hoccleve as tutor concerns more than just the advice given to princes, even as the vision of Hoccleve which one can see in his fifteenth- and sixteenth century reputation and afterlife appears to depend entirely on his advisory roles. From princely advice in *Regement* to his role of disciple and master as evidenced by William Browne's *Shepherd's Pipe*, his works often are read, recommended, and reflected through his engagement with advice, tutelage, and pedagogy, postures which also often demonstrate slippery positions

with respect to age and tutelage. A poem such as *La Male Regle*, for instance, troubles an easy link between old age and wisdom. The role of dissolute youth which Hoccleve claims forces the recognition that even bankrupt in money and morals, this youthful Hoccleve continually teaches the aging Hoccleve a lesson. Further, *La Male Regle* also highlights that the twisting of student and teacher with regard to age is a phenomenon which recalls the contours of senex style. The position embraced by the old Hoccleve, broken in body and bereft of money, demonstrates that rhetorically Hoccleve claims a lack of material support and corporeal ability, even as his hands continue to create.

I will argue, in fact, that the position of tutor *and* student is one that Hoccleve consistently inhabits. In order to demonstrate the contours of these shifting pressures on teacher and student, age and youth, it is necessary to examine this Hocclevean afterlife through both the almost-complete erasure of Hoccleve from early printed materials, and flesh out this deletion of Hoccleve in the context of his *La Male Regle* and reworking of the *Tale of Jonathas*, taken from *The Gesta Romanorum*. I want to further connect these narratives with early print culture in a somewhat difficult and unexpected way. The sole mention of Hoccleve in Caxton's printed corpus occurs in Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*, a book addressed to "Litel Iohn." Mention of Hoccleve in this work is fleeting, but necessary as it emphasizes that pedagogical aspects of poetry connect Chaucer and Gower to Hoccleve and Lydgate in a literary progression that is positioned as a primer for children's proper reading.

Using tutelage as a contextualizing gesture and a work by Caxton to express the contours of that context, creates a literary linkage, based in part on lack, for Caxton never prints Hoccleve's *Regiment* or his *Lerne for to Dye*. Unlike Chaucer's *Melibee* and the other Tales, including the *Boece*, considered perhaps the most dogged of the doggerel of Chaucer's corpus,

which Caxton does print, his lone mention of Hoccleve seems to just exist in the aforementioned *Curtesye*, a work in the spirit of Lydgate's *Stans Puer Ad Mensam*. Hoccleve exists as a cipher in this text, an author one *ought* to know, if no way exists for that knowledge. For, at least from Caxton, much of what exists is a printed critical silence of an author considered necessary for education and upbringing, but for whom Caxton-produced editions are not extant. While Caxton never chose to print Hoccleve in part or his work in its entirety, he does translate and remake Jacobus de Cessolis' *De ludo scacchorum* in the *Game and Playe of the Chess*, a text used also by *Regiment of Princes* and a place where one could read the exemplum of John of Canace.<sup>87</sup> Caxton chooses instead to erase Hoccleve from his version of English literary history, ignoring that Caxton is retracing in many ways the footsteps of Hoccleve.<sup>88</sup> According to William Kuskin,

Caxton knew of Hoccleve's *Regement* but did not print it; indeed, Hoccleve is at once everywhere in Caxton--in his abiding interest in discussing literary production; in the terms of his praise of Chaucer; in the genre at the heart of all his writing, autobiography; and even his addition to *De ludo scacchorum* gravitates to a discussion of Chancery's "hell"--yet nowhere to be found in his portfolio.<sup>89</sup>

While this lacuna troubles the incorporation of Hoccleve into a literary genealogy that has largely followed the steps of printers such as Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, along with scribes such as John Shirley, it also offers an opportunity to make connections among the two figures. Indeed, what author or compiler or scribe of the early fifteenth century spills more ink on the narrative of himself, including his every pain and ailment than Hoccleve, and who could deny the similarity of Caxton's own gossipy accounts of his own textual production and amplification of his aging body? Indeed, similarities in the modes of work prove productive as well: both

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<sup>87</sup> William Kuskin, "The Erasure of Labor: Hoccleve, Caxton, and the Information Age," *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 229-260

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

strictly create text as much as they reproduce it, Hoccleve as author and scribe, and Caxton as translator, prologue-creator, and printer.

Even so, Caxton's efforts to paper over the influence of Hoccleve have been largely successful, strictly speaking from a perspective of source studies and literary allusion. Charles Blyth in his introduction to the *Regiment of Princes* summarizes the dearth of influence held by Hoccleve's poetry, and in particular *Regiment*.

Since the 1970s, Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* has received a degree of attention it had not had since the century in which the poem was written. While the 43 surviving manuscripts, all written between the poem's composition in 1410-11 and the end of that century, attest to its notability, William Caxton did not choose to print it, and as against the frequent salutes to the trinity of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate in the poetry of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Hoccleve receives just one mention.<sup>90</sup>

Tellingly, in fact, this one mention of Hoccleve's *Regiment* is a found in Caxton's

aforementioned *Book of Curtesye*, a book of conduct for a child, a step-by-step guide to behaving and acting well, a portion of which involves reading well.<sup>91</sup> Hoccleve's lone mention occurs in a book of childhood instruction gestures to a new contextual reading for his poem, one that advances a nexus of associations among counsel and tutoring, and age. In the book dedicated to "lytyl Iohn," Hoccleve follows Chaucer who follows Gower. As with *Regiment*, Chaucer receives the majority of praise, but Gower is mentioned and receives his own adulatory stanzas.

Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* exists in two manuscripts and are printed in a facing-page edition in one volume, edited by Frederick Furnivall. In his introduction, Furnivall remarks on the conditions of what he calls Caxton's copy, and Furnivall's chance find of a better copy, found at the end of *Piers Plowman*. Here the older copy is better than the newer and follows the logic of the text itself, which seeks "to styre & remeue" John from vice and to "adrese" virtue as

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<sup>90</sup> Charles Blyth, "Introduction," *Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles Blyth (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), pp. 1-37 (p. 1)

<sup>91</sup> Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*, ed. Frederick Furnivall (London: Trübner & Co, 1868.)



“one to folowe.”<sup>92</sup> The old corrects the young here, mirroring the textual situation of the manuscripts. But in this “contingent” relationship, one might see further reflections of a textual situation that defines the non-existent link between Hoccleve and Caxton. That the manuscript is lost, and all depends on the Caxton copy, until the fortuitous find of Furnivall, is tantalizingly close to what Caxton himself reproduces and the conditions he produces. Losing Hoccleve, where both *Lerne for to Dye* and *Regiment* are concerned, Caxton’s printed works supersede the earlier manuscript forms. And this connection to materiality and textuality in tutelage and counsel is not lost on the author of this conduct literature. He views right reading as social corrective, certainly not a foreign concept in a period in which charges against Lollardy often crystalized around issues of reading and translation. The progression of authors and the qualities of wisdom and style that recommend them occur toward the end of the book and follows a section on discretion, proper games, and the embrace of music and dance. Literature it seems is a part of this cultivation, for the obviously well-born reader, stopping wild chatter and the misuse of terms. Writing of “bookes enornede with eloquence,” the author first discusses Gower, then Chaucer and Hoccleve, and finally Lydgate, reserving more than half of this section for him. Furnivall’s displeasure at this last contribution is palpable: “And though the writer has the bad taste to praise Lydgate more than Chaucer, yet we may put this down to his love for his old master.”<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, even as this speaker tells the child what to read, he also manages to confess his age, and based upon his elderly station, leave interpretation of that age to the young. The speaker to the child

Beholde Ocklyf in his translacion  
In goodly langage/ & and sentence passyng wyse

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<sup>92</sup> Caxton, 3. All citations refer to page numbers.

<sup>93</sup> Furnivall, ix.

How he gyueth his prynce/ such exortacion  
As to the hiest/ he could best deuys  
Of trouthe. pees. mercy. and Iustise  
And vertues/ leetyng for no slouthe  
To do his deuoir & quite him of his trouthe

Requirede him/ as ayenst his souerayne  
Most drade & louyde /

Hoccleve, necessarily for this example, merits only the attention of his “translacion,” which means of course the *Regiment*. Hoccleve wrote prolifically: his *Formulary* attests to the quotidian operations of the Privy Seal office. His *La Male Regle* cements his reputation as overtly autobiographer and embodiment of weak, yet endearing man. Finally, his lines against Oldcastle dramatize his commitment to orthodoxy and his connection, once again negatively viewed and constitutive by absence, to later works that depict either John Oldcastle and Falstaff. Hoccleve’s role here, in his translation of exempla, is one that is required, not marked by “slouthe” and dedicated to a search for “trouthe.” It is foremost a depiction of a work that is not printed by Caxton, even as one assumes Caxton, while printing this selection must have *read* this bit of literary advertising.

Rereading Hoccleve within the contours of senex style offers a chance both to connect his *Regiment of Princes* with its emphasis on princely advice, together with his *La Male Regle*, *Lerne for to Dye*, and the *Tale of Jonathas*. It is precisely in the concept of tutelage and service in the face of royal patronage that often colors his works and the link between them, revolving around their use of senex style. In fact, I begin with unpacking these statements precisely because, in the examination of senex style of Hoccleve, an odd mixture of dullness and creative individuality merge and stand out. While studies of Chaucerian reception have highlighted the role of “Father Chaucer,” Hoccleve both embraces and rejects his childish status. Creating a stylized old age, even in context of his youthful poetry or presentation of youthful characters,

Hoccleve's engagement with senex style is one where he depends on the role of the impaired, yet able old man to be either his makeshift father, his foil for a prodigal youth, or his reason for attempting yet another pass at poetic authority and an annuity long desired.

In order to proceed to the exposition of contradiction in senex style, I demonstrate how teaching and old age reflect together in materials in Hoccleve's corpus, textual strategies he uses, and the sources from which he gathers some of this material. Teaching Chaucer and the other Ricardian and Lancastrian authors is central to the foundation of my argument, which focuses on Caxton's imprint of the *Book of Curtesye*, and its alignment of literature primarily as a teaching tool and the framework of age, youth, and teaching that the text establishes. With the basis for consideration of teaching, tutelage, and postures of pedagogy thus described, I will continue reading first *La Male Regle*, before moving to *The Regiment of Princes*, *The Tale of Jonathas* from *The Gesta Romanorum*, and concluding with Hoccleve's own lessons learned in *Lerne for to Dye*. Necessary to connect these works to the theme of tutelage within the dimensions of senex style is the repeated evocation of "maister," "mastyres," and mastery. A signal of nobility and social position, these terms also invoke the position of tutor, teacher, and intellectual better. Hoccleve has two masters, and from these two teachers, sends there is a lesson of senex style: mastery is an old subject, never complete, always involved in intergenerational depictions, and constitutive of a discursive strategy that embraces power and powerlessness equally. In the context of tutelage, this examination supplies a literal and figurative accounting of literature, history, and age in these works demonstrating Hoccleve's precarious role as tutor, and the constellation of meanings that inhabit intergenerational dynamics surrounding kingship and advice.

Implicitly, I read this poetry as a corrective to a now-familiar enterprise of literary genealogy, which has Hoccleve constantly tying himself to Chaucer, viewing the “fadir” of English literature as his own poetic father and master. It is, above all, a failed enterprise; Hoccleve can clearly be connected to Chaucer, but as a sterile outshoot of a Chaucerian-driven progression that has written Hoccleve and others out. Indeed, it is not just Hoccleve who suffers. George Ashby has largely disappeared from current work and study;<sup>94</sup> Skelton is mentioned primarily as a stepping stone,<sup>95</sup> and Andrew Barclay and Stephen Hawes seem only necessary to move along the impatient reader to the more “majestic” writing of Surrey, Wyatt, Spenser, and Shakespeare (of course!).<sup>96</sup> Histories need not be written only this way. Indeed, Ethan Knapp in a book-length study of Hoccleve, quoted in the pages above, suggests that a turn to Hoccleve—for him Bureaucratic Hoccleve, the Hoccleve of the historicized Privy Seal—embodies different histories and genealogies:

My hope is that this book will have suggested some of the ways in which Hoccleve’s work is refracted through a demimonde not unlike that of those bureaus. Though Hoccleve may not have poetic progeny in the sense that Lydgate had his followers, we would do well to view him as an early chapter in the genealogy of bureaucratic culture. And by a bureaucratic culture we should think not only of the tedium so often associated with that word but also of the hopes for community, the wry self-reflection, and the political dexterity Hoccleve’s work demonstrates from beginning to end.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Recent work on Ashby is in fact rather sparse. Notable exceptions to this critical silence would necessarily include David Lawton’s “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century,” *ELH* 54:4 (1987): pp. 761-799; Michael Livingston’s “A Sixth Hand in Cambridge Trinity College, MS R. 3. 19,” *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Early Print* 8 (2005): pp. 229-237; and finally, most recently, Robert Meyer-Lee’s “Laureates and Beggars in Fifteenth-Century English Poetry: The Case of George Ashby,” *Speculum* 79:3 (2004): pp. 688-726 and his monograph, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> As with Ashby, work still continues on Skelton, including, for example, Jane Griffiths’s *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and *John Skelton and Early Modern Culture: Papers Honoring Robert S. Kinsman* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), and several chapters in Antony J. Hasler’s *Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>96</sup> The work of Barclay and Hawes is examined at length in Meyer-Lee’s and Hasler’s monographs cited above.

<sup>97</sup> Knapp, pp. 185-186.

In Knapp's urge to see past traditional conceptions of literary histories, so often constructed from an imagination of "Courtly art" he urges scholars to see beyond, around, and through these inventions of both early makers and later readers. "But where the courtly tradition has its history confirmed and reinforced by the canons of literary genealogy, bureaucratic art always risks appearing as the production of scattered and marginal eccentrics."<sup>98</sup> A more apt description of Hoccleve perhaps is unthinkable. Scattered, marginal, yet central is too what I propose through an examination of several of Hoccleve's works through the emphasis of age, ability, and impairment offered through senex style.

A turn to senex style complicates the widely-held view of Hoccleve as son of Chaucer, a sterile descendent one which recently has been complicated, by interventions ranging from Charles Blyth to Anthony Hasler and, famously, David Lawton. Key to my reappraisal of Hoccleve is an overriding concept that Hoccleve understands his role as student and as teacher, In an investigation of the slipperiness between teacher and student, in the framing of old *and* young bodies within Hoccleve's corpus, I aim to show both that Hoccleve's construction of old age is infinitely more complicated than has been argued before; that, as an expression of senex style, his consistent deployment of an old man, together with a focus on old bodies reinforces that Hoccleve is, in fact, driven by more than one old body. This concentration on Hoccleve's youthful old body and old youthful body demonstrates, following Charles Blyth, for example that his work is as beholden to Gower, as it is to Chaucer.<sup>99</sup> While formal elements have long branded him a Chaucerian, a goal his work shares, at least on the level of textual elements, what I am suggesting is that Hoccleve's poetry illustrates that Gower's penitential pose as Amans and Gower in-text has as much influence on Hoccleve as Chaucer's reworkings of the modesty topos,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Blyth, "Thomas Hoccleve's Other Master," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): pp. 349-359

often used in service of poetic linkage with past authorities. In fact, Hoccleve's verse does more than resurrect Chaucer, whose ghostly figure points forever in the text of the *Regiment*; it produces the remains of Gower, which, like many things that describe Hoccleve, are characterized by apparent emptiness or lack.

We would be wise, however, to remember that emptiness, lack, and absence of skill are rhetorical moves, countless in their number that color the presumably-better (poetically) work of Chaucer, even as they shadow the texts of Gower, Langland, and other figures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Anthony Hasler, in discussing the role of the aging poet, speaking to ageless or youthful power, begins with a discussion of Gower and Richard, including Gower's old textual body—discussed in Chapter One—at the end of Book VIII of the *Confessio Amantis*. Hasler writes that

The body of the subject Gower, by contrast (to the sun-like image of Richard), shows the depredations of time... This body, of course, had already been attached by Venus to Gower's own name (VIII, 2908), and the "feble and old" poet still summons up the corage to dedicate his book "to the worschipe of mi king" (VIII, 3070\*-71\*). We may ask how far Gower's authorship of "a bok for king Richardes sake" (Prologue, 24\*) answered a genuine royal request; we may skeptically compare his professions of Ricardian allegiance to Richard II with his subsequent dedicatory shift to Henry IV; we may assume the passage to be a veridical representation of the relative ages of young king and old poet. Literal considerations alone, however, cannot account for the regularity and the degree of detail with this scene is repeated throughout the fifteenth century in England. The subject's body, feeble or old or indigent, is counterpoised to the glorified body of a patron who is beyond such constraints.<sup>100</sup>

Seen this way, one might consider in fact how such grand trajectories of the fifteenth century as "Chaucerian" (voiced by Seth Lerer, among others) might deny the case of a different father, one who has, if not equal influence, then certainly an appreciable amount. Gower's relationship to power is one that Hoccleve in fact reproduces. It is no surprise that Hasler's book opens this way. His display of a paradigm of power and patronage viewed through Gower is no accident, as

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<sup>100</sup> Hasler, *Court Poetry*, pp. 6-7.

he plumbs the depths of a connection that is shown best, arguably, by the example of Gower. And this concentration on the long-buried, almost forgotten, link between a rhetorical pose embodied by Gower, and one taken up by Hoccleve offers opportunity to show how the hollowness of Hoccleve's formal and textual elements, along with his repeated ties of the aging, impaired body to action and narrative actually doubles back to a previously explored area of poetic engagement with the world, the text, and the world of London textuality.

Following new interpretations of Hoccleve, primarily from Ethan Knapp and Robert Meyer-Lee, I too read Hoccleve as a figure *senex style*, has a doubling effect in Hoccleve's verse. Imagined so often in Hoccleve's corpus as emptiness and lack, *senex style* operates in Hoccleve's omnipresent role as teacher and student, prodigal youth, and worrying, avaricious old man. *Senex style*, in fact, connects the advisory role of Hoccleve as counsel to princes in the *Regiment* with his plaintive tones of older, but not wiser man in *La Male Regle* and the *Tale of Jonathas*. Concluding with a discussion of Hoccleve's reworking of Henry Suso's treatise on dying, *Lerne for to Dye*, I propose to link together some of Hoccleve's central works and to explain how the body of the dying young man in *Dye* instructs one how to read the *senex style* of Hoccleve. It seems natural to investigate Hoccleve's works within the constraints produced in *senex style*. As a position of complaint, in which one claims impairment and simultaneously narrates and creates in ways that trouble that invocation of impairment, *senex style* is both empty and full: empty because the seeming paradox it offers is instead a claim of impairment that signifies a lack of absolute limit or debility; full because that complaint and claim, in spite of its rhetorical and conventional nature actually produces an expanse of work. These dual states of *senex style*, find first expression in Hoccleve's petitionary (and penitential) poem *La Male regle*, a short poem that consistently records a sort of autobiography of Hoccleve's early prodigal life,

and the current pain of that financial largesse and rowdy living in his “old” age. It is clear that Old Hoccleve has learned a lesson, but the temporal bounds of the lesson defy a progressive and linear depiction of history. Old Hoccleve is attempting both to teach young Hoccleve, even as young Hoccleve attempts his own lesson. As an example of begging poetry—with ties to Chaucer’s empty purse and the other empty inheritances that Hoccleve discusses again and again—the poem reinforces that money is transitory and success fleeting. Should Old Hoccleve get his annuity, his pension, or his corrody would that stability offer any security in a world which lacks *any* stability? The ever-arbitrary and capricious whims of Fortune which drive human fate seem entirely inconsistent with any measure of true success, and perhaps this is ultimately the point of seeing Hoccleve as teacher, both young and old. For Hoccleve, inheritance is seemingly always empty, and the progress from failure to success and back, too quick to chart. In examination of *La Male regle*, I want to test what senex style can uncover about this poem: that senex style might be key to the rhetorical positioning of young Hoccleve as student and teacher, even as Old Hoccleve is seen the same way. The generational and temporal contortion between Hoccleve’s adoption of personae, simultaneously young and old finds later voice in the rhetorical presentation of Hoccleve and the old man in *Regiment of Princes*, his curious advice given to the prince, and not the king. That senex style—declamations of impairment tied to presentations of actual ability—might animate Hoccleve’s dull disciplining, even as he is the disciple of dullness will become clear in the intersections of Hoccleve’s choices in using old age and youth as a teaching strategy.

Called “amusing” by James Simpson, this poem has been treated in a number of different ways.<sup>101</sup> Ethan Knapp addresses how “the bureaucratic form of the petition mediated the

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<sup>101</sup> James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution: Volume 2, 1350-1547* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 204.



financial anxiety of those secular clerks” by viewing *Male regle* with Hoccleve’s *Formulary*,<sup>102</sup> Robert Meyer-Lee, in his pursuit of Hoccleve’s “beggar poetics,” a necessary (according to Meyer-Lee) reversal of aureate poetics, describes how the “inherently authentic practice” of begging is changed to suit Hoccleve’s need to be viewed as moral authority, and motivate the payment of the arrears of his annuities; and David Mills has used the poem to suggest further ways in which Hoccleve’s use of private and public selves works in the *Complaint*,<sup>103</sup> These approaches tend to have in common the view that Hoccleve’s poem turns in fact upon the union of easily troubled opposites. From bureaucracy to begging to books, *La Male regle* inhabits a space of poetics poses and postures not easily reconciled. It is no wonder, then, that a further intervention into the poem concentrates on the use of the “oxymoron” and its appearance as key to the poem’s unfolding.<sup>104</sup> In his examination of oxymoron within the poem, W.A. Davenport argues that

the vivid illustration of Hoccleve’s slipping away from the Office of the Privy Seal to indulge himself in over-eating and drinking, enjoying the company of the girls at Paul’s Head Tavern, flattered by the attentions of the tavern-keepers and boatmen of Westminster, that is, the most anecdotal and autobiographical passage, is also the section most strikingly structured around this rhetorical device.<sup>105</sup>

That he should describe these lines as the heart of the poem recall that the Hoccleve addresses his life and lack of money in terms of health.

From the beginning, in fact, the poem elevates health as a “precious tresor incomparable,” (1) to the status of giver of life, corrector of vice, and stability and security against adversity. By the end of the poem, this health has become contingent upon getting his

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<sup>102</sup> Knapp, p. 43.

<sup>103</sup> David Mills, “The Voices of Hoccleve,” *Essays on Thomas Hoccleve*, ed. Catherine Batt (Belgium: Brepols, 1996): pp. 84-107 (p. 102)

<sup>104</sup> W.A. Davenport, “Thomas Hoccleve’s *La Male Regle* and Oxymoron,” *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 82:6 (2001): pp. 497-506.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

payment, a switch that recalls the sleight of hand employed by Hoccleve in the *Regiment*. This ending can only be termed such because the loss of health is originally connected to coin and money; at the beginning, his health is wasted not because he lacks money, but seemingly because Hoccleve has enough to riot, carouse, and act as a prodigal youth. Recalling the discussion above that examined “fool largesse,” it is easy to see why Hoccleve continues to argue that prodigality is a sickness that is curable, connected to youth, while avarice is an “infirmitee” without cure, like age. I do not pretend, however, that these positions can be so easily sundered into pairs.

In fact, within the poem itself, the heart of the poem is one that it denies, as it couches Hoccleve’s petition in the language of health and healing. Meyer-Lee writes “*Male regle* (written in late 1405 or early 1406) is most fundamentally a begging poem, a petition to the then treasurer Thomas Neville, Lord Furnivall, for Hoccleve’s belated annuity.”<sup>106</sup> Addressing my own intervention into the poem as one centered first upon shifting definitions of age and youth, teacher and student, it is important to note that outside of the poem, Hoccleve most likely would not have been anymore than middle-aged at this point;<sup>107</sup> this fact does not discount the use of senex style. While the pecuniary aspects of the poem must be faced, so too must the fact that *La Male regle* is one of Hoccleve’s earliest extant works. This narrative, indeed, has no purchase upon late style or biographical shades of Hoccleve’s own old age.

Yet, in spite of this lacuna surrounding Hoccleve’s age, he does suggest throughout the poem, perhaps programmatically, that he is old and broken. It is fairly apparent from Hoccleve’s evocation, over and over, that his “yowthe” and “yonge yeeres” were consumed by riotous behavior and that the now of the poem is one consumed rather by emptiness and lack. Bereft of

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<sup>106</sup> Meyer-Lee, p. 98.

<sup>107</sup> In *Thomas Hoccleve* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Variorum Press), J.A. Burrow’s biography of Hoccleve, he writes (pp.1-2) that a probable date of Hoccleve’s birth is 1366 or 1367, given Hoccleve’s own autobiographical details supplied in *Complaint*. No records survive of his birth, childhood, or youth.

“coyn,” Hoccleve must petition for the return of his health. Paradoxically, of course, when young and flush with cash, he was presumably unhealthy, and in any case, it is this youth and its easy money which produces the wary, anxious older Hoccleve of *Male regle*. Central to these claims are lines which I have cited before in descriptions of prodigality. I will return to those lines now, following most major studies of this poem, as the picture of young Hoccleve cavorting throughout medieval London has proven one of the enduring portions of the poem. Like John of Canace, this young Hoccleve lives too large:

Othir than ‘maistir’ callid/ was I neuere,  
Among this meynee in myn audience  
Me thoghte/ I was y-maad a man for euere:  
So tikelid me þat nyce reuerence  
þat it me made larger of despense  
Than þat I thoght han been/ o flaterie!  
The guyse of thy traiterous diligence  
Is folk to mescheef haasten & to hie (201-208).

These lines, indicative for Meyer Lee of Hoccleve’s “social inflation,” speak to another inflation, which has gone relatively unnoticed. Puffed up with pride, he is called “maistir,” as a recognition, he thinks, of his higher social status. Nevertheless, it is one that is bought and needs continual payment to maintain. I would add to an ongoing critical discussion of these lines that another shade of meaning is directed by use of “maistir.” Beyond social status, the word carries various meanings connected with tutelage and education. A “maister” might also connote a teacher, a poetic better, a man who rather than being “y-maad” helps to make other men. It is helpful to note just how widespread this meaning of “maistir” is. The *MED* lists examples of this usage from Chaucer to the sixteenth century; arguably, after Hoccleve, in *Phyllyp Sparowe*, John Skelton uses the word in a similar fashion.

More importantly perhaps, Hoccleve himself uses the word in *Regiment* in this way, describing both Chaucer and Gower as “maistir.” It becomes obvious, then, in reading

Hoccleve's use of "maistir" as he hears it from bar keeps and boatmen of the Thames that he considers this "maistir" only as "flaterie" to separate the man and his money. How then might this usage reflect back on Hoccleve's characterization of Chaucer and Gower as "maistir"? It purposes a few different meanings to these poetic maistirs. They are both vivifications of a dying system: courtly makers, supported by either Ricardian or Lancastrian interests. According to Knapp, "old structures that had given security to both the identity and finances of these clerks...were giving way," and in this uncertainty, it is perhaps naturally that Hoccleve would bring back to life reminders and remainders of a previous generation's example of poetic preferment.<sup>108</sup> I argue, the portrait of Chaucer has a different, pecuniary function: Hoccleve, of course, wants to link himself to Chaucer, but this linkage is about more than poetic heritage and literary authority. Hoccleve needs Chaucer revived so that he can serve as reminder that money and patronage follow the creation of poetry, so Hoccleve is merely following in well-tread footsteps. "Hoccleve's debt to Chaucer" is rather a temporally-refashioned debt owed to Hoccleve, and the reanimation of Chaucer points to that accounting.

If Hoccleve was, as Ethan Knapp has argued, caught in a changing system of patronage, professionalization, and payment, then his reviving of the dead poet is both a mark of the futility of that gesture, even as it fully animates the deadness of that older system of patronage. Reading this creative accounting, in the shadow of another famous moment of payment between generations helps to flesh out the rationale of Hoccleve's gesture. The borrowed exemplum of John of Canace frames the examination of tutelage with a discussion of literary inheritance—Hoccleve's accounting for both Chaucer and Gower—masters both to him. It is by now a critical commonplace to speak of the fifteenth-century's invocation of Chaucer as father, master, or creator of a continuing poetic enterprise, even as Knapp has shown, the lone author using the

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<sup>108</sup> Knapp, p. 23

explicitly paternal usage is Hoccleve. While it is becoming an equal commonplace to ruminate on the oddness of Hoccleve's usage, this chapter continues the work of addressing the consequences of that expression of filial piety, its limitations, and the effect of senex style on that expression. Indeed, the emptiness that I connect to Hoccleve's use of senex style, seen often in tropes of inheritance, finds expression in these bits of *Regiment* that repeat the empty articulation of "maistir." "According to the social logic that the one who grieves is the one with the right to inherit," John M. Bowers argues, Hoccleve's stanzas that flesh out Chaucer's death make him the heir apparent.<sup>109</sup> Bowers wonders indeed whether Hoccleve knew Chaucer's work:

On the other hand, most scholars who write about Chaucerian imitators have overlooked the fact that Hoccleve actually shows very little direct knowledge of Chaucer's poetry. Derek Pearsall made this point in an important introductory assessment: "Hoccleve echoes Chaucer less than does Lydgate and writes mostly in non-Chaucerian genres." Even though he was ideally situated in London and Westminster and he had the right connections in the literate culture of the metropolis, Hoccleve seems to have known the man, his literary reputation, and even some ringing phrases, but not much of the works themselves.<sup>110</sup>

With these facts in mind, might instead the name "maistir" demonstrate indeed how close poetic Hoccleve comes to the attitude and position of the boatman of the Thames: with a fake smile and affected posture of humility, attempting to separate the man (Chaucer or Gower) from his money (his reputation, patrimony, the tradition), Hoccleve humbly addresses his "maistir."

Reading "maistir" in this way dovetails nicely with recent critical work. Following Knapp's tropes of "paternity and usurpation" as a reflection of a systematic way of reading into Chaucer's depiction (and Gower's too) a degree of "antagonism," Hoccleve becomes the Prince of Wales, attempting to edge out the father.<sup>111</sup> Knapp, writing of the Chaucer-portrait in *Regiment* argues Hoccleve "suggests his inferiority to Chaucer through the language of reverence

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<sup>109</sup> John M. Bowers, "Thomas Hoccleve and the Politics of Tradition," *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 36:4 2002: pp. 352-69, (p. 352)

<sup>110</sup> Bowers, p. 354.

<sup>111</sup> Knapp, pp. 124-125.

for age...and the familial hierarchy of father and son,” while supplying “dotage” as a descriptive term that undercuts that praise.<sup>112</sup> Writing through “dotage” in the *Regiment* might demonstrate that “maistir” whether in *Male regle* or *Regiment* links teaching and age to foolishness rather than mastery and wisdom. Older Hoccleve learns his lesson, taught by the younger Hoccleve, but the mastery he receives is one that is hollow. If mastery can be tied to specific and shifting circumstances and connected to dotage, then reading it in the context of senex style demonstrates that the paradox of senex style—claimed impairment and actual ability—is present but reversed in different terms in age-related “maistirs:” claiming wisdom, yet embodying foolishness. Hoccleve’s flattery of Chaucer and Gower actually *makes* them “maistirs,” while simultaneously attempting to rob them of poetic greatness.

*Regiment*, of course, concerns a different master as well. Written to the Henry, the Prince of Wales, arguably while the king was incapacitated, the poem covers some of the same ground as *La Male regle*. Plumbing the depths of meaning between youth and age, *Regiment* produces a somewhat confusing trajectory from Boethian complaint to *speculum principis* while reproducing some of the same autobiographical details of Hoccleve’s life as *Male regle*. One notable addition is the concentration on scribal labor and the creation of the Old Man of the prologue, a figure with whom Hoccleve discusses the state of the kingdom, the weariness of the clerk’s body, and the lack of possible avenues for improvement. As I have argued, senex style for Hoccleve is characterized by its paradoxical nature as empty and full, and it concerns the seeming impossibility of being taught and teaching in and out of time. In other words, a long passed young Hoccleve in *Male regle* apparently teaches an older Hoccleve. In *Regiment*, this strategy is reversed. The Old Man represents a possible future for Hoccleve: suffering from the impairments of age, the Old Man is broken in body and purse.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

Together with this reversal of depictions of age and positions of learning and teaching, appears too the problematic aspects of teaching a young prince but pretending to be even younger. It is here that I first want to discuss the range of meanings which attach to “tendre” and then make some historical connections to those examples. Like “maistir” before, “tendre” is a presumably clear word that Hoccleve uses in such a way to both obscure certain meanings but also to make various claims to power, temporal and poetic.

The first occurrence of “tendre” or a related form appears in l. 297 in the *Regiment* in a discussion of John Badby, a Lollard burnt for his heretical beliefs outside St. Bartholomew’s in West Smithfield.<sup>113</sup> Henry IV’s reign saw the increase in trials and punishments for heresy, so the Prince’s mercy to John Badby takes on perhaps greater import. Hoccleve writes that

“My lord the Prince - God him save and blesse -  
Was at his deedly castigacioun  
And of his soule hadde greet tendrenesse,  
Thristynge sore his sauvacioun.  
Greet was his pitous lamentacioun  
Whan that this renegat nat wolde blynne  
Of the stynkyng error that he was ynne. (295-301)

The prince was there at the execution, according to Hoccleve, to move Badby to confession and right belief. It is telling that the terms of Henry’s appearance there are couched in terms of grief and lamentation. The “tendrenesse” of his heart, so abundant, causes Henry to feel the pain of the loss of a member of his kingdom and a soul from God. The next usage of “tendre” or a related form is “tendrenesse” and it is used precisely to describe God’s mercy saving the sinner. The sticking point, here, for Hoccleve is that Henry not only wants to save Badby’s soul but is also willing to save his life: “And souffissant lyflode eek sholde he have/ Unto the day he clad were in his grave.” (307-308). The prince promises a “souffissant lyflode”: a living, a monetary amount of money capable of supporting the man until his death.

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<sup>113</sup> A full examination of Badby is given in Peter McNiven, *Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV: The Burning of John Badby* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987).

It is hard here not to see “tendrenesse” in a more modern sense: a sort of legal or monetary tender, Badby’s adherence to the faith will buy his life, not only in absolute terms—he lives!—but also in terms of material support. Of course, “tendrenesse” does not show any evidence of this meaning until the sixteenth century. But it is clear, as I will show, that “tendre” in fact has a history connected to age, counsel, and material support (money) that is reflected in past examples of tutelage, and which demonstrate the shifting meanings of age and youth. As the example of Badby shows, *Regiment* is not composed in a vacuum, but rather exists within a framework of counsel and its meanings and reflects various contemporary events and controversies, demonstrating the very opposite of Chaucer’s “absent city.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, examining tutelage in specific historic contexts, especially the workings of the Merciless Parliament of 1388 and the successive crises of succession from 1399 onward suggests that both counsel and tutelage are charged and shifting contexts for the advancement of indirect and direct deployment of a *fürtenspiegel*, or mirror literature.<sup>115</sup> Antony J. Hasler writes Hoccleve’s *Regement* “is the earliest example in English poetry of a genre that was to become increasingly popular in the fifteenth century, that of advice to princes.”<sup>116</sup>

Counsel and tutelage are in fact essential to an understanding of contemporary politics. ME *governance* carries a semantic range from political to personal governance, including most importantly, tutelage.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, tutelage offers a different expression for literary progression and history than filial relations of father and son. As simply as tutors mold and shape through

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<sup>114</sup> Bowers notes that the exposition throughout *Regiment* of contemporary London might in fact be key to Hoccleve’s poor reputation. “By eschewing London as a setting for his work, most famously in his decision to situate the *General Prologue* across the river in Southwark, Chaucer evaded any messy encounter with the civic controversies that both energized and threatened the world in which he moved in his professional life,” and it is this messy encounter which the *Regiment* embraces. (p. 360)

<sup>115</sup> For a discussion of the tradition of mirror literature, see Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

<sup>116</sup> Antony J. Hasler, “Hoccleve’s unregimented body,” *Paragraph* 13 (1990): 164-83, here 164.

<sup>117</sup> governance, (n), Middle English Dictionary (MED): <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED19166&egs=all&egdisplay=open>. See def. 3 (a).



their teachings, so do literary texts to those that are written in their larger and older shadows. Both fashion who should advise and what they should advise, often in the context of age. Neither one is consistently of one voice on that role and its requirements, especially where age is concerned. Yet consistently references to age find their way into these texts. Grounding these “fictions of advice” then is a prevalent and polyvocal imagining of age and counsel. In late-medieval England, counsel takes on what perhaps is an outsized function, because counselors were so necessary. According to Judith Ferster,

Since Edward III was enfeebled by age in the last years of his reign, since Richard II came to the throne at the age of ten, since Henry IV was seriously ill several times during his reign, and since Henry VI came to the throne at the age of one year and as an adult suffered periods of insanity, there were long periods when the council was actually running the government.<sup>118</sup>

With the exception of Henry IV, whose incapacities are tied to infirmity, all the other figures Ferster notes are marked in some way by age: Richard is made weak through his depiction as young, and his grandfather through advancing age and an advancing Alice Perrers, together with the literal child who would be king, Henry VI. Henry IV was younger than Richard and managed to seem older in 1399, but eventually Henry IV came to be marked by the same rhetorical implications of age as those used against his cousin. As Ethan Knapp notes, the crises late in Henry’s reign, along with the apparently stable direction, exemplified by his son, created real tensions in discussion of the king’s age. The father becomes the son, and the son the father. This twist to the language of age, propriety and counsel is present in the *Tale of Melibee* and Hoccleve’s *Regement*, and is documented at length by Knapp in his monograph on Hoccleve.

Writing in the shadow of other mirrors for princes, including the above-discussed *Melibee*, Hoccleve certainly knew the danger of counsel: the struggles between the Crown and the Appellants in 1386-1388, the fall of Richard in 1399, and earlier, the machinations of the

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<sup>118</sup> Ferster, p. 2.

supposedly devilish Alice Perrers and the unmanning of Edward III constituted testaments to the dangers of taking and giving counsel. Pointedly, the crisis of 1386-1388 was one of counsel, but does seem at times to be explicitly about youth, age, and tutelage. Chronicles the events leading up to Richard's depositions years after the fact in the shadow of his Lancastrian connections and service, Adam Usk describes the capture of the king at the Tower by the Lords Appellant, in an early counterattack in the struggle of 1386-1388 as a "new tutelage."<sup>119</sup> This "gubernacione" seems ill-advised for a king, a man of age, but in fact rhetorically casts Richard as one to be governed, rather than one who governs. Explicitly, in the charges brought against Richard's advisors, including his childhood tutor, Simon Burley, the dimensions of a harmful tutelage color the accusations of the Lords Appellants.

The constraints on tutelage and its influence were not relegated merely to the Lords Appellant. Borrowing their own lexicon of perfidious tutelage, Richard's maneuverings in 1397 demonstrate not only his desire for revenge, but also his equal and opposite reaction to the strike against his own counselors and tutors. To constrain not only the accused, but the their inheritance and inheritors in perpetuity, Richard's revenge moves beyond confiscation of lands and execution of the Earl of Arundel and the stripping of the Earl of Warwick's land, titles, and income. In fact, as Usk notes, "It was also decreed that anyone who gave advice, help or support to the children of those who had been, or might yet be, condemned in this parliament, should suffer the penalty for treason."<sup>120</sup> But more than simply revenge, this punishment acknowledges the power of tutelage and its distinct risks.

Simon Burley's fate is well-known. He was both tutor and then sub-chamberlain for the King, a Knight of the Garter, and a long-serving attendant to Richard's mother as well. As one of

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<sup>119</sup> Adam Usk, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, ed. Chris Givens-Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>120</sup> Usk, p. 33.

the Ricardian counselors sent to his death by the Lords Appellant in 1388, Burley's fate was tied into a narrative, largely it seems, controlled by the Appellants. Although the St. Albans Chronicle records that Burley's death was not decided unanimously, chroniclers who were not openly hostile to Richard such as the monk behind the Westminster Chronicle reports similar portraits of Burley, as they incorporate contemporary reports of the parliamentary actions, word for word. And those words damn him in terms of how his actions affect Richard and the realm, in light of Richard's age.

The first charge, the umbrella accusation, accuses all of those tried with Burley of the same offense: in light of the "tenderness of the age of our lord the king and the innocence of his person," his counselors obscured Richard's own moral compass and through their enlargement of their personal and political prerogatives, reduced the king to a servile state.<sup>121</sup> The charges that apply to Burley specifically roughly follow the same form. The seventh charge expands upon the discussion of Richard's age, and Burley's exploitation of his role.

Also, whereas the said Simon was chamberlain of our lord the king in his tender age and bound to counsel him for the best to the profit of himself and of his realm, the said Simon by wicked design and procurement counselled our lord the king to have in his household a great number of aliens, Bohemians, and others, and to give them great gifts out of the revenues and commodities of the realm; whereby our lord the king is greatly impoverished and the people utterly oppressed.<sup>122</sup>

And the first part of the twelfth charge:

Also, whereas the said Simon remained in attendance upon the person of our lord the king in the days of his youth until a certain time when he was forbidden the king's presence by the king's good council owing to his evil government of the king's person and to certain other misdeeds, he afterwards returned to the king's company without the assent of the good council.<sup>123</sup>

The issues surrounding these charges are manifold, but the repeated utterance of Richard's

"tender" age is both surprising and inevitable, given the course of action that the Appellants

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<sup>121</sup> *The Westminster Chronicle: 1381-1394*, eds. and trans. L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 271. All citations from *Westminster* refer to this edition.

<sup>122</sup> *Westminster*, p. 275.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, page 277.

follow. He is, after all, a young man of 20-21, a tender age summons now, as it presumable did then the vision of a young child, beholden to his physically, socially, and mentally betters for care. Christopher Fletcher has demonstrated that the exercise of government more directly and forcefully by the king and his counselors led to the return of the king's youth during the crises of 1386-1388. "It is important to note that this use of the king's youth was not a continuity from the beginning of the reign but the revival of a theme which had faded out from public discourse in the early 1380s."<sup>124</sup> In fact, after this crisis, the ageist themes of criticism against the Ricardian regime are again muted, until the new explosions of royal prerogative in 1397.

As Fletcher notes, the Appellants needed to outmaneuver the ongoing efforts by Richard to paint their efforts as treasonous, and rhetorical flourishes, mediating gestures, and reminders of unmanly political positions, such as peace with France, could offer protection. It is clear then that the return of Richard's youth, this invocation of tender also carries a certain inevitability, as the three main Appellants needed a rhetorically strategy that defends the person and office of the king, while those deemed dangerous around him are challenged. The passivity of the verbs in the charges points to this shielding by the Appellants. Only Simon acts directly, counseling Richard to harbor aliens and bankrupt the kingdom. In the twelfth charge, Simon is restrained by the "good council" and freed passively by some unknown entity. Of course, the main actor was clear. While the problems of counsel, and the gestures to good council implicate those around Richard, the true wound was to Richard himself.

Even so, the *St. Albans Chronicle* records that the judgment against Burley provoked an argument between Henry, earl of Derby and later Henry IV with his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester. "The last of those beheaded was Simon Burley, despite the fact that the earl of Derby

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<sup>124</sup> Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-1399* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 ), p. 153.

had done all he could to assist his escape. As a consequence, a great dispute broke out between him and the Duke of Gloucester.”<sup>125</sup> While the feud ends and solidarity returns to the Lords Appellant, the difficulty of disposing of the king’s trusted advisor renders tender even the heart of the future usurper. This affective response both to Burley, and between the younger and older Appellants suggests that the semantic range of tender can offer new insights for how this historicizing impulse toward tutelage. Tender can refer not only to the mitigating effects of remorse, compassion, or other emotions, it can also serve as a sign of consideration or a signal of esteem.<sup>126</sup> In the sixteenth century, the first attestation of tender as payment or a word carrying connotations of accounting occurs, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the origins of that meaning are present.<sup>127</sup> While the words are etymologically distinct: the former traces back to the Latin *tener* and the latter, to *tendere*, the degrees of interchangeability among the different senses and denotations of tender demonstrate tender’s utility in describing this Ricardian vision of tutelage. Tender then here refers to a range of different associations: the childishness of Richard’s actions, even as the Lords Appellants purportedly show him mercy, the effect of Burley’s death on Henry, who possibly had a similar relationship with a different tutor, and the advancement in these counselors by the king, as tender for their service, especially his tutor, Simon Burley.

The economic and monetary connections with tenderness must necessarily be maintained in the examination of Hoccleve’s *furtenspiegel*, as Hoccleve is motivated by the fear of poverty and the lack of a benefice or fulfillment of annuities. “Thought me byrefte of sleep the force and

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *The St. Albans Chronicle: The Cronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham: 11376-1394*, eds. and trans. John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, Leslie Watkiss (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), vol 1 of 2, p. 853.

<sup>126</sup> *tendren*, (v), *Middle English Dictionary* (MED): <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED44799&egs=all&egdisplay=open> See especially meanings 2 and 3.

<sup>127</sup> *tender*, (v), *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED): <http://oed.com/view/Entry/199048?rskey=t8xa94&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>

might,” (7) as he ponders the vicissitudes of fortune, and the fear of his own poverty in old age. Poverty is more here than a reflection of amount of goods or money. For Hoccleve, this reducing of his monetary affairs into penury rises to the level of embodied disorder.

I thoghte eek, if I into poverte creepe,  
Than am I entred into sikirnesse;  
But swich seurtee mighte I ay waille and weepe,  
For povert breedith nagh but hevynesse. (43-46).

Hoccleve is of course employed as a privy seal clerk at Westminster, and so his slide into poverty is just that: a gradual movement signaled by his “creepe” into poverty. This slow transition imagines not just a slide into physical poverty, but a poverty of the physical: a slowing of his limbs and his active body as he enters old age, a the temporal progression into old age seen through the increasing weariness of his limbs. This “sikirnesse” is further presented as embodied impairment by the resultant “hevynesse” a word whose lexical range includes physical weight, sluggishness, oppressiveness of the flesh, as well as a constellation of affective woes.<sup>128</sup> The heaviness of poverty here mirrors the negative image of penniless old age: the slowing of the body, and the emotional distress caused by lack.

Of course, the mention of “hevynesse” does more than establish a temporal progression of Hoccleve’s creeping into poverty with the embodiment of ailments and impairments, in a Hoccleveian version of old age. It can also refer to somnolence, and in this connotation serves as a direct contradiction with the supposed effects of his thoughts on poverty. It is after the specter of unwarranted poverty that will occur in his old age that forces Hoccleve to wake, and “poverte breedith nagh but hevynesse,” it is possible to read this line as a direct contradiction of his very purpose for writing *Regiment*. It is better to be contradictory than dull, and these kind of

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<sup>128</sup> hevynesse, (n) MED: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED20719&egs=all&egdisplay=open>

extended and careful readings characterize recent Hoccleve scholarship, including Knapp's study of the "tropes of paternity," and William Kuskin's "trauailous stilnesse."

If these treatments of Hoccleve's work participate in the ever-shifting definitions and meanings that *Regiment* suggests, it is clear that inherent and unreconcilable differences exist in the poem that revolve around the definitions of age, counsel, and tutelage. In order to alleviate the uncertainty of Hoccleve in the text, he is presented with his own bespoke tutor, a poor old man who serves both as portrait of the pecuniary illness that Hoccleve fears and the cure for Hoccleve's fear of that end. Beyond the twisting of this sickness into cure, the Old Man's presence produces another level of tension in the writing of *Regiment*. It is at the Old Man's injunction that Hoccleve writes the advice to Prince Henry, a mediating gesture that should in fact mute the impudence of a lowly clerk advising one of the future ruler of the realm.<sup>129</sup> But this advice is colored by its appeal to financial security and advancement, a delicate subject to broach. Hoccleve may have been one of the number of subjects who considered the prince's financial acumen as key to his continuing payment. His commission and fiscal competence possibly would not shield Hoccleve from the dangers of presumptuous advice, nor would that commission necessarily buy an unproblematic encomium, as the historical precedent of Richard's commission to John Gower makes clear. Adding to the danger, Hoccleve was "stepping into a potentially dangerous feud within the Lancastrian house itself, a feud between father and son, at a moment at which notions of paternity, inheritance, and counsel could not be used simply and innocently."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The medieval exemplum and the Chaucerian tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 306. "The beggar's praise of Prince Henry would have had the appearance of crass flattery had it been addressed to Henry directly by Hoccleve."

<sup>130</sup> Knapp, p. 126.

These speculations, instead gesture further to the nature of tutelage. The temporal dimensions of Hoccleve's money problem, like his poetry problem, are not simply concerned with the present, but like tutelage are concerned with right governance and behavior in the future and the past. Old age, for Hoccleve, was a period of final accounting for the actions of youth, a point made all too clear in his *La Male regle*, a poem that details the extravagances of his youth, and the dubious reward of poverty in his advanced age. But this old age was also the result of his employ for the king, the office more than the person, as his dedication to the prince demonstrates. *Regiment* concerns itself with vivid depictions of the toil of scribal labor that maps conveniently onto the portrait of old age,<sup>131</sup> and as Kuskin has demonstrated, "the physical and intellectual in 'trauailous stilnesse,' is "made tangible in Hoccleve's body and the literary manuscripts formed by his labor, for the body and the manuscript are a subject to a system of production that is both autonomous and contingent."<sup>132</sup> Mirroring the connections between work and age, counsel and begging come together in *Regiment*, ensuring that the prince can see how tender his heart should become, even if it is "fool largesse."

Just as its prologue seeks to calm the monetary anxieties of Hoccleve, who finds that he cannot sleep, the body of the text seeks to make tender the heart of the prince, to extend credit and make good on the bonds and promises made by the crown. While the Old Man attempts to give Hoccleve some peace of mind, Hoccleve craves a difference piece, a figurative piece of proverbial pie, his share of his master's largesse. The function of this body and speaker is threefold: he first is sent to calm Hoccleve, then to prove that money is not necessary for happiness, and then to subtly remind Henry IV properly now, and the future Henry V, in the future that work, especially the work of the scribe that maps onto the degeneration of the aging

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-106.

<sup>132</sup> William Kuskin, "The Erasure of Labor: Hoccleve, Caxton, and the Information Age." *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): pp. 229-260, (p. 237).



body, deserves and requires recompense.<sup>133</sup> In this context, the position of teacher, of creator of a mirror for princes, cannot be overstated as the posture of authorial control that links Hoccleve to both to poets who are roughly contemporaneous, such as John Lydgate, past authorities such as Chaucer and Gower, and future figures such as John Skelton, a nexus of interrelated relationships that demonstrate how old bodies of authors, men, exempla, and texts often express themselves within the confines of senex style. The central contradiction inherent in senex style—the inexpressibility of old men expressing themselves, the impaired posture of actively posturing—finds common voice in the contradiction that attaches to the position of teacher to power, even if that authority is young, untrained, or outside the immediate succession. One can be a master, a pedagogical better to a prince, but eventually that dynamic of authority switches, and as erstwhile or official tutors to royalty, Hoccleve seems cognizant of the limitations of teaching to power. Then, the core of contradiction lying at the heart of depicting pedagogy to a prince, or of the powerless old man, seems indistinguishable in the works of Hoccleve which explicitly are presented to the Lancastrian house, and those which carry the seemingly singular authorial tone of Hoccleve, which nevertheless, in their implications and unspoken desires, seek to teach a lesson.

In *The Regiment of Princes*, avarice and prodigality, as in *La Male Regle*, are fleshed out with reference to age and youth. Starting with line 4579 in *Regiment*, Hoccleve fleshes out the difference between prodigality (fool largesse) and avarice. The former is

a seeknesse curable  
Outhir of indigence or elles age  
He that fool large in youthe is, is ful able  
In elde to abate it and asswage;  
For agid folk been more in the servage  
Of avarice than been folk in yowthe,

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<sup>133</sup> The Boethian dimensions of this exchange are well-documented. For the contours of this critical discussion, see Knapp (2001), see pages 77-106, especially 93-106.

And what I shal eek seyn herneth wel nowthe. (4579-4585)  
Building, no doubt, on the exemplum of the prodigal son in Luke 15, Hoccleve imagines prodigality first as a weakness of youth. It is easy to make this point; after all, *La Male Regle* and *The Tale of Jonathas* both build upon links between prodigality and youth. In all three works, the opportunity to cure “fool largesse” contracted in and practiced throughout youth is possible. If one, according to Hoccleve in *The Regiment* is a “fool large,” he is then “ful able/ In elde to abate it and asswage.” The use of contraction is no surprise and should communicate that Hoccleve handles prodigality and avarice not merely as sins or character flaws but also and importantly as sickness or illness. In fact, line 4579 communicates this view rather directly: Prodigality is a “seeknesse curable.” Curable, it seems, because it is the overindulgence of a kingly prerogative that is beneficial. Royal servants, men of the household, and other figures throughout the land needed royal support; the entire text of *Regiment* turns upon this very notion. These lines, further, are the citation of Ambrose. At the beginning of this section, Hoccleve quotes him directly, writing, “Waar man that thow ne shitte/ Withyn thy purs the needy peples hele,” (4537), and directs Henry, Prince of Wales, not to lock up in his purse the health of those “needy peples.” Coin, it appears, is central to health, even as the overuse of that coin is disease, albeit one that is curable.

Advising the prince that youthful prodigality need not be an incurable disease is more complicated, dangerous, and presumptuous than it first appears. Depending on the date one assigns to *The Regiment*, it is very likely that it appears in the years during which the King is incapacitated, and the Prince the able steward in control of the government. Knapp asserts that “the period in which the *Regement* was written were the same years as those in which the ailing Henry IV, still trying to consolidate the rule gained by the usurpation of Richard II’s throne, was

faced by a strong challenge for power from his eldest son, the future Henry V.”<sup>134</sup> As a commission by the Prince of Wales, *Regiment* appears, in Knapp’s words “not only to assert the prince’s receptivity to good counsel but also his filial devotion.”<sup>135</sup> Indeed, history remembers Henry V as a largely wiser king, in terms of finances than his father. G.L. Harriss reports that “as debts and arrears began to accumulate the reputation for careful husbandry and good credit which he had cultivated from the very beginning of the reign bore the strain of financial and political tensions.”<sup>136</sup> In spite of wars and campaigns, “his indebtedness,” however, “never produced a collapse in royal credit which frustrated his plans, or impaired his standing as a ‘prince bien gouverné.’”<sup>137</sup>

In addition to a record of a petition for money that addresses the prince, rather than the king, this unfolding of prodigality goes farther in its dangerous presumption. Addressed to a young prince it seems to give him license for largesse, even “fool largesse.” This portion of the text is firmly positioned not within the prologue but rather the body of the *speculum principis*, and it is a young prince to whom Hoccleve writes. Because, tellingly, that is what Hoccleve is asking for: the prince to take on a bit of illness to cure Hoccleve of his, for as I will demonstrate below in the discussion of John of Canace, Hoccleve owns his indebtedness, as a aging condition of a youthful intemperance.

Reading the lines that follow, which too touch upon prodigality, Hoccleve again reinforces, here implicitly, that it is prodigality which devils his old age. It is, however, a condition that is curable.

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<sup>134</sup> Knapp, pp. 124-125.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 125. See also p. 125, n. 28 for Knapp’s discussion of relevant sources documenting the work’s commission.

<sup>136</sup> G.L. Harriss, “Financial Policy,” *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G.L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985): pp. 159-179 (p. 168)

<sup>137</sup> Harriss, p. 167.

Of neede eek may it cured been and helid;  
A man may so large despenses make  
Til al his good despendid and delid;  
And whan his purs yemptid is and shake,  
Thanne begynneth indigence awake,  
By which he cured is of the seeknesse  
Of prodigalitee or fool largesse. (4586-4592)

If Hoccleve offers the cure for his own prodigality and pushes the prince toward a prodigality of his own, it is these lines which offer Henry and the reader the cure: indigence. The logic is really quite simple, although the ties to age complicate his statement. If one spends too much money, then the pangs of poverty and the embrace of indigence will right one's financial ledger. From one extreme to the next, health comes in the middle. That is straightforward enough. The image, however, of indigence waking recalls that Hoccleve's *Regiment* begins with his own sleeplessness, awakened by the almost-allegorical "Thought" and the speed of his own mind running over the consequences of not having his annuities paid now and the consequences for a poverty-stricken old age.

In the midst of his walking through the suburbs of fifteenth century London, he meets in the text an old beggar, whose financial situation is far below Hoccleve's own, and perhaps is meant here, by the indigence that awakes. It is, after all, at the prompting of this old man that Hoccleve is convinced to write to the prince, even as he is already in the midst of composing this text. I will discuss at length the old man of the prologue below, but the tie between indigence and age, however fleeting, does recall that these lines are followed by a description of the relationship between avarice and age.

But avarice, he seith, incurable is;  
For ay the more a man therin procedith  
And wexith old, so mochil more ywis  
He avaricious is; in him nought breedith  
But thought and wo, for ay his herte dreedith  
His good to leese; and more for to hepe,  
His thoughtes stirten heer and theer and lepe.

Avarice is incurable. One might think of the Reeve here or of the sin of Avarice, as he is depicted in the C version of *Piers Plowman*. For both figures, avarice marks their body. The latter example demonstrates an almost direct correspondence between facial structure and sin. Here, Hoccleve announces what makes avarice incurable, and in whom one might find it. The more a man grows old, the more avaricious he becomes, at least according to the logic of the text. In this space of age and avarice, it is thought again which proves central, not as a cure, but rather as a symptom. All is thought and woe, as the old man dreads loss of his goods and money. His thoughts are characterized by their movement, from here to there, leaping about. This section of the discussion recalls that earlier Hoccleve's text ties age not to movement and ability but to decrepit limbs, incapable of action. It is fitting, then, in this discussion of senex style that a portrayal of avarice should tie it to age and ability, even if that ability is not positive or optimal.

The concentration for Hoccleve on age is understandable. As I mentioned earlier, both the Reeve and Langland's construction of Avarice are beings produced through illustrations of their grasping natures and their old faces. Another link between avarice and age might be their descriptions as "seeknesse incurable." In the prologue, the old man, addresses Hoccleve after an extended rant against the customs of the present. Hoccleve's complaint—this time—ends at line 553. The old man attempts at that point to remind Hoccleve that age and pain are inevitable and unavoidable. Echoing Cato's thoughts on old age as a necessary stop before the final desination of death in *De Senectute*, the old man quotes Seneca who

...seith age is an infirmittee  
That leche noon can cure it ne it hele,  
For to deeth next neigheburgh is he.  
Ther may no wight the chartre of lyf ensele;  
The ende is deeth of male and of femele;  
Nothyng is more certeyn than deeth is,  
Ne more uncerteyn than the tyme, ywis. (561-567)

This categorization of age as an “infirmitee” without cure and one unaffected by physician’s care recalls the power of Old Age in *Piers Plowman* even as it records a finality of old age that late medieval medical texts often contest. Like Medea’s rejuvenation of Jason’s father in the *Golden Fleece* textual tradition, various recipes, humoral exercises, and suggestions for better living existed supposedly to retard the affects of age. In the experience of the old man, however, this inevitability of both age and death and the former’s position as bodily impairment is unassailable, and he uses that knowledge to prod Hoccleve into better action and belief now, before he grows old. Tied by the repetition of the adverb “ywis” both here and in the later lines tying avarice and age, avarice seems a certain partner for age according to Hoccleve, even as the old man supposes that only age itself is inevitable. After all, he is not avarice, and his indigence suggests a tie rather with prodigality. This union of age and prodigality, indeed, is both contested and affirmed by Hoccleve throughout *Regement*.

In fact, the lines describing prodigality and avarice follow one of the very last exempla which Thomas Hoccleve supplies in *Regiment of Princes*. The story of John of Canace is translated, retransmitted, and rewritten many times throughout the middle ages, proving how popular and useful this story of prodigal father, prodigal children, and wasted inheritance might have been. In fact, the narrative links through absence Thomas Hoccleve and William Caxton. In fact, while William Caxton prints the *Game and Playe of Chesse*, which contains a version of the story, he does not seem to ever have made an imprint of Hoccleve’s work. Referring back to the contours of a link between Hoccleve and Caxton, is instructive: the inheritance for John’s children who prove neglectful is nothing. They open a chest, which is empty except for a mace that threatens people who despise him with the promise of violence. I advance that we might read this mace as a sign of material violence both to the children who have forgotten John but

also to the page which Caxton prints. Printing necessarily involves impact and markings, after all.

The exemplum itself for these reasons is worth unpacking. John of Canace lives large, perhaps too large. Hoccleve writes, “That of despenses he was outrageous,/ And of his good they were ay desirous.” (4197-8) Throughout his life, he gives his sons and daughters whatever they desire, to repay their “flaterie,” (4196) and because his children “evere weren upon him greedy.” (4200) But when the gifts diminish, so do his children’s affections, and “They wax unkynde unto him anon,/ For aftir had he cherisshynge noon.” (4204-5). John’s cure for this family disease is a loan from a merchant, “his trusty freend had been ful yore.” (4209). After he convinces his children to stay the night with him, he allows them to hear and see him count the loan--10,000 pounds--and they are convinced to let him stay with him for the duration of his life. Thinking that the treasure is locked in his chest, they care for him the rest of his life. After another clever trick at his death, his children are compelled to give money to the Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans. Retrieving the key from the orders, the children discover John’s trick: there is nothing save a mace:

In which ther gayly maad was and ywrought  
This same scripture: “I, John of Canace,  
Make swich testament testament heere in this place:  
Who berith charge of other men and is  
Of hem despysid, slayn be he with this.” (4350-4354)

As with so many other categorical distinctions envisioned by Hoccleve, the distance between prodigality and rightful largesse is variously indistinct and/or close. The slippage of these categories can occur, Hoccleve tells us, and his exemplum fashions a straightforward analogue of King Lear into something else entirely.<sup>138</sup> In the context of Hoccleve’s failed bid for financial security; his indirect and purposely confused relation to counsel and power; and his

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<sup>138</sup> Charles Blyth, “Master,” p. 354.

identification, not only with Chaucer, but also with Chaucer's fallible authors, his working of the exemplum surprises the reader with its direct appeal to the prince and a radical rewriting of reward and inheritance. After all, Hoccleve does not allow this exemplum to pass without personal comment. Fittingly, considering that *Regiment* begins with an overly long prologue that is starkly autobiographical, this voice again surfaces following the opening of an empty chest, as Hoccleve makes his identification with John clear.

I, Hoccleve, in swich cas am gilty; this me touchith.  
 So seith povert, which on fool large him vouchith  
 For thogh I nevere were of hy degree  
 Ne hadde mochil good ne greet richesse,  
 Yit hath the vice of prodigalitee  
 Smerted me sore and doon me hevynesse. (4362-4365)

And compare a similar sentiment in *La Male Regle*:

Othir than 'maistir' callid/ was I neuere,  
 Among this meynee in myn audience  
 Me thoghte/ I was y-maad a man for euere:  
 So tikelid me þat nyce reuerence  
 þat it me made larger of despense  
 Than þat I thocht han been/ o flaterie!  
 The guyse of thy traiterous diligence  
 Is folk to mescheef haasten & to hie<sup>139</sup>

Matching the foolishness of John, in both *Regement* and the autobiographical treatment of his own wasted youth, Hoccleve claims the vice of prodigality. In the second quotation, Hoccleve explains that when he had money the boatmen who ferried Hoccleve across the Thames would call him "maistir," but this honor was given only to separate him from his money. The terms of that trick match the machinations of John's children, who through "flaterie" take more and more of his wealth. Hoccleve, on the other hand, cannot be thought of a man, though he "thoghte/ I

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<sup>139</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, *Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick Furnivall and I. Gollancz and revised by Jerome Mitchell and A.I. Doyle (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), ll. 201-208. All citations of *La Male Regle* refer to this edition by line number.



was y-maad a man for euere,” but as the reader of the *Regle* and *Regiment* knows, this foolish display of overly large largesse does nothing but reduce Hoccleve to begging.

Unlike John, Hoccleve, of course, doesn't have the tools necessary to combat his age and poverty; John's strategy turns on the an old friend and the trust between them:

He to a marchant gooth of his notice  
Which that his trusty freend had been ful yore,  
Byseechyng him that he wolde him chevice  
Of ten thousand pound ne lenger ne more  
Than dayes thre, and he wolde it restore  
At his day. This was doon; the somme he hente  
And to his owne hous therwith he wente. (4208-4214)

And here the similarities end between John and Hoccleve; Hoccleve has no trusty friend to loan him money to convince Henry to fund his annuity, secure him a benefice, or supply him with other material comforts. Famously and supposedly, Hoccleve's friends had abandoned him after an acute mental breakdown, as he related in his *Complaint*, and he has no “trusty freend” of “ful yore.” The issue of trust and capital has been examined by William Kuskin who writes, “The Tale of John of Canace underscores that trust only masks the coercive power of capital, and that it is ‘foole large’ to believe otherwise.”<sup>140</sup> As with John's children and John himself, Hoccleve is locked in this system, and cannot act otherwise.

If one were to follow the logic of Hoccleve's implicit identification with John, then the aim and result of John's use of trust in an old friend to produce payment for lack of trust in his younger children touches again on danger for Hoccleve. The threat of violence assumed by this mace, “slayn be he with this,” produces an anxious extension of Hoccleve's identification with John. If John is Hoccleve, and Hoccleve John, then Hoccleve's care for Henry in the tutelage of

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<sup>140</sup> Kuskin, 250.

his tender years unpaid will be violence unto Henry.<sup>141</sup> Larry Scanlon interprets the mace “as a primitive weapon turned signifier of communal sovereignty” and as such “the mace embodies the power of ideology to material result.”<sup>142</sup> This “wonderful emblem of the power” that Scanlon imagine Hoccleve offers to Henry can certainly be seen differently. In fact, the mace in fact gestures to the same energies behind the textual creation of Hoccleve’s own poem to Henry, reproducing in fact the impetus to first be a good ruler, and then, as that good ruler, pay poor Hoccleve. Written exactly in Hoccleve’s text as exactly as it was on the mace, this textual product, “scripture,” recalls not only the status of Hoccleve as compiler, taking textual bits from *Secreta Secretorum* as well as *De ludo scacchorum* but also the prominent role of scripture proper within the *Regiment*. Again and again, Hoccleve uses the Bible as support for his teachings, and beats the expected reader with the knowledge that following his advice is to act the King, and to act the king is to be the king.<sup>143</sup>

In light of what Paul Strohm calls the exemplum’s “ambivalence or two-sidedness,” I want to turn now to Hoccleve’s other implicit identifications in this tale. While he explicitly makes clear his connection to John, for good and ill, he also through the workings of his own prologue forces an identification with John’s own unruly children. This link can too be contextualized through *Regle*, interrogated through its connection to kingship, and viewed in the material circumstances of John’s empty chest. The children are prodigal too, in fact. They accept all the money that John can give them, and turn him out when they exhaust his funds. It is only through loans that the promise of further payment induces the ingrates to accept him once again

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<sup>141</sup> For a reading that examines the ambivalence of the tale--as both advice to the Lancastrians and as a narrative that uncovers their empty claim to the throne, see Paul Strohm’s *England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 196-214.

<sup>142</sup> Scanlon, 320.

<sup>143</sup> Strohm wisely remarks, “A certain ambivalence or two-sidedness has characterized this narrative throughout: implicitly loyalist in its advice about inveigling subjects into submission, it is recklessly irreverent in identifying the father as gylour and the chest’s promise as an empty one. It is undeniably shrewd, but also cynical, in its perception that even an empty vacuous center can constitute subjects as good citizens so long as it engages their desires.”

into their home. The depth of identification that Hoccleve has with both the children and their father is confusingly intricate. Hoccleve, like John, paints himself as profligate and then penniless as an old man; yet, he also appears to suggest to Henry that payment is necessary for a sort of paternal love, making him more a child of John than John himself. Indeed, to the last point, Hoccleve in the beginning lines of the actual *speculum principis*, writes that he is “ful tendre” (2021) and “to this kyng beer” (2046) his “tendre love.” (2045) Donning the familiar modesty topos of dullness, he continues describing his “dul conceit” (2057) and warning the prince that composing this text “nat accorde may/ With my childhede—I am so childissh ay.” (2057-2058) All of this material positing Hoccleve’s youth and childish approach recalls that John’s plan to exact revenge is depicted as a process of making them seem younger, and apparently, foolish. After inducing them into a sort of poverty through charity—part of the deal to get the empty chest is to empty their own pockets—Hoccleve notes “Hir berdes shaved he right smoothe and cleene.” (4340) His children, like Hoccleve to Henry, become gullible and childish, even as they both seek out remuneration for their tasks.

In fact, Hoccleve’s interactions with the Old Man in the extended prologue to *Regiment* concern the very issues raised by a depiction of Hoccleve opening his own empty chest: indeed, what is left after the death of Chaucer, and the death of Gower? The movement for Hoccleve in the text from calling the old man names to the name of “fadir” dramatizes in reverse the metamorphosis of John’s treatment at the hands of his children. They transition from a false sense of affection to one of annoyance, and finally anger when the truth of their empty chest is revealed. Yet, Hoccleve’s relations to this old man are not strictly those of a father, but father figure, and in the distance between reality and perception of that role, tutelage of course plays a

role. Hoccleve is indeed taught and reformed as an author who can now advocate for good governance.

*The Tale of Jonathas* is always placed in the *Series* after Hoccleve's *Lerne for to Dye*, and this structure is presumably problematic, unexpected, or rich enough to cause Hoccleve to create a dialogue with a friend to conceptualize it and give a proper introduction to it. Indeed, *Lerne for to Dye* appears final. In fact, it appears at the end of this chapter, a gesture to its concluding aims and material. Yet, if anything describes "the poor old versifier" Hoccleve, it is a dual commitment both to follow conventions to a point and to flout them where necessary, especially in circumstances such as these, where the refusal of accepting his own's text logic actually makes for a more logical progression for the large project that is the *Series*.

The pose of penitence and penitential poet does not disappear after the thematics of *Dye*, as *Jonathas* follows the figurative and literal moralization of the tale. Like *La Male Regle* before them, both *Dye* and *Jonathas* take the young man as teacher and student variously through the texts, and *Jonathas* cannot be separated from the mercantile or material world of Hoccleve's own textual activities. That is, in the environs outside the text, Hoccleve's existence is both apparently and very likely one which has a great deal of uncertainty and want of security and money. It is further likely that whether or not he was profligate as a youth, the competing pressures of winning annuities and corrodies (more about the latter in the next chapter) can possibly be offered as partial basis for his "beggar" poetics. That his own circumstances might suggest parallels with his verse is not my aim here, however. But beggar poetics has more meaning than money, as the explication of *Jonathas* makes clear.

Inheritance has been a theme for my discussion of Hoccleve, either foregrounded or recessed, from the beginning of this study of senex style; it seems apropos of my aim to uncover

the contours of Hoccleve's engagement with senex style to discover first why he might have positioned *The Tale of Jonathas* after such a final act and text such as *Dye*. Hoccleve's own words in this deserve first discussion, but always caution should be read into the dialogue he either creates or reports. Indeed, it is part of the structure of the book itself that such a dialogue occurs. Hoccleve's introductory gestures to the *Tale of Jonathas* clearly link it not only to *La Male Regle* but also to that poem's foregrounding in what I've characterized senex style. While the core meaning of this authorial position is consistent from Gower to Shakespeare, the execution of a certain writing of old age through old age differs in substantial ways for Hoccleve: as an poet who attempts to embody the role of both teacher and student, especially to his youth in *La Male Regle* and the *Tale of Jonathas* and to his old age in the *Regiment of Princes*, Hoccleve's engagement with senex style reflects in his odd twisting of temporalities as he vacillates from teacher to student and back. His discourse of mastery and governance connects with late medieval discourses of tutelage and power; to be lesser than the subject of the advice—he is young when he attempts to instruct his age, and old when he attempts to correct his long-passed youth-- when giving instruction maps onto the logical contradiction in senex style. Powerless, yet with power to teach and advise, Hoccleve-cum-teacher/student uses old age to instruct and learn.

At the beginning of *Jonathas*, a nameless friend of Hoccleve asks him to translate a tale which he read. The friend supplies rationale that are familiar to readers of *La Male Regle*, which serves as cautionary tale of unrestrained youth.

Thensaumple of it/ to yonge men mighte auaille  
 And par cas/ cause hem riot to forbere  
 The rathere/ and be better of gouernaill  
 Youthe in no wyse/ wole his thankes fail  
 fflesh for to chepe, femel and venal

Payyng for it/ more than worth is al.<sup>144</sup>

As with the subject of this thesis, this story is aimed directly at a certain construction of masculine behavior and identity. The friend ties wanton activity in young men—and the narrative here is explicit on that point—to the pursuit of corporeal pleasures and the enjoyment of women, as men chase “fflesh for to chepe, femel and venal” and pay more than it is worth. Men here are led astray by their desire for taste of the flesh, and the what’s made clear later by Hoccleve in this exchange is the ruinous image that the friend here is creating: blaming women as a monolithic group, who destroy manly virtue. But Hoccleve himself has been guilty of this charge.

That this passage concentrates on “gouernaill” and female agency will come as no surprise. One of the implicit tensions within *La Male Regle* is Hoccleve’s gendering of youth as feminine. Grammatical gender, at least, in late medieval texts is often more than simply a characteristic of language. Studies of personification have linked grammatical gender to larger images of abstract nouns made flesh, and Hoccleve’s contrived narrative of making makes this link more concrete.<sup>145</sup> In fact, as Catherine Batt has noted,

In the *Series*, the issue of women’s reception of literature, or perhaps more exactly, a man’s construction, from a position of some ignorance, of literature and of women’s responses to it, serves both to structure the collection as a whole, that is, to generate more writing, and to intensify the debate surrounding the disparateness and subjectivity of attitudes to literature in general.<sup>146</sup>

The centrality of a certain construction of a female subjectivity is in many ways central to the workings of Hoccleve describing youth and death, in the *Series*, as feminine. Indeed, after *Regle*

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<sup>144</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, *Tale of Jonathas*, in *Minor Poems*, ed. Frederick Furnivall and I. Gollancz and revised by Jerome Mitchell and A.I. Doyle (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), ll. 8-14. All citations refer to this edition by line number.

<sup>145</sup> To demonstrate the link here, one might view, for example what Langland does not do with female personification and allegory in Helen Cooper, “Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 5 (1991): pp. 31-48.

<sup>146</sup> Catherine Batt, “Hoccleve and...Feminism?” *Essays on Hoccleve*, ed. Catherine Batt (London: Brepols, 1996), pp. 55-84. (p. 59)

and *Jonathas*, can a reader picture youth as anything other than a young, wanton woman? At this instant in the text, the contrast between good “gouvernail” and evil women is clear. The connotations of “gouvernail” further suggest that this difference between youth rightly lived, and wanton misspent years is a product of teaching. “Gouvernail” is used elsewhere in Hoccleve’s series, in another tale from the *Gesta Romanorum*, to mean tutelage and governance of youth, and it is a mean well-attested in the extant corpus of late medieval English literature.<sup>147</sup> Hoccleve sets up personal governance, well taught, against the machinations of women and the young men who succumb to their predations.

Hoccleve’s *Tale of Jonathas* begins appropriately enough with the depiction of a Roman emperor, dying, who must decide how to allocate his property and wealth. His three sons split his inheritance in seemingly unequal ways: the first receives all property that his father inherited, the second all the property the father himself acquired, and the third a brooch, a ring, and a jewel. That property and titles escape the third son is noteworthy, as this image encapsulates the meaning of empty inheritance for Hoccleve that is a hallmark of his poetic corpus and its engagement with senex style. John Lydgate, as opposed to Hoccleve, receives the majority of whatever might be understood as Chaucer’s patrimony;<sup>148</sup> Hoccleve, it seems, is left with just the image of a father, and some stylish trinkets, or in other words, just the outward signs of an inheritance.

“My wordes, sone, enprynte wel in mynde,” (110) so go the instructions given to Jonathas, the younger son of the wise king of Thomas Hoccleve’s *Tale of Jonathas*, part of his *Series*. The tale is an apt one to begin an examination of the old body in the context of tutelage,

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<sup>147</sup> gouvernail, n. *MED*: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED19165&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (Accessed 5 May 2013).

<sup>148</sup> Besides my discussion of the appearance of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate together as the three flowers of English literature, see Meyer-Lee’s suggestive thoughts on Hoccleve as laureate and Lydgate’s assumption of that position, following *Regiment*’s dissemination and Hoccleve’s illness. (pp. 88-92).

especially given the lessons learned by Jonathas throughout the tale, and the narratives connections to inheritance. The text revolves centrally around the inheritance of the youngest son; his eldest brother receives all the patrimony that their father was granted, and the second, all the property of the father not received from the grandfather. A confusing situation, Hoccleve uses this situation to cast aside the primacy of primogeniture through his text. Writing of the scope of his text, Hoccleve announces

Of the yongeste sone I telle shal,  
And speke no more of his brethren two,  
ffor with hem haue y nat to do at al. (127-129)

Hoccleve's investment, for lack of a better word, is according to these lines just for the youngest son, and the one specifically cut out of a real inheritance. His turn of phrase for this attention which he will only give the youngest son is peculiar. He has nothing "at al" to do with the other sons. This line is ambiguous and probably purposefully so. Does it mean that their stories will have nothing to contribute to the moralizing for which his friend has asked? Or does this line convey that Hoccleve has no personal connection with landed men, men with greater connections and opportunities? In other words, perhaps Hoccleve only draws attention to the son whose youthful profligacy matches the narrative of Hoccleve's former state and earlier poem *La Male Regle*. This distinction is most likely to fine to parse, and in any case both meanings are present, I will argue, in this line. Indeed, while the titular figure of the tale does not necessarily evoke the contours of the narration of rhetoricized old age, the context of Hoccleve's own extended relationship both to impaired old age, textual production in his own admitted age, and concentration on the thematic of inheritance defines *Jonathas* as a tale necessary to understand senex style in Hoccleve.

Like *Regle*, which I discuss below, *Jonathas* concentrates on illness and woe tied to possessions, the loss of those possessions, and the restoration of health through restoration of



those material objects. The third unlucky son loses his three magic objects—which without other material support, such as lands, houses, or coin—win him a life of study at the university and an existence unconnected with daily labor. His lover, Fellicula, manages to steal each one, leaving Jonathas penniless and possession-less. He outwits her, and eventually posing as a doctor and quasi-priest for her manages to retrieve his goods and kill her with poisoned water.

At the end of the tale, Jonathas, disguised, tells Fellicula

Lady, yee muste openly yow confesse;  
And if ageyn good conscience & right.  
Any good han yee take, more or lesse,  
Beforn this hour of any maner wight,  
yilde it anoon/ elles nat in the might  
Of man is it/ to yeue a medecyne  
þat yow may hele of your seeknesse & pyne. (617-623).

Robyn Malo has tied this scene in particular to Jonathas position as somewhat of an “ill-trained physician.”<sup>149</sup> Describing the multiple meanings of “openly...confesse”, Malo notes that Fellicula entrails spill out after Jonathas gives her poisoned water and cursed fruit. Continuing to address how odd this confessional stance seems, she argues “there is no clear sense that she seeks a physician for any other reason than to be healed. In other words, as a metaphor for the penitent Christian, Fellicula fits the bill.”<sup>150</sup> Beyond the shortcomings of confessional discourse, however, this scene might in fact be tied back to the beginning discussion of prodigality, avarice, and inheritance that springs from the exemplum of John of Canace. Like John, Jonathas is guilty of prodigality, a “seeknesse” fully curable. Fellicula, like John’s children, appears incurable, suffering from avarice and grasping greed. Tellingly, the fruit and water, both cursed and poisoned which kill Fellicula, earlier only injured Jonathas when he consumed them. As a

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<sup>149</sup> Robyn Malo, “Penitential Discourse in Hoccleve’s Series.” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34.1 (2012): pp. 277-305 (p. 301)

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

prodigal son, he is damaged but salvageable. Fellicula, though she “fits the bill of penitent Christian,” is doomed, like John’s children.

The connections here, which one might make between *Jonathas* and John of Canace go further. It is the first trick that Fellicula executes—pretending to have her strong box, her chest, robbed so that it appears Jonathas goods are stolen recalls the earlier treatment of John’s own box. Unlike John, Fellicula’s trick has no charity involved and is merely a tool for her own aggrandizement. Instead, at the end, she finds her strong box really empty when Jonathas recovers his valuables, and her entrails spill out of her bodily chest. Avarice, indeed, is a poisonous ailment, whether young or old. Part of Hoccleve’s own inheritance in using monetary metaphors that touch also upon embodied concepts of inheritance is that Chaucer, his own “maistir,” had already explored some of the thematic connections of the chest to the body. At the close of this examination of Hoccleve, I want to return to the idea of a locked chest, a box for storing valuables. Indeed, I conclude here with a turn to chests, returning to where I first began, but moving beyond the meaning of strong boxes and human bodies to another kind of chest. Coffins, tombs, sarcophogai: these physical containers of the physical remains, chests of another sort, are also evoked by the ME *chest*. A chest to hold the corporeal chest, a coffin seems an apt symbol with which to link Hoccleve both to Chaucer *and* to Gower. As I’ve explained in Chapter 2, the ghostly presence of Chaucer rising from his son’s tomb, illustrated in Thomas Speght’s 1598 edition of *Chaucers Workes* is linked to Hoccleve, and his ghostly resurrection of Chaucer in the *Regiment of Princes*. That Hoccleve, Chaucer’s self-proclaimed son, should engender the image of Chaucer rising from his own son’s tomb seems particularly appropriate, as the construction of paternity and genealogy is one driven from the present and future to the past. It is, in short, an empty birth.

I think it a commonplace at this point that Hoccleve knew, or at the very least, constructed a rhetorical persona who recognized the emptiness at the center of his efforts to link himself to “Fadir” Chaucer. Yet, still, John of Canace demonstrate, heirs can be fooled into accepting empty inheritances, locked boxes, full of nothing, as it were. The prodigality which is foregrounded in the descriptions of both father and issue in the exemplum of John of Canace suggest that Hoccleve might view his own distracting self deprecations as author and man, perhaps in an effort to reach the level of subtlety and comic effect that Chaucer’s own comments of his textualized personae create. Hoccleve is too good at insult. His rendering of his persona as dull, old, unschooled, lacking in morals as a youth, lacking in constancy and stability as an aged man reach too far; they have been accepted largely uncritically, but when viewed with caution and care, these postures are central to Hoccleve’s authorial status. However, as I hope is clear, these moves occlude another, even more central, facet of Hoccleve’s textual relationships and poetic modes: the relationship between Hoccleve and Gower is a deep one, with the former driving much of Hoccleve’s poetic practice. If Chaucer can be given credit for some of Hoccleve’s style and formal elements, then the penitential pose and hybrid role as teacher and student, inhabiting simultaneously the role of insider and outside observer of the workings of power colors Hoccleve a true disciple of Gower.

I argue in this investigation of senex style, to use the postures of youth and age, together with shifting meanings of ability and impairment links Hoccleve more firmly to Gower. Like Gower, Hoccleve’s construction of old age colors his verse. And like his “maistir” before him, the pose of penitent is one which fits Hoccleve. I have made clear that my examination of Hoccleve is structured around a shifting dichotomy between emptiness and fullness, and like Gower, Hoccleve is a poet who suffers the ignominy of silence following the fifteenth century

and sixteenth centuries. Ralph Hanna, describing why book history and medieval English literary history have formed a necessary alliance writes,

In English medieval studies, no literary history can be possible (nor has there ever been one) without a reliance upon book history. In contrast to the situation obtaining in later periods, only a single writer, Geoffrey Chaucer, has that continuous publication and reading history necessary to being a known historical quality.<sup>151</sup>

Gower's example, like Hoccleve's cannot be further away from the continuous existence that Hanna describes for Chaucer's canon. Indeed, poor, old Gower's reputation followed Hoccleve's at the close of the sixteenth century, and what remains of an early modern appreciation of Gower is spectral, and contained mainly in the textual journey that the "Apollonius of Tyre" exemplum takes.<sup>152</sup> In her discussion of the reemergence of Gower, through transcription of the Trentham MS for Granville Leveson-Gower, second Earl Gower, Echard notes that Thomas Berthelet's 1554 edition of *Confessio*, Gower largely disappears.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, like Hoccleve's, Gower's reputation basically dies. This this literal and figurative death of an author and any promised progeny seem particularly pregnant with possibility when viewing Hoccleve's *Series* and specifically, *Lerne for to Dye*, connected as it has been very recently to Hoccleve's own methods and views of book production.<sup>154</sup>

Considering that this poem is the *only* poem in Hoccleve's hand in all of its then-contemporary manuscripts, a concluding examination of Hoccleve's construction of age, learning, and authorship in *Lerne for to Dye* can, I argue, teach the reader how poses of young and old in the frame of instruction and didactic poetry operate in Hoccleve's verse. I will briefly flesh out this work that chronicles the loss of flesh, life, and body and show the inversion again

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<sup>151</sup> Hanna, "Middle English Books," pp. 157-158.

<sup>152</sup> Siân Echard, "Aristocratic Antiquaries: Gower on Gower," in *Printing the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): pp. 97-125.

<sup>153</sup> Echard, *Printing*, p. 101.

<sup>154</sup> David Watt, "I this book shal make': Thomas Hoccleve's Self Publication and Book Production," *Leeds Studies in English* 34 (2003): pp. 133-160. A full length study of the *Series* in the same vein by David Watt is forthcoming (July 2013), but unfortunately, too late for inclusion here.

of instruction, in terms of age, a strategy inflected through senex style. In her discussion of Hoccleve's *Lerne for to Dye*, Robyn Malo posits that

*Learn to Die* presents penance and mainstream confession as the remedy for being forgotten and ostracized. The poem, a translation of Suso's *Ars moriendi* comprises an interior dialogue between a "disciple" (LD 87) and the image of a dying man who convince the disciple "to lerne for to die" (LD 50).<sup>155</sup>

Indeed, Hoccleve's reworking of Henry Suso's prose work reimagines parts of what might be considered elements that are Hocclevian in nature, including the creation of an imagined dialogue with a created persona, who represents a different generational position. Like the rhetorical construction of the Old Man in *Regiment*, the image of a young man, dying, gives the poet space to act as both teacher and student, taking the name Disciple as he learns from Death, and acting as teacher, as he attempts to correct the selfish thinking of the young man, dying early. These common elements, which Malo contends "dovetail with those of the narrator of the *Male regle* and stem from confessional discourse" concerns the creation of a younger, sinful, dying man who is subsumed into the narrator's older body. Death commands this narrator to

"Beholde now the liknesse and figure  
Of a man dyyng and talkyng with thee."  
The disciple, of þat speche took good cure,  
And in his conceit/ bysyly soghte he,  
And ther-with-al/ considere he gan, & see  
In him self put/ the figure & liknesse  
Of a yong man of excellent fairnesse,  
Whom deeth so ny ransakid had, & soght,  
þat he withynne a whyle sholde dye.  
And for his soules helthe/ had he right noght  
disposid/ al vnreedy hens to hye  
Was he and therfore he began to crye  
With lamentable vois/ in this maneere,  
þat sorwe and pitee greet/ was it to heere: (85-98)

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<sup>155</sup> Malo, p. 301.

Reading *Lerne for to Dye*, it is hard not to imagine the debt which Hoccleve possibly owes not to only to Suso but also to Gower for this rhetorical construction. That the “ymage” the Disciple constructs is one which becomes part of Disciple, reflecting the self-conscious characteristics of Hoccleve’s *Series*, might in fact connect back to Gower’s own construction of Amans, along with the subsuming of that identity into Gower’s own textually constructed identity as Gower. More simply, Gower merges a penitential persona with his own in *Confessio*, a move similar here to Disciple’s. Ashby Kinch has recorded that an illustration of this poem in Bodley MS Selden Supra 53, f. 118 makes this linkage between the image and disciple clear. While Suso’s text is, according to Kinch, silent concerning this identification, “the Arch Selden image converts the text’s abstract didactic message into a visual self-reflection, a literal realization for Disciple of the venerable monastic tradition of internalizing the death of the Other as one’s own: *sum quod eris* (I am what you will be).”<sup>156</sup> Indeed, the words used by Hoccleve indicate that the adoption of this image is rather expected. It is after all an image which Disciple is instructed to construct, and as such recalls the poetic enterprise itself. But more specifically, in its lexicon of images that position the young man as both unready and loudly mournful of his lot, recall vaguely the portions of *Regiment* which describe John Badby. Rather than tie these piteous cries to the Lollard, however, examining *Regiment* together with *Dye* instead seems to bring to mind the prince’s woeful performance.

Turned inward, the grief that the prince feels in *Regiment* instead has a connection with the plaintive tones of the young man, who aware of his youth and desirous of more life begs

Death to

Spare my youthe/ of age rype ynow  
 To dye / am y nat yit/ spare me now

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<sup>156</sup> Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Meditating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2013), p. 70.

How cruel þat thow art/ on me nat kythe!  
Take me nat out of this world so swythe!

To which the disciple replies death favors no one, “Ne of the olde and yonge/ hath no mercy;” Death, according to the Disciple, kills the some “in youthe,” many an othir eek in middil age,” and some not “till they right olde be.” (162-164) Like Hoccleve before in the *Regiment*, the young man cannot hear the truth. If Hoccleve had difficulty hearing the message of the Old Man in the prologue, then Hoccleve, through the Disciple, now is hard to hear. Perhaps indicative of how difficult it is to align Hoccleve with either youth or age, this intransigence on the part of the youth dying rehearses much received material about old age, some of it to be found, for example, in Cicero’s *De Senectute*. For example, the belief expressed by the dying man is that “rype” old age is the age at which death should strike, echoing Cato’s image of old age as the last act in the play of life, given in Chapter 85 of *De Senectute*. Implicitly, the argument is one that has been made over and over: it is unnaturally for the young to die.

These lines, however, viewed within their temporal progression actually show the naturalness of another time-bound process. If *La Male regle* supposes that, at the end, the old man is the main teacher—arguably it does—then *Regiment* reverses this arrangement rhetorically, through Hoccleve’s claim of childish wit and young counsel, itself a fraught proposition (especially considering Cato’s digression on the evils of youth counsel in *De Senectute*). *Lerne for to Dye*, through the use of the young body as reflection of material prime for educating, demonstrates that as the old man learns, he teaches the young man whose example supplies his material. *Lerne for to Dye* actually returns to the site of teaching, through senex style, which *La Male regle* originally dramatizes. Malo’s ending judgment of *Dye* is fitting here, I think, and a natural place to end, if we as readers can acknowledge like the dying youth of *Lerne for to Dye* that concluding occurs naturally at the end.

Is it better in the end to conform to convention, embrace taxonomies of sin, madness, social stereotypes? These are complications the poem raises but does not—perhaps cannot—resolve, except to rest in the paradoxical hope that one might find a receptive audience. It is suggestive, as Steven Rosenski Jr. points out, that Hoccleve’s additions to Suso’s text focus precisely on issues of isolation, loneliness, and the desire to be reintegrated into the community.<sup>157</sup>

As perhaps not the uncouth and deformed, but purported dull “son” of Chaucer, Hoccleve’s own relationship to a looming and famous figure like Chaucer or Gower is necessarily tortured and difficult. In his discussion of the “poetic usurpations” of Hoccleve’s poetry, Ethan Knapp, for example, sees in *Regiment*, “a Hoccleve whose wariness about authority and paternal figures makes in these matters at least, a true son of Chaucerian wit.”<sup>158</sup> Even when used anxiously—as I too use it—the language of sons and fathers is of course deeply embedded in temporal progressions of literary history. According to Knapp, “It is, indeed, hard to imagine a form of literary history that would not be genealogical.”<sup>159</sup> Without a father, there can be no son, but relationships can continue. Augmenting these filial-driven notions of literary inheritance, progression, and history with stylized old age as *prosthetic*, the figure of the old man makes clear that a reproductively sterile and supposedly unproductive body of literary history can be revised.

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<sup>157</sup> Malo, p. 304.

<sup>158</sup> Knapp, 127.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, page 109.



## Chaucer's "Latere Age"? Dirt, Rust, and Anger in Chaucer's Corpus

Dirty old men. The *OED* marks the first attestation of this phrase in the twentieth century,<sup>160</sup> although any reader of Chaucer for instance understands the applicability of the phrase to several characters in his corpus, and to his own rhetorical presentation in his envoy to Scogan. Beginning with a reading of Chaucer's poem to Scogan, continuing with the lyric to Adam Scriveyn, and concluding with the Reeve, I will trace the contours of a certain meaning of dirty for Chaucer: an engagement with sex, sexuality, and seeming and teeming procreation through the presentation of figures of male age who represent both Chaucer's debt to previous textual traditions, and his inheritance for posterity. In this chapter, I shall argue that Chaucer's creation and adaptation of certain elderly male characters, who are all dirty in a sexual sense embody both a reflection of an authorial mode and a relationship, based on persona-theory, of Chaucer to his literary forbears and sources, which was never clean.

As example of Chaucerian old age, the Reeve suggest something of an affective engagement with and intellectual distance from the figure of authorial and narrative Chaucer. For in fact, on one hand, Chaucer seems to have affected a special place of disgust for those old men who maintained open sexual desires, and on the other hand, he implicitly and sometimes explicitly tied them to narrative enterprise, with its connections to authorial personae, truth value, and perspective. This twisted connection to the old body is nowhere more central than the *General Prologue*-portrait, prologue, and tale of the Reeve. Indeed, Chaucer famously, evidently an old man himself, created a figure of male age that is characterized by abjection and filth, not only in the descriptions of his bodies, but also in his desires and actions. While the Reeve might simply function as a figure of fear, disgust, and anger, his engagement with the Miller and its

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<sup>160</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*:  
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/view/Entry/53367?redirectedFrom=DIRTY+OLD+MAN#eid6647598> (Accessed 10/29/12).

similarity to Adam's upbraiding provide instances of uncomfortable identification with a certain self-created persona of Chaucer as the rhetorically aging author.<sup>161</sup> Further in the rhetorically disgusting depictions of old age-related infirmities and impairments, along with the noxious affects felt by each lies a kernel of historical understanding that suggests a historical relation that a historical, aging Chaucer might have with his literary forebears and Chaucerian heirs.

While many of the descriptions of Chaucer in the fifteenth century avoid the appellation of old in conjunction with Chaucer, later descriptions highlight what must have been, according to these biographical treatments, his old age. And here from Thomas Speght, editing *Chaucers Woorkes* in the sixteenth century, to William Godwin, writing in the nineteenth, Chaucer takes on the primary characterization that seems to follow Gower: old. Godwin, for example, in his first volume, before he even treats Chaucer's birth, treats *at length* his supposed birth dates for the purpose of testing Chaucer's old age. Godwin succumbs to a common fallacy when reading Chaucer's playful posturing. Taking textualized Geoffrey at his word, Godwin assumes that the testimony of the narrator of the *House of Fame* is just that: the testimony of the real Chaucer. So what? In essence, the so what question can be assured thus: if the real Geoffrey can't be read from what one assumes are his own textualized creations in his poetry, then at the very least, these narratorial asides, personal descriptions, and exclamations of inability, age, and portliness instead postulate *some kind* of subjectivity. If one cannot read the real Geoffrey in them, then one can still read what passes for authorial subjectivity *for* Chaucer. And I want to argue, throughout, that of the many ways Chaucerian texts argue for a form of authorial subjectivity is the pose of masculine old age, which refracts through a shared set of writing practices, allusions, and descriptions that properly constitute one version of Chaucer's senex style. It is frankly

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<sup>161</sup> As Derek Pearsall suggests in *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), "that the work of Chaucer's lasy years, or even his last months, was the 'knitting-up' of Fragment I and the writing of the Miller's Tale and Reeve's Tale." (227).

unimportant to me whether Chaucer was in Godwin's words "sixty-four or sixty-five" or "forty-eight or forty nine" when Gower saluted Chaucer's writing at the end of Book VIII of the *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>162</sup> Godwin cannot imagine that Gower "speaking of his friend under fifty years of age," would "employ such terms, and, in this ungracious way, give him his discharge from the theater of literature and of life." It is indeed arguable whether Gower's lines do this in any way, but regardless, the rhetorical position of authorial age carries more weight than the light and scant features of "real" Chaucerian biography. When Gower writes of Chaucer's days of old age, can it not be considered apart from a modern system of valuation for old age and youth, but instead within a textual system in which old age can function as a rhetorical pose of inability hiding or abetting actual ability? Old age might have been a positively valued at a widespread level; indeed, even as Chaucer embraces the postures of age, he relegates figures of masculine old age to the limits of human propriety. But within this framework of fallibility, Chaucer is fashioning an authorial pose, one reflected within the contours of senex style.

Occurring in what is often called the first fragment of a work constituted of various fragments and links, the *Reeve's Prologue and Tale* presents first, in the prologue, a learned demonstration of various images of aging, borrowed extensively from Latinate traditions and second, in the tale, a blending of the French fabliaux and other continental sources including, as Nolan has deftly suggested, a reflection of classical sources. Indeed, in the Reeve's effort to blindside the Miller and serve a balanced account, his textual borrowings resemble those of Chaucer the author. Derek Pearsall has characterized the narration of the fabliaux of the Miller, the Reeve, the Shipman, and the Merchant, as "sleight of hand," a tricky move to put the dirty

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<sup>162</sup> William Godwin, "Dissertation Upon the Period of the Birth of Chaucer," in *The Life of Chaucer*, vol. 1 of 4 (London: Printed by T. Davison, White-Friars for Richard Phillips, No. 71, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1804): pp. xxi-xliii (p. xxxix).

words of an upper class entertainment in the mouths of the “cherles.”<sup>163</sup> In this way, the Reeve’s own tale, in particular, participates in a similar textual economy as the author of the *Tales*, as the Reeve blends English, French and Italian sources for the presentation of old age, creating a persona that can be closely identified with the I-persona of “Scogan” and “Adam Sciveyn,” the textualized Chaucer of the later lyrics, even as that Reeve, like the I-persona revels in the dirt of age.

Chaucer’s Reeve has been written off as a vicious old man, incapable of returning an appropriate tale to the Miller, but as I will demonstrate in “Rewriting Old Age: The Invention of English Senex Style from Chaucer to Caxton,” the Reeve functions as a symbol of authority and authorial persona, suggesting that the Reeve’s own cries of impairment are as hollow as the body he criticizes. Even if modern critics are lulled into believing the Reeve’s claims of powerlessness, the fifteenth century which follows proves exception to this rule, as Thomas Hoccleve, George Ashby, and William Caxton highlight their own age and dullness, tying themselves to the same narrative energies behind Chaucer’s cranky creation as they seek to authorize their works and cement power, prestige, and position.

As befitting this concentration on reading Chaucer through time, and through the Reeve, a character of *The Canterbury Tales*, one obsessed with right reading and accurate accounting along with old age, it seems appropriate that starting in 1993 with the publication of Lerer’s book, the critical nucleus of this chapter is moored a study of reading Chaucer and Chaucer as reader from each decade beginning with the 1990s and the publication of Lerer’s book in 1993. Chaucerian reception is both an old topic and a new approach, signaling the depth of its reach and something that begs to be examined again. Chaucerian reception is not only how we receive him, but how he receives himself; a point of view in the examination of his work which

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<sup>163</sup> Pearsall, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 237-238.

concentrates on Chaucer's creation of personae, as later readers invented their own version of an authorial persona for Chaucer himself. It is to read both Chaucer and like Chaucer, a point made brilliantly by Trigg; but it is a job unfinished, seemingly without end. For though Gust, Lerer, and Trigg all read the short lyrics, all examine Chaucer's later reception, what is also common to them is an absence of attention. In their silence on the Reeve, I argue, one can find a new way to view Chaucer, his writing style, and the creation of a corpus and an author centered on the textualized experience of old age.

The Reeve, unfortunately, is usually subjected to much critical silence. Although he is examined somewhat by Lee Patterson in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* and briefly touched on in H. Marshall Leicester's *The Disenchanted Self*, he is usually figured as a compliment to discussions of the Miller. More recent explorations of Chaucer have likewise given somewhat short shrift to the Reeve. He has no part in *Chaucer's Queer Nation* and is unvoiced in contemporary treatments of persona and authorship such as Alastair Minnis's *Fallible Authors*. Every monograph need not treat the Reeve; it is curious, however, that in spite of the character's utility to some of these studies, that he is left out. An explanation might originate from the Reeve himself. His prologue is interpreted by the Host, only the Cook responds to his tale, and he himself rides apart from the rest of the pilgrims on the way to Canterbury, as the ending lines of his *General Prologue*-portrait make clear. Indeed, according to recent reappraisals of the Reeve, both his temperament and seemingly unequal tale, given to "quite" the Miller are central to a scholarly enterprise that voraciously consumes all things Chaucerian. According to Nicole Nolan Sidhu, following her summation of the clerks' revenge in *The Reeve's Tale* and their retrieval of the ill-gotten cake (this last move takes the cake!),

The combination of disturbing brutality and comic high jinks that we see here and elsewhere in the *Reeve's Tale* has presented a perennial challenge to scholars.

Although the tale's milieu and characters suggest comical fabliau trickery, it depicts extremes of brutality, desperation, and social anxiety that are unusual in the genre. As a result, critics have tended to dismiss the tale as a vengeful narrative by a bitter old man that signifies the decline of morality or political resistance (Muscatine, 204; Patterson, 276).<sup>164</sup>

A bitter old man, signifying the decline of morality or political resistance?<sup>165</sup> Certainly that description does not fit Chaucer, but as I will show below, it need not in order to see how, like Minnis's vision of the Pardoner or the Wife of Bath, the Reeve is wrought with "authoritative materials and methodologies,"<sup>166</sup> even if he is bitter, old, and in decline. Like Chaucer, however, the Reeve spoils many expectations for genre and textuality, and apart from the brutality, with which he attacks the Miller, it is clear that he is well trained at narrative sleight of hand. It would be foolish, I think, to recreate the past in Chaucer scholarship and attempt links between historical personages and Chaucer's pilgrims, or worse to see a one-to-one correspondence between a pilgrim and Chaucer. The Reeve, like Chaucer, has signs about him that suggest author-like status, and like Minnis, I too see in the slippery distance between *auctor* and *auctoritas* a key to reading a pilgrim differently.

Where I depart, obviously, is choice of pilgrim. This foray into senex style uncovers connections between selected short lyrics and the materials that center on the Reeve. While the Wife of Bath or the Pardoner are frequently connected to authority and authorial poses<sup>167</sup>, the Reeve has escaped, unfortunately, similar treatments. It is unfortunate because the Reeve offers

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<sup>164</sup> Nicole Nolan Sidhu, "To Late for to Crie": Female Desire, Fabliau Politics, and Classical Legend in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*" *Exemplaria* 21:1 (2009): pp. 3-23 (p.4). I return later in the chapter to Sidhu's reading, for even as my reading departs from hers, the insight Sidhu has into the textual economy created by the Reeve is fundamental to an examination of the Reeve within senex style.

<sup>165</sup> The efforts to place the Reeve within contemporary politics has been a fruitful enterprise, and one that guides partly my thinking here. Most recently, for example, view David R. Carlson's *Chaucer's Jobs* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.)

<sup>166</sup> In the aforementioned *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), Alastair Minnis attempts new readings of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath, in his words, "bearers of authoritative material and methodologies." (p. 4)

<sup>167</sup> Persona theory, and the role of authorial personae as a primary commitment in Chaucer's fiction are central to Geoffrey W. Gust's *Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

something to the study of the author in late medieval England which also offers different suggestions for creation of literary history. Marginal for many reasons, the Reeve's churlish old age, and flaunting of the constraints of time recommend him as a curative for a long-standing (and oft-discussed) view of Chaucer as the playful, mock-serious Chaucer; this altogether angry and envious Reeve, both too old and too young,<sup>168</sup> threatens to revise parts of Lerer's totalizing picture of Father Chaucer and the infants which he begets in the poetry of the fifteenth century. In both acknowledging and departing from the later work of Gust and Trigg, an emphasis on Reeve as authorial voice—at least one, no one said Chaucer had to have only one—also promises to use the supposed universal qualities of the Reeve's examination of old age and the lifecycle<sup>169</sup> to give more historical specificity to Chaucer and his poetry. Tied by both place—Norfolk—and historical circumstances—both the Reeve and Chaucer are grappling with a very late medieval picture of old age—Chaucer can more readily be inserted into history through the Reeve and the narratives he manages. Finally, to see Chaucer, through the Reeve, working through senex style rebrands literary history, linking the *Confessio* to *Canterbury* to Hoccleve's *Complaint to Pericles*.

It seems odd that no one has managed this link before. The evidence is both extant and extensive. Indeed, the Reeve's characterization as a Norfolk man is heavy with meaning. A region of England dominated by large landed estates, it is a logical place to find a reeve, compiling lists of assets and expenditures for a lord. Beyond logic, it reflects some of the extant bits of Chaucer's own biography that might link his authorial presence to that of the Reeve.

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<sup>168</sup> Susanna Greer Fein's work on the Reeve as a reflection of the *puer senex*, though older, has proven remarkable resilient. In "Lat the Children Pleye: The Game Betwixt the Ages in *The Reeve's Tale*," in *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive Spirit in The Canterbury Tales* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991): pp. 73-104, Fein locates within the Reeve a fitting symbol of the man stuck in time in the *Tales*, who "refuses to accept his time-bound experience in the world and hence lives a sort of death in life." (p. 78).

<sup>169</sup> Here I follow Fein in reading the Reeve's use of a plural pronoun in discussing those affected by old age as indicative of an urge, perhaps, to "speak for all the offended old men who make the mistake of not turning over the leaf to pass over *The Miller's Tale*." (p. 76)

Together with the ties of figures such as Henry Scogan, a man of Norfolk, prominent addressee of a short lyric of Chaucer's and creator of his own *Moral Balade*, Chaucer's exceptional characterization of the Reeve as a Norfolk man resounds loudly. Or it should. Bedeviled by early twentieth century critical work that sought to tie Chaucer directly, and without exception to his work through biography and tantalizing records, textual moments such as the Reeve's origin carry something of a dirty pedigree in modern Chaucerian studies. To use them is to worry too much about old scholarship; to refute them is to construct straw men. But might an approach be useful that returns to biography, Chaucer's "life writings" and discussion of the *Canterbury Tales*? Frankly, the result, as I will demonstrate is a new theory about how the Reeve functions, a revised view of how his prologue, tale, and *General Prologue*-portrait connect, and a realization that senex style link the Reeve and the I-persona of some of Chaucer's later lyrics together. In order to fully connect these apparently disparate texts, I first establish a biographical tradition in Chauceriana from the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the 18<sup>th</sup>, and then flesh out how I read the Reeve and Chaucer by tying first the *General Portrait*-prologue of the Reeve to Chaucer's *L'Envoy de Chaucer a Scogan* upon the use of rust in both narratives, and emphasizing the old age-related imagery of both, I show that Chaucer and the Reeve both participate in the central paradox of senex style: claiming impairment, while they deny the consequences of that impairment, through poetic and textual activity. I move next to Chaucer's and the Reeve's narratives of pregnant absence. In Chaucer's *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse*, and *The Reeve's Prologue* both the textualized Chaucer of the short lyrics and the Reeve claim emptiness as a condition of their late-in-life conditions, while still producing active descriptions of that emptiness. Full of vigor in descriptions of nothingness, decrepit bodies, and empty purses, both Chaucer and the Reeve give full accountings of senex style. Finishing the Chaucerian trace of senex style, I turn to *The*



*Reeve's Tale* together with *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn*. In spite of the Reeve's given refusal to face the Miller and the tale the drunken man has measured out, *The Reeve's Tale* more than matches the theft and insults produced by the Miller, and metes out textual punishment in the form of aging, a role not unlike that of allegorical Elde. This Elde-like function hides an authorial connection that Chaucer's lyric to Adam Pinkhurst (perhaps?) uncovers. To be an author is to control descriptions, and like Adam naming the animals, Chaucer offers to age the scribe, threatening to banish him from the Edenic paradise of youth or not-old age as punishment for textual transgressions.

Together with an emphasis on biography and the creation of father of poetry has come all the consequences and constructions that inhere around oldness and old age. Unlike Gower, who infuses himself and constructed images of what might be called his autobiography into a greater part of his writing, Chaucer seems oddly silent on the particulars of his life, apart from deprecating comments about his body and age. As Stephanie Trigg has argued, "Chaucer certainly exploits the performative device of representing his own physical or social demeanor in his work."<sup>170</sup> For Trigg, these slightly overdone exasperations of the author and his body in the text constitute his "bodily signature," just as surely as Long Will's paradigmatic riddles of his own body represent his in *Piers Plowman*. Tellingly, the idea of Chaucer as elvish, rotund, and implicitly jolly is a sticky one. Unlike Gower, who is repeatedly tied to old age, wrinkles, and grey hair, Chaucer seems ever the *puer senex*, playing at the bounds of age. This image of slightly juvenile Chaucer—and this phrase, to which I will return is one freighted with meaning—does indeed age. The veneration of Chaucer, coeval with his life and and death did not stop later readers from seeing Chaucer in the reflection of a more negatively-imagined age.

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<sup>170</sup> Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 65.

Indeed, even as figures such as John Dryden sought through his *Moral Fables* to extend the life of Chaucer's more moral sentiments, he, at the same time, strenuously avoids the addition of more scurrilous or playful Chaucer. Chaucer was venerated, even before he drew his last breath, even as time and the postures of age could often be unkind, as an early poem of Joseph Addison teases out the idea of an aging poet, whose warped language is virtually unreadable, and jokes unfunny. In his "Account of the Greatest English Poets," Addison both makes space for the grandeur of the poet's verse, as he simultaneously undercuts the former.

Till Chaucer first, a merry Bard, arose;  
And many a Story told in Rhime and Prose.  
But Age has Rusted what the Poet writ,  
Worn out his Language, and obscur'd his Wit:  
In vain he jests in his unpolish'd strain,  
And tries to make his Readers laugh in vain.

Chaucer's characteristic position of first founder/poet/finder of the English poetics is part of Addison's depiction, which nevertheless sees that position as somewhat corroded and ruined on account of time and age. Indeed, Addison's eighteenth century summation of Chaucer reflects something rusty about Chaucer. Rust can be a sign of age: purer metals reflecting their years and exposure to the elements; metaphorically, it can also connote the wages of sin, a reverse alchemy that turns the gold or silver of the good Christian into the rusty flesh of the sinner.<sup>171</sup> That rust should be evoked in this portrait of Chaucer is appropriate: the Reeve, for example, carries a rusty sword at his side. The image of the Reeve is surely one for which these lines are appropriate, as the last lines portray Chaucer not as the serious Boethian poet nor as the fifteenth

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<sup>171</sup> Rust, n. *Middle English Dictionary*. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED38158&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (Accessed June 12 2013). *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/view/Entry/169112?rkey=gb1soB&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> (Accessed June 12 2013).

and sixteenth century teacher of children through the *Astrolabe* but rather as the poet who cannot—any longer—move his audience to laughter.<sup>172</sup>

This moment is fortuitous for my reading of the Reeve as authorial persona. What centers in the mind of Addison and his constructed reader is the fabliaux, the outrageousness of the tales of the Miller, the Reeve, the Shipman. What one can perhaps read further into the view of Chaucerian game that Addison posits is that the Reeve's reception, with its largely silent outcome (only the Cook responds) is one that matches Addison's own view of Chaucer. The Reeve, too, would have been more than current for Addison, even with the old man's rust. Continuations and adaptations of the Reeve explode in during the Restoration and later, and Dryden notes that if he had included tales such as the Reeve in his *Fables Ancient and Modern* it would have been a popular choice. "If I had desir'd more to please than to instruct, the *Reve*, the *Miller*, the *Shipman*, the *Merchant*, the *Sumner*, and above all, the *Wife of Bathe*, in Prologue to her Tale, would have procur'd me as many Friends and Readers, as there are *Beaux* and Ladies of Pleasure in Town."<sup>173</sup>

Addison's view of Chaucer, then, is not universal, at least not in a literal sense of an old, rusted Chaucer. But the equation of Chaucer with rust necessarily, together with other materials from Dryden and copies of the *Reeve's Tale*, suggest that the author of the *Tales* and the irascible old man of the first fragment can be and were often connected. Rust, here, is clearly a marker of age or history, as it is also a material change of materials. While it is an oxidation of metal, it looks very much like dirt, and as contemporary usage of rust and rusty demonstrate, the meaning of one's rusty verse might indeed be a very dirty image. I want to further advance that a

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<sup>172</sup> In her discussion of later printings of medieval works, Siân Echard recounts the contours of a Chaucer for children in "Bedtime Chaucer: Juvenile Adaptations and the Medieval Canon in *Printing the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): pp. 126-161.

<sup>173</sup> John Dryden, *Fables Ancient and Modern* in *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1962): pp. 513-840, (p. 531-532).

particular meaning of rust for the Reeve and Chaucer also includes the meanings of corrosion and age that both define the both Addison and Dryden's engagement with Chaucer's old corpus.

The reflection of Chaucer's rusty body and his decaying and unpolished language meets the scandalous, though popular, parts of *The Canterbury Tales* in the phrase, "dirty old man," that, while aptly describing the Reeve, might also be a useful one for considering an author and his work with its engagement with old men who never seem to leave the arena of frank and open sexuality. It is tempting to write (or say) that Chaucer, himself, an old man created images of himself in these other old men, who in their lasciviousness match the Father of English poetry in his concentration on the bawdy body. Following the provocative turn of Gust toward autofiction and persona-theory,<sup>174</sup> the image of rusty Chaucer, scabby Chaucer, and angry, accounting Chaucer, in the three late lyrics I examine establish that a certain stance of senex style links the Reeve with a posture of of masculine old age. Encapsulating a certain Chaucerian engagement with literary and textual history and with what might be called "life writing," dirt, disgust, and age are tied in the creation of Chaucer's Reeve, a figure of old age, anger, and accounting who fashions the answer to the churlish and interrupting Miller. The Reeve implicitly ties narrative production to age, and in doing so, matches the in-text activities of the I-persona of several of Chaucer's later, smaller lyrics. To make concrete this link between somatic change and age and the marking on skin and paper renders new some very old assumptions about Chaucer and his biography and offers a contemporary way to connect the *General Prologue*-portrait, prologue, and tale of the Reeve.

It takes work to connect the Chaucer of the late complaints (and I connect *Purse*, *Scogan*, and *Scriveyn* as indicative in some way of Chaucerian complaint) with the materials of the *The*

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<sup>174</sup> For a relevant discussion of authorial personae and the *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey W. Gust, *Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition* (NY: Palgrave, 2009).

*Canterbury Tales* which likely consumed his last years, such as *The Miller's* and *The Reeve's Tale*. Work is necessary to connect these materials not only because the persona of the lyrics appears nakedly autobiographical and the personae of the *Tales* are seemingly divorced from their author and tied to their respective in-text teller but also more importantly because of Chaucer's role as a worker and his insertion seemingly everywhere of jobs, profit, and professions. If the complaints strive to "depict a world without work, for an audience that wanted to live in one but did not," then tales and prologues like the Reeve's self consciously foreground themselves in work.<sup>175</sup> In fact, the Reeve's anger is first said to originate from his sharing of a profession with the cuckold at the center of the Miller's fabliau. It should be noted that as Derek Pearsall has argued, and I have repeated, these fabliaux too represent work, at least on Chaucer's part. The trick of Chaucer, to place these texts in cherles' mouths for cherles' enjoyment or pain, took work to explain and defend.<sup>176</sup>

In spite of the absence of work of which the complaints apparently conceive, work through its absence is nevertheless everywhere in them. In particular, viewing *L'Envoy de Chaucer a Scogan* with the Reeve's *General Prologue*-portrait through age takes work, but only inasmuch as Chaucer's work life reflects so closely with the Reeve's. The Reeve, in a position similar to Chaucer's custodial position of the King's works, accounts not only for the lord of his manor, but also for the peasants over whom he lords. It is this middling and middle position, as a guardian of transactions and balance that strikes closest to both the Reeve's beginning portrait as an aged man, and the position which Chaucer claims in *L'Envoy de Chaucer a Scogan*. Like the Reeve, who engenders fear in those over whom he has power, part of Chaucer's duties as Clerk of the King's Works might have been one of enforcement and arrest: while "the records are not

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<sup>175</sup> David R. Carlson, *Chaucer's Jobs* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>176</sup> Pearsall, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 247.

detailed enough to show which or how many subversives Chaucer may have had to arrest and hold on the king's behalf," he nevertheless took an oath to do just that.<sup>177</sup> In fact, according to Carlson, "Chaucer was the police, not in an attenuated or metaphoric sense: in the better part of his mature employments, he was an official of the repressive apparatus of the state."<sup>178</sup> In some ways, writing the Reeve as a figure of age, an embodiment of power and regulation, and a holder both of a "day job" and a different profession—his training as a carpenter—present a powerful portrait that *looks* a great deal like the historical Chaucer. But this is not and cannot be a study that equates Chaucer and the Reeve: instead I continue to stress that these connections, similarities, and identity positions pose the Reeve as one of a number of voices that are seemingly authorial in nature and one with which we might align the personae of other Chaucerian pieces.

Earlier, by way of Addison's accounting, I described the rust that could attach to Chaucer's work and it is important to remember that it is Chaucer who first makes this image possible. In *Scogan*, Chaucer, evidently an old man, playfully announces the end of his writing career, declaring that his muse rusts in its sheath. The sexual connotations of this metaphor cannot be missed, central to a right reading of the claim that age stops narration, symbolized by the rust and disuse of Chaucer's "muse." The I-persona's description in elegant verse of this muse's inertia and senescence actually reinforces the idea that old Chaucer never stops writing, and that age supplies the real subject of the envoy. Reading *Scogan* as a poem that speaks of inability in half-hearted ways maintains that the poem itself is one characterized by feelings of love and affection, if rightly understood in a certain homosocial understanding. As a ameliorative to a surface reading, against which I will caution, which marginalizes an old speaker, like

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<sup>177</sup> Carlson, *Jobs*, p. 30.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1

Chaucer or Scogan, and excises them from the game of love, this sort of interpretation both pays attention to Chaucer's rhetorical moves, even as it sheds light on the stigmatizing presence of the Reeve on the journey to Canterbury.

Likewise, the *General Prologue* seems necessarily to relegate figures of advanced, or advancing age to the margins. As the opening lines suggest, the *General Prologue* describes a spring awakening, ripe with sexual desires and evocations of life and youth. As one of the most well known examples of chronographia, these lines extolling spring, youth, and rebirth, are implicitly and diametrically opposed to winter, both in seasonal and embodied times. Winter figuratively stands in for the period of age in medieval literature, linked by qualities of cold and dryness of the environment that find parallels with the old body in medieval humoral theory. Chaucer's use of the chronographia is a expression of "an older tradition of scientific-philosophic seasons description derived from classical sources and from encyclopaedic treatises such as the *Secreta Secretorum*."<sup>179</sup> In fact, John Trevisa's ME translation of Bartholomew Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, one of these "encyclopaedic traditions," features the allegorization of February as an 'olde man sittinge by the fire hetynge and warmynge his feet and hondis." That the Reeve could stand in for a certain formulation of February is telling, for the poem opens with the gifts of Spring and the temporalizing mention of "Aprille." As with the body he inhabits, his presence, prologue, and tale are apparently on the margins of acceptability. And tellingly, here Chaucer's use of old age has connections to Gower's whose discussion of old age in Book VIII is contextualized within the movement of the seasons and an image of age as winter.

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<sup>179</sup> Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 171.

In this way, a certain viewing that examines the shortcomings of the pilgrims as generative of social conflict is obvious. The portraits, however, are not so obvious, generally, but the Reeve's is. No one needs to parse the feelings of the peasants or interpret some satirical comment with forays into late-medieval religious or didactic traditions (although this act is fruitful) in order to understand just how beyond the pale the Reeve is. The specter of bodily contagion, its isolating effect, and the temporality of that contagion is suggested in the Reeve's portrait in *The General Prologue*. The stigmatizing effect of the Reeve's role and identity is assumably older than the tale-telling game. Before the pilgrims laugh at the tale that apparently undoes him, the Reeve is marginalized socially. His liminal position as overseer of his lord's lands socially isolates him from the peasants he squeezes economically and the lord that he pretends to be in his act of theft from that lord. Indeed, the peasants fear the Reeve and his machinations as much as the plague, as the *Prologue*-narrator explains. "They were adrad of hym as of the deeth," implying a feeling so strong that it matches that of a disease that decimates the population of rural England and urban London. While the social and political implications of this isolation are great, what is most interesting is the embodiment of the plague as the Reeve, which the emotive weight of this common fear (*adrad*) makes clear. The Reeve is as hurtful to the population as the plague.

What is it then that both causes the Reeve to lag, but also to confess so openly about his negative emotions and characteristics and his threats of violence and hatred toward the Miller, but a recognition of his stigmatized status, one that already-always existed? His embodiment as disease and old age, and the nexus of disability that might describe both, exists in the Reeve, communicated through the peasants' fear of his person, and his unwillingness to ride with the group. While Chaucer is rarely an overtly political or topical author, and unlike his contemporary



Boccaccio, he writes rarely of such a momentous event as the Plague, these descriptions take on added importance. Central to an understanding of the Reeve and his old age, the plague reference could have some purchase on a reality outside the text. Marilyn Sandidge's "Forty Years of Plague: Attitudes toward Old Age in the tales of Boccaccio and Chaucer," in fact sees Boccaccio's and Chaucer's textual trajectories and depictions of youth in the former and age in the later informed by demographics, and by those age groups most affected by plague.<sup>180</sup> Frankly, I am not convinced by Sandidge's reading of old age, and its rather blunt tie of Chaucer's own old age to the depictions of old age in *The Knight's*, *Miller's*, and *Reeve's Tales*. Indeed, Sandidge follows a critical trend that sees connections between Chaucer's biography and his textual creations, and neglects to account, for instance, for the fact that the *Knight's Tale* is almost always categorized not as a late work, but as one of the earliest *Tales*, with Pearsall noting 1381 or 1382 as the most likely date.<sup>181</sup>

And perhaps, beyond the brutality of the Reeve later in his tale, this plague reference is not as serious as it has been read. A turn to the *Envoy to Scogan* here gives another view of this plague reference. Robert Epstein notes the "*Envoy to Scogan* is if anything more ironic than that to Bukton and more convivial than that to Vache; it is easy to imagine Chaucer himself reading it to a gathering of friends including Scogan."<sup>182</sup> Indeed, he *Scogan* seems comically overwrought: it begins with a lament that all high, divine laws, meant to last forever, have been overturned; it continues with the image of seven goddesses crying; and finally the opening stanzas pivot to Venus, whose tears will drown us all. This "deluge of pestilence," which Chaucer lays at

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<sup>180</sup> Marilyn Sandidge, "Forty Years of Plague: Attitudes toward Old Age in the Tales of Boccaccio and Chaucer," *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, eds. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007): pp. 357-373.

<sup>181</sup> Pearsall, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 152-153. Elsewhere, Pearsall suggests that lines in *The Knight's Tale* might in fact reflect the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (p. 145).

<sup>182</sup> Robert Epstein, "Chaucer's Scogan and Scogan's Chaucer," *Studies in Philology* 96:1 (1999): pp. 1-21, (p. 2).

Scogan's feet, is also blamed on Scogan's disregard of the "lawe of love." At Michelmass, the opening of a season of finances and rents, Scogan has forgotten all words of love: he merely collects, one might read, the coin to which he is due, and forgets the bonds of fellowship. That pestilence describes Chaucer's friend and his much-maligned creation deserves notice. It is possible of course that he might gentle ribbing in one and serious criticism in the other, but the juxtaposition cannot be dismissed.

Even as I introduce perhaps a possible comic element to the Reeve's *General Prologue*-portrait, however, it cannot be denied that other descriptions mark the Reeve as outside the bounds of expected behavior. Indeed, far from being unique in its isolating force, this plague-reference appears to fit the other images of the Reeve and his demeanor. From the last line of the Reeve's portrait in *The General Prologue* it is clear that he has isolated himself from the rather rowdy group of pilgrims that travel toward Canterbury. "And evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route," a position certainly not required by his horse, which is described as "ful good." The employment of "evere" in a temporal sense is telling here; indeed, the word communicates the constancy of the Reeve as the last in line. While he certainly has the capability to join, he does not. This position, as last in line, is potentially indicative of not only the Reeve's social station, but also his position in a Latinate ages of man schematic, in which old age and feebleness directly precede death. That position at the end of the group is significant for other reasons. "Hyndreste," while a completely suitable word to describe the Reeve's position, also conveys more than just physical position. The word is not well-documented in modern philological tools; the MED (however limited it is) lists very few occurrences of the word, most of which are found in the work of John Trevisa. More importantly, is Trevisa's usage. Rather than use "hyndreste" to refer to physical position, Trevisa describes the place of various faculties of the brain with the

employment of the word. This contemporary connotation of “hyndreste” opens new possibilities in interpretation of this line. More than a marker of position (social, locative, political), this word also gestures toward the life of the mind, and perhaps to the innerworkings of the Reeve in construction of an identity and a self. The root of “hyndreste” confirms this possibility and offers evidence that power of stigma is at work in the description of the Reeve’s position. “Hyndreste” is a comparative of hinder, which carries various meanings, including a temporal sense, one still used today in the form of posterity. Figurative usage of the word can be fairly negative however, as the MED demonstrates.

With the connotation of unfortunate, “hinder” illustrates that the very mention of physical position vis a vis the other pilgrims is never purely physical or mundane. The unfortunate position of the Reeve is at the end of the line, close to death, away from the pilgrims, shunned in this life. To return to posterity, for a character that seemingly has no future, but only history, the link between history and embodiment is communicated through “hinder,” which is used in *The Parson’s Tale* to highlight through description of male buttocks the scandal and stigma of (then) contemporary mores and trends in dressing. The Reeve more than makes an ass of himself; his stigmatized position is at the end of life, of use, and of body.

His liminality has been addressed in economic terms, but the Reeve also blurs the boundary between secular populations and religious orders. His physical appearance given at the beginning of his portrait suggests that the Reeve gets as close as he can to performing as a priest:

His berd was shave as ny as ever he can;  
His heer was by his eres ful round y-shorn.  
His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn. (598-590).

The maintenance of his hair and beard implies an attention to his body and care of that body which is unparalleled in the *Tales*. Further, this self-care is given in the context of ability—Osewold shaves as close as he can, and cuts his hair, *in the front*, to appear as a priest. That the

Osewold one sees looking back in the pilgrimage to Canterbury looks like a priest hides the fact, that *from the back*, Osewold may not appear priestly at all. But not everyone is fooled by this performance; as Bryan Carella argues, it is the identification of Osewold, the Reeve, the carpenter, the priestly pretender who reads in *The Miller's Tale* a challenge to his apparent social climbing.

After the narrator describes the manicured hair and beard that Osewold sports, he moves naturally to Osewold's body, which is long and lean, without any definition that would indicate musculature. The absence of any outward sign of strength finds an echo in the description of Palamon in *The Knight's Tale*.

The Reve was a splendre colerik man...  
Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,  
Ylyk a staf; there was no calf y-sene. (587; 592-593)

These lines present the Reeve as a figure without definition, so fully without definition that he *could* be a staff. The analogy of the Reeve to a long stick is interesting in that, the image of an animate person compared to an inanimate object dehumanizes the figure somewhat. Rather than compare the Reeve to some living figure or person whose body is thin and lacks muscle, the narrator invokes a wooden staff, a diminutive of the tree from whence it came, something originally strong and alive, but smaller and dead. The analogy is pushed far in its interpretation here, because the portrait as conceived by the narrator abounds in the use "ful." Ful is used twice in one line here, for a total of five times throughout the portrait.

To describe the Reeve using fully so often highlights that in spite of these totalizing characteristics, the Reeve inhabits a highly liminal and contested position within the *Tales*: both full and almost empty, characterized by sexual urges and thoughts of anger and envy, even as he embodies age-related impairment and diminishing power. These plaintive notes of resignation,

given in the context of old or somewhat-impotent bodies find expression in *Scogan*. Scogan, like Chaucer is immune from love, apparently because of age and rust, as the God of Love

wol nat with his arwes been ywroken  
On the, ne me, ne noon of oure figure;  
We shul of him have neyther hurt ne cure.<sup>183</sup>

To Scogan, to Chaucer, and all others of their “figure,” love will not waste arrows. Cupid is entirely removed from their realm, even as like the Reeve, the persona of this lyric delights in describing shades of his own cupidity. As the lines, however, make clear, Scogan and Chaucer shall have no hurt (no arrow of love) and no cure (resolution of that love-hurt). As figures of age, they are apparently exiled from the game of love; my use of figure, however, like Chaucer’s proves one full of possibilities: in the next stanza, indeed, the reader finds out how full. The word refers not only to the category of people such as Chaucer and Scogan, men of rents and not of love, but also to those who are “hoor and rounde of shap.” (31). Old, round men who have left the arena of love embody the position of this textualized Chaucer and his addressed Scogan, whose reply is given in the below lines: “Lo, olde Grisel lyst to ryme and playe.” (35) Play, it must be remembered can refer to bookish and sexual enjoyment, and as the lines which follow make clear, both these meanings are in play.

Ne thynke I never of slep to wake my muse,  
That rusteth in my shethe still in pees  
While I was yong, I put hir forth in prees;  
But al shal passe that men prose or ryme;  
Take every man hys turn, as for his tyme. (38-42)

The dimensions of the connection between Chaucer’s textualized sexual organ and his writing instrument is made clear in these lines through the contrast of the young and old man. The display of the speaker’s muse in public as a young man, indicative of the role of a public poet and the rust of that muse, now sheathed, casts a mock-serious shadow on the sentiments of Olde

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<sup>183</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, “Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan,” *The Riverside Chaucer*, Ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 655. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. All quotations of Chaucer refer to this edition.

Grisel, mentioned earlier, which the I-persona ascribed to Scogan. The old man's "sword" rusts in its sheath, an instrument that he once put forth in public, just as surely as the sexual abilities of the old man have dimmed and left. But is this farewell anymore convincing that the Reeve's later exasperated claim that he cannot "play" because age is too much with him? That the persona of *Scogan* finds expressions and words useful that are common to the Reeve, both as he "uses" them, but also as they are used on him posits a linkage between Chaucer's *Scogan* and Chaucer's Reeve.

Feared by the peasants almost as much as the plague, the Reeve appears in The *General Prologue* as a man well versed in deceit and guile. Simultaneously carpenter and reeve, Osewold extracts his wealth from both the peasants over whom he lords, and the lord whom he plunders. He looks like a cleric, accounts like a Reeve, and is a carpenter by trade. He is unmarried, yet feels the sting that attaches to a fabliau, describing the folly of an old husband. His sermonizing pits him against the guardian of the *Tales*, who urges him not to waste time. The injunction to speed things along highlights the awkward temporal position to which old age has relegated him, and yet Osewold doesn't drag his feet in his tale, as he advances rhetorically the age of the Miller, fulfilling his promise to meet force with force. Even as he complains about his wrongs, his own sins and inconsistencies are manifold: his avarice and ruthlessness in extracting money engenders fear in the peasants and wins him the trust of a lord, who is blind to the Reeve's theft. Osewold travels slower than all the pilgrims, though he rides a capable horse. With rusty sword at his side and closely shaven beard, Osewold defies categorization both as a pilgrim, and as a psychological type. He is deeply resentful, and evinces a propensity to anger. After the teasing of the Miller, the Reeve launches into a prologue that in its rather deep discussion of negative affect

and Latinate views of old age that motivates the Host's use of his veto power to urge an old man not to waste time.

The prologue to the *Reeve's Tale* fleshes out the outlines of a speaker who appears as an example of a very dirty, very old man. As an explanation of the frustrations of the physical limitations of the old body, the Reeve offers what he claims is the only choice of the old man.

For whan we may nat doon, than wol we speke;  
Yet in oure asshen olde is fyr yreke.  
“Four gleedes han we, which I devyse--  
Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise;  
These foure sparkles longen unto eelde. (I.3881-3385)

The temporal dimensions of old-age impairments and limitations are obvious in these lines.

When we cannot do, then we speak. Narrative here takes on a prosthetic function here, replacing lost ability, and modifying the embodied reality of the aged. It is, however, an odd statement to give in a contest that leaves aside real action, and concentrates instead on appearances, their descriptions, and the narratives. First Osewold speaks to the infirmities one might expect from an apologia of age, and then twists that defense.

Oure olde lemes mowe wel been unweelde,  
But wyl ne shal nat failen, that is sooth.  
And yet ik have alwey a coltes tooth,  
As many a yeer as it is passed henne  
Syn that my tappe of lif bigan to renne. (I.3886-3890).

What should not go unnoticed in these lines is that the Reeve speaks for all old men, or at least attempts it. His use of the first personal plural possessive pronoun indicates a generalizing characteristic that he shares with the other old men, as well as the maintenance ever of the will.

The truth is that the body will fail, but the animating force will not. “Elde” of course manages the opposite: the body fails because the will does, it is away because old age hijacks the body. After this expression of solidarity, the Reeve introduces his “coltes tooth” that preservation of youthful power and promise that has lasted from birth till now. So, even as his tap runs almost to the end,

his youthful vigor remains. Brandishing his power as surely as allegorical Elde in “Elde” or Piers, the Reeve manages to align himself with an old man, because he looks like one, and differentiate himself, because he retains the narrative power to age his textual subjects.

So theek, quod he, “ful wel coude I thee quyte  
With blering of a proud milleres yë,  
If that me liste speke of ribaudye. (3364-3366).

He continues the language of contest and revenge, but also of legalistic revenge, with his mention of “quyte” here, and tells the Miller what he might do, if it pleased him. By framing the narratives in terms of equal action and reaction, through the use “quyte,” the Reeve announces that through “ribaudye,” the Miller’s eyes can be bleared. Having himself been tricked, and his age apparently been made obvious, he would speak in low terms and talk about a miller who is deceived, and repay the wrong. Line 3364 of this passage is remarkable, given its invocation of supposed ability on the part of the Reeve, who alternatively, like the Chaucer’s I-persona, claims and refuses the ability to act and narrate.

Chaucer’s dirty trick is apparent here. The blending of an Elde-like character with the real-to-life Reeve is hidden in the very language of trickery, which ties the Miller and the Reeve. “Millers are not the only thieves abroad in the world,” as Susannah Greer Fein’s reading makes clear and the *General Prologue* spells out the Reeve’s cunning and greed.<sup>184</sup> Beyond that tie of trickery, lies another commonality: the Reeve has aged and so will the Miller be one day. And the trick of the Reeve is to use the traditional powers of Elde to show the Miller this truth. Returning to the Reeve’s promise to “quyte” the Miller with the “blering of a proud milleres yë,” demonstrates the medical notion of impairment that inheres in the trickery of the Reeve. Other English poems make the connection between bleared eyes and age: In “Elde, one of the features of creeping old age is failure of sight. Old Age, animating the body of the speaker, causes

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<sup>184</sup> Greer Fein, p. 75.



changes in his eyes: “I blind, i bleri.” (60). He grows blind, and his eyes retain excess water. This condition both points to trickery here and to the powers of old age, for Elde takes over the body, sending its will away and ravaging a space not its own. This range of meanings in this usage is fairly common: indeed, the figure of Elde in *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, too, is bleary-eyed. “He was bitel-brouwed with twei blered eizen” (109) and this lack of clear sight produces a narrative of the Nine Worthies that is often twisted and wrong, but carries a truth common to bodily realities: everyone ages and so do their bodies.

In *Chaucers Complaint to His Purse*, the bodily truth of age is seemingly nowhere to be found. Although the small poem has produced a great amount of payment and ink, it traditionally has not been understood in the context of age, age studies, or late style. Indeed, its application to depictions of age or age-related impairment seems distant at best, and the terms of stylized old age never enter explicitly the poem’s register. But, like Hoccleve’s grasping for an annuity, the appearance of a desire to avoid penury and to gain the security of an annuity is a wish tied to futurity and its promise of bodily wear and tear. Much is known of Chaucer’s finances—the records are deep for his business dealings, and as Andrew Galloway has shown through the examination of a late fourteenth century account book, Chaucer and his poetic contemporaries were deeply, literally, invested in a rising mercantile culture.<sup>185</sup>

The shades of an economic Chaucer are fleshed out a bit in this poem, and his tie to the world of patronage and income has been extrapolated from these short lines. Noting that the stance of begging is a highly personal one, Geoffrey W. Gust outlines the number of studies that have tied the speaker of the poem to the Chaucer outside the text, proclaiming “criticism of ‘Purse’ has largely undertaken a project of *re-individualization*, with this late Chaucerian text

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<sup>185</sup> Andrew Galloway, “The Account Book and the Treasure: Gilbert Maghfeld’s Textual Economy and the Poetics of Mercantile Accounting in Ricardian Literature”. *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): pp. 65-124.

seen as an intimate, private correspondence between the author and Henry.”<sup>186</sup> Yet, while it’s customary to view later poets such as Thomas Hoccleve in the framework of begging, Chaucer seems very often to avoid that particular position. In *Purse*, however, a poem wrought in the ledger books of senex style, it is Chaucer’s begging (or as R.F. Yeager puts it, his “begging off”) that reflect in part the contours of a Chaucer, aging and grasping, as he “grucches” about an empty container. These considerations are not readily apparent. Unlike the Reeve, who announces his age, Chaucer’s poem is silent on the age of the textualized “I,” so often assumed to be Chaucer.

Apart from explicit mention, other considerations deem this poem suitable for investigation of senex style. Manuscript placement can often, as Ralph Hanna suggests, tell us as modern readers ways in which old readers of old materials viewed collections, and as both he and Bahr suggest the history of the book and of Middle English literature are rather inseparable. With this in mind, I will examine Chaucer’s lyric as its presented in a 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript, British Library, Add. 22139, which contains most of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. This push to view manuscript evidence together with *The Riverside Chaucer* is one voiced by Arthur Bahr who wonders whether “reliance” on *The Riverside Chaucer* “can still be theoretically justified.”<sup>187</sup> Looking at this manuscript foregrounds not its exceptional quality as a produce perhaps touched or viewed by Chaucer but indicative of how a then-contemporary reader might have consumed Chaucer’s emptiness in this lyric.

Indeed, the final leaf f. 138<sup>v</sup> of this manuscript presents most of *Chaucer’s Complaint to His Purse*, and all of *Gentillesse*, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, and *Truth*, forcing both the reader and critic to deal with an extended framework of Chaucer’s poetry and Middle English literature, as

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<sup>186</sup> Gust, p. 106.

<sup>187</sup> Bahr, pp. 157-162.

these poems follow the Latin poem of Gower *Quia unusquisque* without break or introduction. I want to advance here that apart from a discourse beneath the surface of a temporal wish for security to guard against the instability of the world and fortune through time, the other three poems, which I do not discuss in detail, suggest something of a Chaucerian nostalgia for a time long gone. Both *Gentillesse* and *Trouthe* present the decay of the world and its condition, which reflect both to Gower's prologue of the *Confessio Amantis* and Biblical sources such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the ages of man in the Book of Daniel. Nostalgia, I argue, really should be the fifth emotional ember which still burns for old men, according to the Reeve's analysis of their affective states.

Apart from the Chaucerian lyrics, the position of *Purse* opposite the end of *Confessio* speaks to some common elements of these works. The framework of the poem is quite simple and, like *Confessio*, Chaucer deals with an intermediary—his purse, which both he and his royal masters touch—to signal that he is destitute, financially here rather than morally, as in the *Confessio*. It should be rather obvious at this point why I pair this poem with the *Reeve's Prologue*. A sense of an empty space, and the deleterious effect on the speaker's life link Chaucer's empty(ing) purse to the Reeve's empty(ing) cask. Chaucer's *Purse*, through both considerations of space and acknowledgement of different recensions, fits well at the end of *Confessio*, especially *this* version of Gower's poem with its first recension that mentions Richard and not Henry. *Purse* too exists in two different forms, both with and without the final envoy, addressed to Henry. B.W. Lindeboom has described the poem's structure and the appearance and disappearance of this envoy and depicts the poem as

pleasantly and cleverly courtly, addressing his purse as if it were a beloved lady whose golden appearance and pleasing sound he is eagerly looking forward to, a way of dealing with the subject that is well in tune with the spirit of Richard's court. Henry's was never so frivolous. Affixed to five out of twelve redactions of

the poem there is, however, a five-line envoy that hails Henry as rightful ruler and serves as a reminder that, whoever was King, royal servants needed a bit of salary now and then.<sup>188</sup>

Or at least this is the traditional view.<sup>189</sup> Chaucer needs money and recycles an old work (five of the twelve manuscript copies seem new in that they carry the recent addition of the envoy) in order to achieve action from the king and the Exchequer.<sup>190</sup> Whatever motivates Henry is unknown, but he does double Chaucer's annuity.<sup>191</sup> And central to this poem's reception has been, and most likely will continue to be, the envoy to Henry, and its appearance in almost half of the poem's extant copies. The text available in this manuscript, however, lacks that envoy, and so becomes quite generic: it could be addressed to Richard or Henry. In spite of that generic address, the rather "courtly" tone of the poem suggests, that like Gower's *Confessio* and earlier ending, copied opposite, that this poem is an earlier version or reflected copy of one, which, like *Confessio*, manipulates a discourse on old age in order to advance some thoughts on "making," poetry, and patronage. The end of *Confessio* is of course both a celebration of ability—Gower has made a book!—and a recording of an impaired role—Gower is summarily ejected from the court of love, even as he produces a grand work on love—which from the opposite leaf highlight a similar strain in *Complaint*. The purse is different from the Reeve's cask, and similar to Gower's role in one important way: it can be changed, and refilled. Chaucer need not "dye," at least not yet.

To 3ou, my purse, and to non other wighte  
Compleyn I, for 3e be my lady dere

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<sup>188</sup> B.W. Lindeboom, "Chaucer's *Complaint to His Purse*: sounding a subversive note?" *Neophilologus* 92:4 (2008): pp. 745-51, (p. 746).

<sup>189</sup> R.F. Yeager's "Chaucer's 'To His Purse': Begging, Or Begging Off?" *Viator* 36 (2005): pp. 373-414, gives both an excellent summation of important critical work on the poem, together with new views on the dating and addressee of the poem.

<sup>190</sup> Yeager on p. 386 notes that in view of evidence from Shirley's copy of the poem, we might also consider that it was sent to Richard in 1393 or 1397.

<sup>191</sup> Paul Strohm advanced that *Complaint* should be understood rather as a transaction between poet and tyrant, as an authorizing gesture for the new Lancastrian regime in Chapter 4, "Saving the Appearances: Chaucer's Purse and the Fabrication of the Lancastrian Claim," in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth Century Texts*

I am so sory now that 3e be lyghte  
That certes but 3e make any chere  
Me were as lefe be leyd upon my bere  
For which unto your merci thus I crye  
Be hevy ageyn or elles mot I dye<sup>192</sup>

The threat of an empty purse recalls that, like the emptiness of the Reeve's imagined cask, for Chaucer emptiness in his purse necessarily means death.

Nowe vowche safe this day or hit be nyghte  
That I of 3ou the blisful sown may here,  
Or se your coloure lyche the sonne bryghte  
That of yalownys hadde neuyr pere.  
3e be my lyf, 3e be my hertis stere,  
Quene of comfort and gode companye,  
Be hevy agayn or elles mot I dye.

"Mot I dye," is a promise that death will follow the emptiness of this purse, unless it is refilled.

Money is central it seems to Chaucer's life here. But beyond the surface, one can see how casks and purses are similar: money, it seems, might be a metaphor for life and death, which Lindeboom suggests as a theme of the poem. I am not convinced that this is a petition for Richard's life, as Lindeboom so clearly is. But it is worth remembering that the contours of a discussion of coin could be remembered for Hoccleve as central to the struggle of life and death.

The third stanza offers something of a telling signal that Chaucer might be connected to the figure of the Reeve. Apart from the lyric's enduring image of an empty bag and its link to death, Chaucer's status now as shave "as neygh as any frere," should be familiar to readers of the *Tales*.

Now purse that been to me my lyues lyghte  
And sauour as down in this worlde here  
Out of this towne helpe me thorow 3our mizt  
Sin that 3e wil nat been my tresorere  
For I am shave as neygh as any frere;  
But 3it I pray unto 3our curtesye,  
Beth hevy agayn or ellis mot I dye.

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<sup>192</sup> British Library, Add. MS 22139, f.138<sup>v</sup>. With the exception of the absent envoy, all citations of this poem refer to this manuscript.

Beyond the repetition of Chaucer's wish and consequence of its unfulfilled state, Chaucer's metaphor of mendicacy affirms an unstated and perhaps unplanned echo of the Reeve's *General Prologue*-portrait, who sports a "berd" which is "shave as ny as ever he kan." (I. 588). For the Reeve, this detail seems to confuse his profession; for the Chaucer of the lyric, it reveals perhaps the shortcoming of his: dependent upon annuities and patronage, upheaval in the monarchy only intensifies his need for money.

*Lenvoy de Chaucer*

O conquerour of Brutes Albyoun  
Which that by line and free eleccioun  
Been verray king, this song to yow I sende,  
And ye that mowen alle oure harmes amende  
Have minde upon my supplicacioun.

"Verray" is a bit much here, and it reads as though Chaucer does not actually buy the sales pitch of supplication that he here presents. And like the Reeve, who sermonizes on the emptiness of old age, the "I" speaker of the poem, according to Lindeboom, recalls an empty space as well, one that necessarily inheres in this depiction of "free eleccion" and usurpation.

Any use of "thou" would have been tantamount to giving the game away and alerting the Lancastrians to the hollowness of his apparent compliance. In the context of a rather aggressive new regime he was treading the danger line closely enough not to have wished to add insult to injury.<sup>193</sup>

And this envoy has been entirely successful, not only with respect to Chaucer's annuity, but also to the views of Chaucer and Henry subsequently. Gust recalls that the imagination of later critics is rather consumed with viewing Henry as the more moderate king, and therefore, the more justifiable choice to receive such personal commerce: "perhaps the reception of 'Purse' highlights a veiled desire to hitch the poet's fortunes to the brightest star, so to speak, which

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<sup>193</sup> Lindeboom, p. 750.

would prove helpful in establishing an ethically prudent, political astute, and historically important author.”<sup>194</sup> Unfortunately, that envoy also allows some surface considerations of the poem that appear to completely miss the heavy contents of this little poem. Seth Lerer briefly mentions the poem in *Chaucer and His Readers*, writing, in *Complaint*, “Chaucer writes as a man to a man: The father of English poetry writes to the father of his people.”<sup>195</sup> As part of Lerer’s project to see Chaucer and his influence as an method of infantilization for the poets of the fifteenth century, Lerer necessarily reads the poem as a conversation between equals and with the recognition that later poets, such as John Lydgate, do not write for men, but for boys: “One consequence for English literary life of living under a child king is a certain nostalgia for a political hegemonous and artistically glistening past.”<sup>196</sup> It is not obvious whether this statement, cited outside of Lerer’s book refers to Richard or Henry VI, Chaucer or Lydgate, for in fact, the problem of living with a monarch beset by both the reality and rhetoric of tender age covers both writers. As I have before, I depart from Lerer here. It is difficult to justify his reading of the poem, and the evidence is thin that Chaucer reacted to his own culture without the same nostalgia. But the mention of nostalgia which clings to Lerer’s conception of the fifteenth century might also easily describe this poem and the Reeve’s own grucching in the prologue which he offers after the *Miller’s Tale*.

*Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam His Owne Scriveyn* is seemingly defined, in part by old age, primarily due first to its material circumstances. Extant only in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.20, the poem is copied in John Shirley’s hand, the presence of this scribal figure in the text’s history necessarily places the lyric within a context of old age. Seth Lerer has described

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<sup>194</sup> Gust, p. 107.

<sup>195</sup> Lerer, p. 15.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

this manuscript as one produced in the last part of Shirley's life and the bleeding between personal and public that the manuscript demonstrates through this scribe:

To read the personal in Shirley's volume, therefore, is to find the person thus inscribed; that is, to see how Shirley has projected his own self-consciousness of writing as an aged scribe onto the dating of Chaucer's lyric works. His fascinations with the lives of authors mirrors his own preoccupations with the circumstances of his life; the attentions to the biographical reflect the autobiographical...his apparent dating of *Truth* and *Lak of Stedfastnesse* makes Chaucer's work, much like his own, the product of his final years.<sup>197</sup> Lerer here alludes to the editorial interventions of Shirley in the Trinity volume, a topic too of Margaret Connolly's study of Shirley: "Chaucer had been dead for more than thirty years by the time that Shirley was copying the Trinity manuscript," a fact that does not stop him from "offering details about the context of certain pieces, or the circumstances under which they were composed."<sup>198</sup> If we read *Adam Scriveyn* biographically then responsibility for that act can be given to Shirley whose title is editorial and links the poem's speaker to Chaucer and his "owne" scribe. Again, if we read *Adam Scriveyn* as a statement tied in part to old age then too that reading can be traced back to Shirley's whose repeated evocations of his aging and impaired body color the corpus of Chaucer as he creates it as much as the gossipy accounts Shirley gives of the poems' genesis and textual transmission.

As a result of these moves by Shirley, perhaps no lyric from Chaucer has received more and varied attention than *Adam Scriveyn*. In fact, *Adam Scriveyn* has taken on such an oversized role in Chaucerian criticism that it has affected not only Chaucerian gender and sexuality studies but also reverberated in historical and material examinations centered on the scribe's "real" identity and his relationship to authorial Chaucer. From Carolyn Dinshaw's masterful reading two decades ago to the discovery of the purported Adam (Adam Pinkhurst) by Linne R. Mooney, the lyric has proven adaptable to the differing ends of the scholar reading it, even as the logic of

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>198</sup> Margaret Connolly, *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1995), p. 85.



the lyric centers on the anxieties of a “trewe” meaning.<sup>199</sup> All of these differing directions seem directed by the material created by Chaucer, as if he intended to create work that was generative of layers of meaning.

Of course, the lyric was not created to later produce reams of scholarship. In service of the desire for a “trewe” meaning of Chaucer’s corpus, the lyric centers on an embodied curse, as it explores the creation of palimpsests, and the loss of true meanings. The lyric is extremely concise, measuring only seven lines, and mentions both “Boece” and “Troilus” (2) and Chaucer’s complaint that due to Adam’s “negligence and rape,” (7) Chaucer must “thy werk renewe/ It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape.” (5-6) Chaucer’s frustration extracts a curse from him to Adam, a consequence that will befall him if Chaucer’s “makyng” is rendered twisted and wrong again. While this poem does indeed shed light on scribal activity and manuscript production and highlights the gendered nature of writing, the poem is also about inscription and erasure, accumulation and “reducyng,” to borrow Caxton’s later use of a surgical metaphor for a return to true meanings and origins.<sup>200</sup> All of these meanings inhere in the embodied curse that results from writing on another body: the wrong writing grows upon Chaucer’s corpus, written on skin, and he has to remove and redo the surface. Chaucer is angry, and like the Reeve, another

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<sup>199</sup> The number of works and articles that address this tiny lyric are numerous, but surely a sample of manuscript and paleographical treatments would include Linne R. Mooney’s article detailing her “discovery” of Adam Pinkhurst, “Chaucer’s Scribe,” *Speculum* 81:1 (2006): pp. 97-138; Alexandra Gillespie’s skeptical reply to Mooney, “Reading Chaucer’s Words to Adam,” *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 42: 3 (2008): pp. 269-283; Simon Horobin’s treatment of Mooney’s evidence and Gillespie’s criticisms, along with own evidence that Adam Pinkhurst was Chaucer’s scribe in “Adam Pinkhurst, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of the Canterbury Tales,” *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 44:4 (2010): pp. 351-357, and Alan Fletcher’s “What Did Adam Pynkhurst (Not) Write? A Reply to Dr. Horobin,” *Review of English Studies* 61 (2010): pp. 690-710, a reply to a different article by Horobin that was originally aimed at a different essay by Fletcher, all of which concern Adam Pinkhurst, and Mooney’s foundational article. See also Jordi Sánchez-Martí’s “Adam Pynkhurst’s ‘Necglygence and Rape’ Reassessed,” *English Studies* 92:4 (2011): pp. 360-374. For a highly suggestive and foundational reading of the lyric, tied to gender concerns, feminism, and queer theory, see Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). Suggestive is Mooney’s assertion that Adam copied both the Hengwrt and Ellesmere MSS, which is tantalizing, given the marginalia in the *Reeve’s Prologue*.

<sup>200</sup> As I will argue in Chapter 4, Caxton’s use of “reducyng” to mean translation also involves surgical connotations.

figure of wrath from the *Tales*, threatens bodily change.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, as I will argue, this lyric presented in the shadow of Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* suggests a connection among anger, authority (*authority*), and age. In some ways, Chaucer's actions map onto to the Reeve who threatens something similar to premature and narrative age and curses a different narrator with physical pain and disorder. If the Reeve threatens a "bleryng" of the eye, which could be read not only as trickery (a dirty trick) but also as a rheumatic condition, an accumulation of fluid, then Chaucer too, threatens accumulation: if he has to scrape this other body (of the text), then the most appropriate punishment is for Adam's scalp and skin to multiply.

Linne Mooney in her groundbreaking (and contested) examination of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt MSS in general and their, arguably, common scribe, has opened up new vistas of investigation. Her identification of Adam Pinkhurst as the scribe of these manuscripts and the scribe to whom Chaucer writes the lyric *Adam Sciveyn* offers interpretative space to flesh out some connections between this lyric and the rest of Chaucer's corpus. Of course, consideration of this biographical and historical information about Chaucer's scribe necessarily points toward the life of the father himself. Mooney opens her study by recalling that "with some recent scholarship suggesting that Hengwrt, and perhaps Ellesmere as well, was prepared during Chaucer's lifetime, and therefore possibly under his supervision, scholars have begun to speculate increasingly about this scribe."<sup>202</sup> That Chaucer's life and presence might motivate further investigation of his writing's material conditions of production is no stretch. As I have demonstrated, a study of Chaucer's life as a man is coeval with his presence as a writer,

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<sup>201</sup> Of course, one need not read Chaucer's anger as serious, although I choose to, given other evidence from the Reeve. For a detailed reading of the genre of complaint poetry to which "Adam Sciveyn" might belong, see John Scattergood, "The Jongleur, the Copyist, and the Printer: The Tradition of Chaucer's *Wordes unto Adam, His Own Sciveyn*," *Manuscripts and Ghosts: Essays on the Transmission of Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp.115-127.

<sup>202</sup> Mooney, "Scribe," p. 97.

uninterruptedly according to Ralph Hanna, for readers, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

*Testament to Love* is attested as a work of Chaucer in large part for its own account of biographical information which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was mistakenly tied to Chaucer. The reading of Chaucer's life is then an old enterprise and one which is for *Adam Sciveyn* also suggestively about old age.

I follow this thread of interpretation through Shirley's own accounting of age in reading *Adam Sciveyn* while maintaining more distance from the "biographical" truth generated by a Shirley-centered reading. Of course, Shirley's life, its effect on this poem, and the specter of age can never be fully be jettisoned. The title is editorial and included in *The Riverside Chaucer*; its presence there as a poem inflected through Shirley's textual practices renders it forever tied to Shirley. Stow, too, owned the manuscript and Connolly argues for its role as the exemplar for Stow's own Add. MS 29729, on the basis of rather overwhelming evidence.<sup>203</sup> Apart from these textual considerations, information within the poem also drives a reading of the lyric within a discourse of old age, one which has, apart from Lerer's larger reading of Shirley as a reflection of Sciveyn, gone unvoiced. I will read the poem not only as a lyric that participates in depictions of old age but one too that can be tied to *The Reeve's Tale*. Following I print the full text of the short lyric.

Adam sciveyn, if it ever thee bifalle  
Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe  
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle,  
But after my making thow wryte more trewe;  
So often adaye I mot thy werk renewe,  
It to correcte and ele to rubbe and scrape,  
And it all thorough thy negligence and rape.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Connolly, p. 95.

<sup>204</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Sciveyn*, ll. 1-7. All citations refer to the poem as it is printed in *The Riverside Chaucer*, as with my quotations of *Purse*, *Scogan*, and the *Tales*.

The creation of a link between bodies and texts is clear in *Adam Scriveyn*: Chaucer establishes an implied link between old age and writing, between the body and the vellum leaf, simultaneously exhibiting apparently mock rage, bodily threats, and an authorial adversity to incorrect readings. The terms of this engagement are deceptively simple: if Adam ever writes *Boece* or *Troilus and Criseyde* then he should get the “scalle” unless he writes or copies more “trewe.” The anger, whether real or mock, is palpable here: in the past, because of Adam’s “negligence” and “rape,” Chaucer has been forced to correct not only the text itself but the material context. Line 6 is explicit here: Chaucer needs to “correcte” and “eke” to rub and scrap away the surface of the manuscript page. What Chaucer deploys is a fitting punishment for that labor: if he has to remove skin, then a true “quyting” would be the opposite for Adam: the “scalle.”

The “scalle,” as Chaucer terms it is no invention from his corpus. An actual medical condition, described in medieval medical texts, the “scalle,” seems closest to psoriasis or eczema, an inflammation of the skin that results in often dry and flaky skin. The ME translation of *Guy de Chauliac’s Chirurgie* provides this description: “the skalle is a skabbe of the hede wiþ flaws and wiþ crustes and wiþ some moysture and with doynge awaye of heres an wiþ an askisse colour and with a stynkyng and with horrible lokyng.”<sup>205</sup> This disgusting image of the “skalle” is useful, for its similarities to other depictions of age: hair is lost, the skin loses color, becoming like ash, and the image and smell of the afflicted scalp is horrible. The accumulation of fluid and material maps onto the description of a medical “bleryng” of the eyes, and the location of the ailment, the scalp, recalls manuscript materials: skin with hair removed. Here, Geoffrey in his position as author, recalls the writing of age by Reeve. Disgusting images from

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<sup>205</sup> *The Chirurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. Margaret Sinclair Ogden (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 417. Published for the Early English Text Series. vol. 1.

arguably dirty old men, Geoffrey and the Reeve, result from the apparent misuse and abuse of textual elements. Age ideally constrains both Adam and the Miller, as the textualized Chaucer and his colleague the Reeve work through anger and physical change to punish those younger or more active for textual abuses. The accumulation of skin on Adam, and the forced scraping of skin on Chaucer's manuscripts brings into focus the very real effect of age on the creation of the Middle English canon, and the very real connections among negative affect, age, and authorial personae.<sup>206</sup>

The words further which surround this use of scalle are equally significant for tying this performance to age, anger, and the Reeve. The use of "most" in line 3 and the following use of "mot" in line 5 gestures to an ambiguity that is readily apparent though difficult to parse in the use of this modal verb. "Most" might seem a form of must and supply a reading along the lines of "you must have the 'scalle' because you copy these lines thus," but rather this form of *moten* instead is not descriptive but prescriptive, indicative of Chaucer's cursing words.<sup>207</sup> You will get the "scalle" if you cannot copy faithfully. "Mot" in line 5 in contrast is a descriptive form, reflective Chaucer's past activities and interactions with Adam, which are nevertheless given in a temporal frame of presentness. The deployment here of "adaye" announces both that Chaucer has to work during the day, a somewhat difficult proposition for someone with a day job but also a word that works well with the use of "renewe." Chaucer's work in the text is redone while he does other work but these constructions also reflect a signal of passing time, a element in common with the rare signal of time within *The Reeve's Prologue*, "it is half-wey pryme," (I.3906), glossed by the editors of *The Riverside Chaucer* as possibly half past seven in the morning.

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<sup>206</sup> Dinshaw, p. 4.

<sup>207</sup> *moten* (v). *Middle English Dictionary*, see 12, c: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED28752&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (Accessed June 1 2013)

In view of these echoes of the Reeve's materials, it is valuable and not a waste of time to connect two echoes from the end of *The Reeve's Prologue* before discussing the main parallels between *Adam Sciveyn* and *The Reeve's Tale*. This notion of "adaye" in *Adam Sciveyn* and the invocation of a time in the morning, which the Reeve unduly wastes according to the Host, posit that Chaucer or the I-persona, like the Reeve, is working in the morning. Implicitly, within *Adam Sciveyn*, the notion that this speaker, like the Reeve, is also wasting time is apparent. Using "eke" and "renewe," the lyric foregrounds that this scribal activity is undertaken as extra work or textual production that exists as a secondary task to the original creation of writing. After this intrusion of the clock, the Reeve takes the cue and moves to the project form which he has recused himself: the "quyting" of the Miller.

The Reeve announces at the end of his prologue that "Right in his cherles termes wol I speke./ I pray to God his neeke mote to-breke." (I.3917-3918) The threat here is visceral violence with a connection to the use of the Miller's own tools. Osewold prays for Robyn's neek to break and implicitly this desire follows his promise to follow exactly in the Miller's steps. The reflection of Chaucer's I-persona in *Adam Sciveyn* appears closest to this desire: there, the threat too is equal and opposite and the "most" of *Adam Sciveyn* is used almost identically to the "mote" of the Reeve's promise. These verbal cues reveal a similarity in the manner in which textual punishments are executed, both for the Miller and Adam. While these similarities do not concern the actual text of *The Reeve's Tale*, it is telling that they occur within a few lines of the actual tale.

In spite of these connections with the prologue of the Reeve, it is the tale to which one might more closely tie *Adam Sciveyn*. Nicole Nolan Sidhu has tied *The Reeve's Tale* to the use of classical sources, and it is this reflection that provides the first basis for connecting the tale of

the Reeve with the complaint of the textualized Chaucer. Of course, *Adam Sciveyn* does not mention the *Tales* but rather *Boece* and *Troilus*. While this omission might be explained away by use of chronology—these are earlier works and Adam might be dead or no longer be Chaucer’s “owne” scribe—it is difficult to explain just the appearance of these selected early works. Sidhu has written that “One of the most fascinating features of the *Reeve’s Tale*—which has gone entirely unnoticed in previous criticism—is its extensive use of classical legend tropes.”<sup>208</sup> She invokes the specter of Ariadne in exposition of Symkyn’s daughter, Malyne, in her unfolding of *The Reeve’s Tale* as a confrontation of “the paradoxical status of women’s desire in late-fourteenth-century England.”<sup>209</sup> That Sidhu views the *The Reeve’s Tale* as responding directly to Theseus and *The Knight’s Tale* brings to the fore that Osewold’s tale participates not only in the dirty textual economy of the fabliau but has a longer reach back to classical sources. In view of this borrowing, it is important to note that like *The Reeve’s Tale*, *Adam Sciveyn* concentrates its citation on Chaucer’s work in classical sources, mentioning only Chaucer’s work on Troy and his translation of Boethius.

These works should be viewed together further in this connection. Carolyn Dinshaw has unfolded some of the connotations of Adam’s “rape” of the text in *Adam Sciveyn*. In her reading of the poem’s charged register of violence and sexuality, she writes “rape’ seems to be able to denote either haste, or abduction, or sexual violation, or a combination of these; and here, I maintain, it indeed carries a sexual charge.”<sup>210</sup> Adam, according to Dinshaw, is commanded to copy like a woman, obediently and faithfully.<sup>211</sup> But like Ariadne and Malyne, Adam, according to the lyric acts as a woman who is unfaithful and betrays her father or maker. The terms of rape,

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<sup>208</sup> Sidhu, p. 5.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> Dinshaw, p. 9

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 7

writing, and fidelity pose a possible area for fleshing out connections between this lyric and *The Reeve's Tale*.

The conclusion to *The Reeve's Tale* and its rape of Symkyn's daughter and wife is not one I would gloss as anything but rape. In spite of Malyne's enthusiasm following the sexual act, and the lack of condemnation from the women involved, the punishment demonstrates a brutality that is difficult to explain. It is affected through a bed trick and the movement of the crib that holds Symkyn's infant, which introduces the appearance of all stages of the Ages of Man in the narrative. Indeed, it is a well-worn observation that *The Reeve's Tale* involves every position of the lifecycle. From the baby whose crib and its placement makes the fabliau possible, to the aging Parson and his on-stage manipulations, it is clear that the tale furnished by the Reeve involves more than "youth and age...ever at debate." As I read this tale for its contribution to Chaucer's handling of senex style and its obvious, and not-so-obvious connections to *Adam Sciveyn*, I want to expand the examination of this tale from the idea of *puer senex*, its ties to affect and masculinity, and other recent approaches to demonstrate how senex style reflects through the tale into a reading of Chaucer himself, Chaucer the man, and the fifteenth century. Like the other personae which Gust has studied in his work on Chaucer and autofiction, the Reeve and his tale offers something of a link, which is both affirmed and denied to a textualized and biographical Chaucer. The Reeve presents Chaucer with an opportunity to take what even then seemed a commonplace—the wheel of fortune—and test and reflect its efficacy through the narrating of an old man, himself a visual and textualized version of it. Senex style is at play here too—in the recollection of the impairments and constraints which time brings, the Reeve's own narrative downplays those of the Reeve: after all, in this contest of dueling tales, I will show in fact, the Reeve answers a challenge that the Miller cannot hope to contextualize and articulate,



but is one which nevertheless the undoing of the Miller's easy platitudes about age and difference.

*The Reeve's Tale* begins with a locatable space, delineated by the Reeve in minute detail. Set near Cambridge and its university, it fits in opposition to *The Miller's Tale*, which takes Oxford as its setting. Unlike the Miller, the Reeve doesn't simply mention a name but instead places his tale "At Trumpyngtoun, nat fer fro Canterbrigge," where

Ther gooth a brook, and over that a brigge,  
Upon the whiche brook ther stant a melle;  
And this is verray sooth that I yow telle:  
A millere was ther dwellynge many a day. (I.3922-3925)

The amount of detail which the Reeve supplies echoes back from his prologue, where the Host accuses him of sermonizing, wasting time, and wasting words. These characteristics of linguistic and spoken overproduction recall the contours of old age which Maximianus supplies in his *Elegies* even as the amplification of narrative given by the Reeve reflects within the boundaries of senex style. Location is an important feature of Chaucer's use of senex style and here I want to advance that the Reeve's use of such detail should bring to the fore that Chaucer himself as surveyor of the King's work would have been tasked with such detailed descriptions, a fact supported by Chaucer's limited use of distinct place names within *The Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, in the midst of this accusation of temporal profligacy, given by the Host, he notes a specific location. In the turning of an old commonplace of old men—their incessant speaking—Chaucer locates not only the Reeve's tale and sins, but also Chaucer's own biography, loosely given.

If the reader of the Reeve can touch the setting for his tale, it appears it is the only construct for which that is possible. The man at the center of the narrative, the treacherous Miller, is a man who "no man, for peril, dorste hym touche." (I. 3932) He is armed, and like the Miller of the pilgrims traveling to Canterbury, he is a substantial man. But the tale revolves

around this line. Everyone is touchable by age and death, and in a reversal of senex style, the Reeve begins his tale with a character who is *said* to be the most able, yet is defeated—knives and all—by two (young) impoverished scholars. The importance of the line, and the impotence it ultimately disguises seems clear when the Reeve repeats the line five lines later: “Ther dorste no wight hand upon hym legge,/ That he ne swoor he should anon abegge.” (I.3977-3978) The competition of the *Tales* and the Reeve’s obsession with payment finds full expression here. There is an equation implicit in these lines: touch the Miller and he will pay you back. Yet more to the point is the suggestive quality these lines impart of the Miller’s invincibility and the Reeve’s implicit characteristic powers of narrating. As an old man, both in his prologue, and here, in his tale, Osewold gravitates towards a fullness of description, a repetition of lines, and a sense that, as the old men of antiquity, he speaks too much.

This fullness of detail, reflective always of the ripeness of age, and the portrait of senescence which the Reeve himself describes in his prologue, continues to drive the narrative which the Reeve creates. Introducing Symkyn’s wife, the tale gives signal after signal that she views her social position, while elevated, inappropriately high: she is “proud, and peert as is a pye”; (I.3950) she “was a digne as water in a dich”; (I.3964) “ful of hoker and of bisemare”; (I.3965) she “thoughte that a lady sholde hire spare;” (I.3966) One of these phrases might have been enough to convey one of the central truths that the Reeve attempts to communicate: that even as Symkyn’s wife hangs tenaciously to a status to which she has no real purchase, all is vanity, and all passeth away. If the Miller imagines himself immune to corporeal wounds, the wife broadcasts her imperviousness to poverty and ill breeding, all the while being set up to face the most perverse humiliation possible. It is, in fact, Symkyn’s one apparent weakness that he has implicit fear of poverty and social degradation,

For Symkyn wolde no wyf, as he sayde,  
But she were wel ynorrished and a mayde,  
To saven his estaat of yomanrye. (I.3947-3949)

Death and sickness lie at the center of *The Reeve's Tale*. Foregrounding the tensions between the young scholars of Cambridge and the Miller of Trumpington is the escalation of the Miller's thievery, made possibly by the near death of the Maunciple, an explicit guard to outrageous theft. While the head of the scholars's college at Cambridge openly rebukes Symkyn, he "craketh boost, and swor it was nat so." (I.4001) The young scholars "Testif and lusty for to pleye," ask for time to have their corn ground, and swear to the master of the college that the "millere sholde not stele hem half a pekke/ Of corn by sleighte, ne by force hem reve;" (I.4010-4011). Here, recalling Pearsall's discussion of Chaucerian fabliaux and its innovation as "cherles termes" the clerks deny to the Warden that they will be robbed (reve) by either hook or crook. Yet, as with Chaucer's movement from high to low in terms of his fabliaux construction, the Miller in the *Tale* does rob the clerks, through both sleight of hand and violence, which they both use to pay him back.

After setting up the tension between town and gown which animates the tale of the Reeve, the Reeve pivots once more to location. It is fitting that regions and lands define so much of what the Reeve narrates. As the overseer of large estates, he would have been versed, just as Chaucer, in the lexicon of buildings and landscapes. As a man traveling throughout England on the King's business, Chaucer, further, would have topographical information that might have been rare for others. It seems odd, then, that in describing the origin of the scholars, that the Reeve can only say, "Of o toun were they born, that highte Strother,/ Fer in the north: I kan nat telle where." (I.4014-4105). But what the Reeve can tell is how this narrative ends and one of the

final bits of violence, I will suggest, ties the Reeve both to his prologue and to a hazy description of something close to the act of writing.

At the close of the tale, Symkyn's wife tries, in vain, to take revenge, and like Malyne only helps the clerks.

For at an hole in shoon the moon bright,  
And by that light she saugh hem bothe two,  
But sikerly she nyste who was who  
But as she saugh a whit thyng in hir ye.  
And whan she gan this white thyng espye,  
She wende the clerk hadde wered a volupeer,  
And with the staf she drow ay neer and neer,  
And wende han hit this Aleyn at the fulle,  
And smoot the millere on the pyled skulle,  
That doun he gooth, and cride, "Harrow! I dye!" (I. 4298-4307)

Symkyn is not dead but apparently touched and toppled not only through the rape of his wife but also through the violence done to him by her in this ending scene. She believes ("wende") that she has struck at Aleyn, the clerk who rapes her daughter, but instead, due to the light of the moon, misreads age for youth. Believing her husband's shiny, bald head to be Aleyn's "volupeer," Symkyn's wife strikes him with a staff. Reading hairloss, here a marker of age, as a signal of identity, she comes close to the Reeve's prayer by reading the Miller's age as sign that he should be punished. The cries of "I dye" link with the anticipated death of the maniple at the beginning of the tale, signaled by the use of "wenden" and Symkyn's wife, who "wende" that she has hit and hurt Aleyn. Yet, I cannot help but hear in this line another mock death: the cry of Chaucer, feeling the emptiness of his purse. Fill it up, he implores, or "mot I dye." The emptiness of Chaucer's purse and the emptiness of Symkyn's position as untouchable man here collide.

But the Reeve, within the tale, is ever apparent and the textual curse—break Symkyn's neck—is affected through a "staf." The Reeve in his *General Prologue*-portrait is likened to a staff, long and lean without musculature or definition. While I would avoid arguing that literally

Symkyn's wife uses the Reeve to beat the Miller in the text, this narration of a staff recalls the thick meaning of this thin rod.<sup>212</sup> It is after all, a shepherd's crook or a weapon for fighting. "Staƿ" can also stand in for land measurement or an alphabetic character, and while these meanings might inhabit the background of the word's use here, the imagining of this "staƿ" in terms of land surveys and written texts refer the word back to the Reeve, who keeps account of his lord's lands and moveables but also threatens textual punishments. This staff, after all, might be a letter.

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<sup>212</sup> staff, (n). *Middle English Dictionary*: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED42552&egs=all&egdisplay=open> (Accessed June 1 2013)

Mor(t)al Gower? Revising the Poet from *Confessio Amantis* to *Pericles*

The threats of *Adam Scryveyn* made by the I-persona, long thought to be Chaucer, demonstrate how anger and the writing of texts inhabit the center of a Chaucerian engagement with senex style. As the previous chapter suggests, the speaker's *grucche* that he must "renewe" the work of the sloppy scribe reflects the textual corrections which the Reeve attempts to make following the outrageous fabliau of the Miller. But another connection appears with the urge to renew and remake. Examining Shakespeare's *Pericles* as a product of revision and a depiction of Gower's contributions to senex style recalls that restoration, recuperation, and renewal lie at the center of senex style for Chaucer's contemporary as well. Gower's restorative role in *Pericles* brings to fore what is specific to Gower's use of senex style and the use of the poet in Shakespeare's own imagining of senex style. This final chapter outlines what is most traditionally stylistic of senex style, concentrating not only on the archaisms of Shakespeare's Gower but also Gower's role as prosthesis in the early modern play and the medieval poetry that the play references.

At the heart of this argument, lies an emergent sense of prosthesis as rhetorical strategy—the addition of initial letters to words—that finds voice in manuals of rhetoric that predates *Pericles* (1609) but postdates Thomas Berthelet's edition of the *Confessio Amantis* (1532). Taking this meaning and usage of prosthesis as central to senex style, I examine first *Pericles*, defining the play's often confused use of old and ancient, moving from study of the play's archaic diction spoken by Gower to the valuation of old tales as restoratives. Simultaneously, this focus on *Pericles* exists in the context of Gower's own narrative describing Apollonius of Tyre, part of Shakespeare's source material and a story that literally fills in the gaps of Shakespeare's narrative.

The Apollonius material is the longest of the exempla that Gower provides in his *Confessio Amantis* and serves as the first extended narrative of the eighth and final book of *Confessio*. Book VIII of the *Confessio* takes it central position in this chapter, as I contend that Gower's speeches and words in *Pericles* reflect the beginning, as much as they do the end of Book VIII. At the conclusion of the *Confessio*, Amans himself concludes, confessing his old age and taking the identity of Gower. In fact, Gower's language of impairment and age which surround the action of *Pericles* serve as reminder that Shakespeare's play contends with the portrayal of old age, old stories, and old authors that Gower constructs at the end of *Confessio*. Focusing on the rhetorical construction of Gower's blindness by Gower himself, alongside the portrait of Amans at the end of Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis*, this chapter examines moments of revision within Gower's own text, and concludes by way of Gower's apparently autobiographical announcement of his blindness and age-related impairments in "Quicquid homo scribat," a poem that exists in three revisions.

Unlike the revised copies of "Quicquid," the earliest extant copies of Shakespeare's *Pericles* share almost identical title pages. Announcing the play as the "Late, and much admired Play," these title pages, the earliest dating from 1609, describe not only what the play is about but also how frequently it has been performed. Late is a thick description here: it points on one level to the play's recentness and on another to the classification of the play as "Late Shakespeare," an appellation given by modern criticism. Yet a third level of meaning could be fleshed out from this title. Late and much admired would also describe the recent work on the play, with new readings of the play from medievalists like R.F. Yeager to early modernists like Jeffrey Marsten. Indeed, the most recent collections of essays—*Medieval Shakespeare* (2013) and *Late Shakespeare* (2013) both treat *Pericles* extensively.

*Pericles*, in fact, has served as the site for an array of different agendas—the study of *narratio*, the creation of authority, and the examination of fathers and incest. Among all these strands of criticism and the categorization of the play as late, another meaning of late appears. John Gower, resurrected and restored to the page, controls and moves much of the action. Yet, from the beginning, it is clear that Gower is late: old as an author, dead as a man. Indeed, of all the reanimated John Gowers who fret upon the stage and breathe life in stanzas of early modern drama and poetry, none is perhaps more well known or discussed than Shakespeare's construction of the poet in *Pericles*. In his retelling of the narrative of Apollonius of Tyre, contained in Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis*, Gower is presented as a very old poet who is somewhat out of time as he dons once again the mortal body of man, depicting the struggle of Apollonius (changed in the play to Pericles) to regain his wife and daughter. Due to Gower's repeated reminders that he is not of the world of the play or that of the audience, Gower is both outside the play, fulfilling a choral function and inside the play as it rehearses material from his earlier Middle English work. Indeed, from the opening lines of the play during which the medieval poet assumes man's infirmities (again) Gower's position is one defined both by his centrality as old narrator and effacement of that role through repeated mention of his ancient age. He is the explicator of the dumb shows and in spite of his frequent insistence that his words are unnecessary he speaks them.

In stark contrast to *Pericles*, as late as 1985, critics could talk of the neglect of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in discussions of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Richard Hillman in his study of the Shakespearean debt to Gower's own compendious poem writes that in accepting, *prima facie*, Gower as chorus, readers "may also be lulled into accepting a significant aspect of the play's



originality.”<sup>213</sup> This, fortunately, is no longer the case. In fact, following Kelly Jones, R.F. Yeager, and Bart Van Es, I read Gower as a clear signal that the medieval source of *Pericles*, *Confessio*, is often highlighted, even when Shakespeare writes in ways that seem to obscure the medieval underpinnings of *Pericles*. Where I depart from this trio is to see in both Shakespeare and Greene, a sustained narrative and rhetorical strategy produced *first* by Gower in depictions of his own old age and claims of revision. Jones and Yeager, as I discuss earlier, are not deaf to the contours of Greene’s *Vision* both as it affects Gower’s early modern reputation, and as a possible reflection in *Pericles*. Yeager and I seem attuned to similar points in the text; like him, I want to show how *Pericles* foregrounds an early modern understanding of medieval texts and sources. Where we depart, I think, is largely on issues of performance: I am interested less in the historical nature of editing and revision within performances of *Pericles* and more in the history of editing within Gower’s corpus, and *Pericles* as text. Further, Jones approaches *Pericles* “to assess how Gower’s role as chorus was embedded within the theatrical and cultural practices of both the medieval and Renaissance periods,”<sup>214</sup> and while this approach is rich, varied, and helpful, I find less affinity with it and my own trajectory concerning *Pericles*.

In light, however, of Jones’s essay, one further source deserves mention. Jeffrey Marsten’s complication of performance, textuality, and authorship, concerning *Pericles* in *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* offers yet another facet to the investigation of *Pericles*. In spite of a tendency to view stage performance and textual production separately, Marsten notes, “in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, London theaters performed at least ten plays that *did* elaborately attribute sources, tracing their writing back to an origin” which undermines a prevailing view of early

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<sup>213</sup> Richard Hillman, “Shakespeare’s Gower and Gower’s Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36:4 (1985): pp. 427-437, (427).

<sup>214</sup> Jones, p. 203.

modern theater and performance as divorced from the craft of the author.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, here, it seems that Marsten's examination of the "author-function" is germane to the opening of *Pericles* and the resurrection of Gower. Conceptualizing Gower's stated assumption of man's infirmities at the beginning of the play is crucial to a fleshing out of senex style, as I track his role as chorus and plot mover in the play, after depictions of old Gower in *Confessio* and "Quicquid homo scribat."

Alternatively called "Moral Gower," and "Old Gower," Gower's epithets illustrate the enduring legacy of Gower, largely, it seems because of his *Vox Clamantis* and *Confessio Amantis*. It is in the latter work that Moral Gower, advisor to the king, textualized tutor advocating for the common good of England most fully meets Old Gower, as the center figure of the text, Amans in the final book, recognizes both his age and identity as John Gower within the text. The blending of these two identities highlights that Gower's old persona is featured here in *Confessio Amantis* and also in other works, especially his Latin lyric, "Quicquid homo scribat." No other author of the period from 1381 to 1609 could be more appropriate for study than John Gower, and an examination of his works, together with his Shakespearean afterlife animate the contours of what I have christened senex style. The approach of senex style offers a chance to tie together the authorial personae of some of Gower's Latin lyrics with his presentation of the old lover at the end of *Confessio Amantis*, assembled, I argue, by the Shakespearean resurrection of dead Gower in one of his late plays, *Pericles*. In fact, I will demonstrate that Shakespeare reads Gower closely to the way I read him, as *poeta senex*, practitioner par excellence of senex style.

Senex style is a rhetorical posture, a stylistic approach, and a common element of several works from John Gower to William Caxton. Although this so-called senex style bleeds further

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<sup>215</sup> Jeffrey Marsten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 74.

into the future—Alexander Barclay, Stephen Hawes, and John Skelton seem apt students for fifteenth century lessons in depicting old age and authority—yet under the control of these authors who span the so-called twilight of the late medieval period of England, senex style reaches something of a fever, culminating in a uneasy celebration of the writing of age. Senex style, as I discussed it in the Introduction, reflects a central paradox in the description of old age: to write old age through a concentration on its related ailments, impairments, and abilities is assume an ability describe it, which proves problematic and contradictory, from the mouths of aged speakers, proclaiming their impaired natures. Describing oneself as old brings both connotations of impairment but also authority and worth, stemming from the paradoxical nature and depiction of old age. While senex style need not issue from an aged mouth, or from the pen of a wavering hand, it often does. It is a rhetorical posture, more than a celebration or denigration of biological fact; while it could be both, it is old age, and here, masculine old age that is stylized and made useful for a group of authors and texts.

This merging of moral and what I will call mortal Gower frequently meet in depictions of old, moral Gower. R.F. Yeager most recent work on Gower makes this claim apparent:

On those many occasions (surely!) when we close our eyes and call up John Gower, the image that I wager we conjure most often is of an elderly, bearded man in a long robe. Depending on our degree of familiarity with the realia of Gower scholarship, that robe might be blue and the beard medium-length, forked, and salt-and-pepper (as “he” appears, along with beehive hat and longbow, in London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.iv.fol. 9v); or, alternatively, the gown might be red and gold, and the beard shorter, a rounded Van Dyke, thick and lustrous black (as presently on his tomb effigy, in Southwark Cathedral); or the gown is wholly red and the beard white, long, and unshaven from ear to scraggly end near mid-chest (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 902, fol. 8r). Or perhaps, if one is a true aficionado, Gower appears (as he does in a tiny miniature in London, British Library, MS Additional 42131, fol. 209v), naked from the collarbone up, bald on top but with shoulder-length, wavy white hair below, bushy white eyebrows and a white beard, grizzled and forked, that extends

from earlobe to what would have been four or five inches below his chin if blown up to scale.<sup>216</sup>

That the modern imagination, even supplemented by medieval images of Gower mostly imagines him old is telling; while Yeager notes that evidence of illustrations of younger Gower exists, with the burial effigy looming large, Gower and Amans, the titular character of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* largely appear as old men.<sup>217</sup> In this way, I will argue, modern readers and medieval makers of manuscripts are brought together in communion through the early modern readings of Gower's age, morality, and textual practice. These readers, from John Skelton to Robert Greene to William Shakespeare were once like us, modern consumers of the old poet, and they saw—it seems—as we did and do. That Gower is both old and moral, but in a telling departure from this apparently simple community of consumers and reproducers of Gower's own self-created image, I want to argue that the senex style which I fleshed out in the Introduction explains the early and modern reading of the poet, once which both his English and Latin works suggest and advance, as they too participate in senex style.

I examine Shakespeare's *Pericles* in the revisionary shadow of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, a work that not only revises its own sources, but serves also as the site of authorial revision, with its multiple endings, and possible manuscript-level editing by the author. Revision, I suggest, is an appropriate thematic for interpreting late Gower and Shakespeare together, as it frames not only the material transmission of their work in cultures of late script and early print, but also enlivens a somatic-textual link. The link between body of the author and body of his text, ambiguously alluded to by the Latin term *corpus*, is strengthened by the multiple meanings

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<sup>216</sup> R.F. Yeager, "Gower in Winter: Last Poems," *The Medieval Python: The Purposive and Provocative Work of Terry Jones*, eds. R.F. Yeager and Toshiyuki Takamiya (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): pp. 87-103 (p. 87).

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88

of revision<sup>218</sup>. On one hand, revision's more antiquated meanings carry a suggestion of embodiment and vision, while on the other hand, revision has come to mean textual correction and editorial practice. As I will demonstrate, in fact, revision can describe the process of aging by which the body of an old man is likened to the page of a manuscript: taunt skin, with layers of change, inscription, erasure, and reinscription.

Both Gower and Shakespeare's use of revision and rejuvenation of old texts touch on the tactile nature of skin, its use as a writing medium, and the fact that it displays the wear of years, in wrinkles and folds. Isabel Davis has recently treated the "aggravated politics" and "aesthetics of aging female skin" in the relationship between Christian temporality and narratives that describe skin.<sup>219</sup> Moving away from Davis's reading tying skin and time—their common stretching, tearing, expanding—I do want to highlight that revision, as it applies to the skin of the page and skin of the body, necessarily has a range of meanings for Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, and *Pericles*. For all three, revision should be anatomized further. By breaking into its constituent elements, it becomes clearer that this textual practice announces both an original vision of the text and the author and a subsequent return and reworking. The prefix "re" is an addition, one which suspends the original act of seeing or production in the shadow of a more recent reworking. Revision, then, qualifies as an example of a prosthesis on a lexical level—the addition of a prefix to a word that creates a new meaning—even as its function is a prosthetic one for old Gower modifying Amans in *Confessio* and old Gower retelling a portion of *Confessio* in *Pericles*. The separation of seeing and seeing again, later, together with writing, and rewriting, is an act that Gower performs in *Pericles*, but that Amans also performs at the end of Book VIII

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<sup>218</sup> For the full range of meanings associated with revision, see the *Oxford English Dictionary* for revision as a noun: <http://oed.com/view/Entry/164894?rskey=hLvtEw&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> and revision as a verb: <http://oed.com/view/Entry/276072?rskey=hLvtEw&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> [Accessed December 10, 2012]

<sup>219</sup> Isabel Davis, "Cutaneous Time," *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, ed. Katie L. Walker (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 99-118 (p. 101).

of *Confessio Amantis*. There, age has literally revised his face: ruined the skin, written white on his head, destroyed the face. But this self-knowledge is not self-taught. It is the mirror of Venus which makes Amans re-vision possible, a necessary prosthetic for Amans to demonstrate the existence of bodily revision. Taking this meaning and usage of prosthesis as central to *Pericles*, Gower's role then is similar not only to Amans, as the old poet out of time, but also to the mirror, who fills in the gaps of texts, as old texts and authors become valued as restoratives.

Simultaneously, this focus on Gower's own narrative describing Apollonius of Tyre and his in-text appearance in *Confessio* which follows serves to fill in the gaps of Shakespeare's narrative of Gower and a scholarly engagement with Gower's role in *Pericles*. Revision, like senex style, can denote impairment and prosthetic, functioning as narrative supplement or prosthetic to both authorial personae and texts that are impaired.

John Gower, the resurrected medieval poet and embodied chorus claims the space to make narrative interventions in the Shakespearean retelling of material that Gower has previously himself reworked and the necessity for doing so. Pleading with his audience to connect with him as a metonymic figuration of the past, Gower asks those hearing him, "To learn of me, who stand i' the gaps to teach you/ The stages of our story."<sup>220</sup> This line, with its play on "stages" and "gaps" as physical spaces suggests not only the performative aspects of the play but also its status as text. Gower, of course, must make clear that the often confusing narrative of *Pericles* has stages. From the court of Antiochus and Pericles where he discovers through reading Antiochus's riddle the truth of the king's incest, back to Tyre, and then away again across the sea, *Pericles* makes central that its twisting narrative reflects a display of twisted

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<sup>220</sup> William Shakespeare, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2008), 18.8-9. All citations of *Pericles* refer to this addition by scene and line number.

subjects: actual incest and the seemingly ever-present threat of future incest; murder, realized and attempted; and prostitution, performed and threatened. Beyond the image of stages as narrative marked through time, Gower's use of stage must also refer to the text as object performed. It becomes almost impossible to deny that *Pericles* exists as a popular and frequently performed work on the early modern English stage. Indeed, as chorus, Gower performs—as a figure both central and adjacent to the action of the play—on the stage, and his mention of stages cannot help but reinforce that the play was relatively popular, even as it does not exist in the first or second folio.

This discussion of stages, as narrative progression and indication of the text and its performance brings to fore a third meaning. Uttering the word “stages,” Gower calls attention to the corpus of his own work, which he purportedly revised and reworked, even blind and infirm. Following the work of Peter Nicholson and M.B. Parkes, I read “stages” as a spatial evocation of the editing process. In fact, the mention of Gower working in and through the gaps in Shakespeare's play highlights both the textual traditions of *Pericles* and the copies of Gower's own works, which from *Vox Clamantis* to *Confessio Amantis*, are often categorized as stages of authorial and rolling revision. These lines then transport their hearer both to the early modern play and the medieval poem and the construction of authority in the early modern performance of texts and authors long dead. This Gower, in the gaps, remains suspended in time between the composition of *Confessio Amantis* and *Pericles*. Indeed, *Pericles* renews the story of Apollonius of Tyre, given in the first portion of the last book of *Confessio Amantis*, and Shakespeare's Gower cannot help but recall that the end of Book VIII features an in-text revision, present in all versions of the *Confessio*, of Amans into John Gower, an I-persona that appears tantalizingly close to the Gower who exists outside the poem and Shakespeare's play.

The “gaps” between performance and text and between medieval poet and early modern resurrection are necessarily filled by Gower, whose ghostly presence multiplies in early modern England. Fleshing out—as it were—the remains of Gower and his poem in Shakespeare’s play offers some suggestions for how he might be read not only in the play, but also in poem. Common to both works, as readers of *Confessio* are surely aware, is the appearance of a textualized Gower. The revision of Amans into Gower, given at the end of Book VIII, dramatizes the recognition of both Amans’s old age *and* his identity, as John Gower suddenly surfaces in the reflection of Amans’s old face in the mirror of Venus. Conversely, Gower introduces the narrative movement of *Pericles*, assuming what he calls man’s infirmities from the beginning, through the revived author’s rehearsing of a version of the Apollonius of Tyre narrative that begins *Confessio*’s last book. Both central to the play—his narrative serves as one of the probable sources for *Pericles*—and set apart from the action—he consistently attempts to downplay his role in the text—Gower and his choral function recall that Amans both exists centrally as participant in a structure of confession that necessitates the production of exempla even as he is removed from the heart of these stories. Indeed, from the opening lines of the play during which the medieval poet assumes man’s infirmities (again) Gower’s position is one defined both by his centrality as narrator and effacement of that role through repeated mention of his ancient age. In spite of his frequent insistence that his words are unnecessary, Gower speaks them, as he offers something of a narrative aside of the dumb shows throughout the play. In fact, throughout the play, Gower is presented as a very old poet who is somewhat out of time as he dons once again the mortal body of man, depicting the struggle of Apollonius (changed in the play to Pericles) to regain his wife and daughter.



The reverberations of Gower resound throughout the play. *Pericles* foregrounds sickness and physic, and inward and outward appearances, and in this context, the terms of Gower's appearance are given in terms of an outward appearance that is mortal, fallible, and subject to corruption.<sup>221</sup> He is ancient Gower, an old man telling an old story. That the first appearance on the stage is of a medieval poet whose *Confessio Amantis* perhaps serves as a source for Shakespeare's play, even as the *Confessio Amantis* produces throughout a highly dramatized sequence of narrative and ethical healing for the old lover through both positive and negative exempla is fitting. At the beginning of his famous from beyond the grave appearance in *Pericles*, John Gower enters and introduces himself and the play. In order to

sing a song that was sung  
 From ashes ancient Gower is come,  
 Assuming man's infirmities  
 To glad your ear and please your eyes.  
 It hath been sung at festivals,  
 On ember eves and holy ales,  
 And lords and lives in their lives have read it for restoratives  
 The purchase is to make men more glorious,  
*Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.*  
 If you, born in these latter times  
 When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,  
 And that to hear an old man sing  
 May to your wishes pleasure bring,  
 I life would wish, and that I might  
 Waste it for you like taper-light. (1.1-4; 11-16)

Within these lines, Gower both announces his position as a medieval poet and a narrator who exists in the present. The reflection of old age is everywhere in these lines. Gower calls himself "an old man" and announces he is come from "the ashes," and imagines time as "like taper-light." These references to the superannuated Gower recall a discourse of age that seems lifted almost directly from Chaucer's *Reeve's Prologue* rather than Gower. Still, the impression of Gower is clear from the beginning lines: a writer and reviser of *restoratives*, Gower is poised in

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<sup>221</sup> See Margaret Healy's "Pericles and the Pox," in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*, ed. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999): 92-107.

these lines to reflect not only his modest position—he is, after all, the “burel clerk” of the *Confessio*—but also his moral stance in texts from *Vox Clamantis* to the later Latin lyrics. Beyond Gower’s modesty and morality, these lines present Gower’s purpose as an old man singing to an audience with a wit more advanced and developed.

Gower’s agency throughout the play serves several purposes, one of which clearly is to highlight the ancient textual trajectory of the story of Apollonius of Tyre. Its textual tradition is older than Gower, of course, but his recurring role as prime mover of the play’s plot insures that the medieval nature of the tale is always remembered.<sup>222</sup> According to Helen Cooper, Shakespeare “does know it [the tale of Apollonius] is older than Gower, as that first chorus makes clear, and his treatment is designed to reinforce that sense of antiquity,” even as “the few changes he makes to Gower’s development of the story almost all serve to add to its medieval qualities.”<sup>223</sup> So, in “assuming man’s infirmities,” Gower is vivified, and made to speak the contours of a slightly changed tale from the one which he himself penned two centuries earlier. Gower, back from the dead, speaks in an archaic language, calling himself an old man, and invokes the common image of man’s life as a candle, burning to its end. In spite of these descriptors of age, so modestly given, Gower’s apologetic entry into this afterlife carries with it many features of his past. Announcing *Et bonum quo antiquiis eo melius*, Gower complicates from the beginning the status of ancient texts and authors. A good thing is better the older it is, and one can almost hear Gower defending his age within texts, as he will throughout his corpus.

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<sup>222</sup> Elizabeth Archibald provides important detail on the medieval reception of the “Apollonius” narrative in *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991).  
<sup>223</sup> Helen Cooper, “This worthy olde writer’: Pericles and other Gowers, 1592-1640,” *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010. First published in 2004): 99-113, here 109. See also Martha Driver’s “Conjuring Gower in Pericles,” in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation and Tradition*, eds. Elisabeth Dutton, John Hines, and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010): 315-325.

While it is clear that Gower stands in for a visual sense of antiquity, and serves as a reminder of the play's long textual history, I argue that his role in the play is more than stand in for a medieval past. Shakespeare might not have known Gower as we know him, as a prolific rewriter and reviser of his own works, a position that scholars today take as a rather uncontested point (contesting instead the extent of that revision, and whether by Gower alone, or accompanied by scribes or a scriptorium).<sup>224</sup> However, it is suggestive that Shakespeare might have read Gower's own assumption of infirmities at the end of Book VIII and it is this connection, rather than one based either on the historical presence of scriptoria or on Gower's reworking of Apollonius that concern me.

Recent examinations of Gower in *Pericles* take a somewhat different approach. Bart van Es, for example writes in his "Late Shakespeare and the Middle Ages," that if Gower's narrative of Apollonius is defined by its sober approach, then *Pericles* takes a different tack, preferring to overtly state its medievalness by addition of a jousting scene in place of Gower's more "classical" wrestling scene. "The depiction in Shakespeare's *Pericles* of armour, tilting, and *impresse*, however, involves a distinctly 'middle' option: neither Early Modern, nor Classical, but instead 'medieval' in feel."<sup>225</sup> What is common for both texts is that Gower, like Shakespeare

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224 G.C. Macaulay in his standard edition of John Gower's works (*Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899 [Vol.1: The French Works]; 1901 [Vols. 2 and 3: The English Works]; and 1902 [Vol 4: The Latin Works]) writes extensively of Gower's authorial revisions. In vol. 4, in his description of MS All Souls College, Oxford 98, Macaulay asserts that this "MS. was certainly written and directed under direction of the author, and remained for some time in his hands, receiving additions from time to time." (lxi). Additionally, Macaulay dates four of the extant manuscripts containing *Vox Clamantis* not only by means of paleographical evidence, "but also by the fact that they all have author's corrections written over erasure, and in several cases the same hand is recognizable throughout." (lix-lx) John Fisher, in his *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: NYU Press, 1964), speculates further that "we may assume Gower made use good of the library at St. Mary Overeys [where he is buried], just as he must later have made good use of its scriptorium." (93) The claims concerning Gower's dedicated use of a scriptorium have been largely proven unlikely by M.B. Parkes, in "Patterns of scribal activity and revisions of the text in early copies of works by John Gower," printed in *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in honour of A.I. Doyle*, eds. Richard Beadle and A.J. Piper (Ann Arbor: Scholar Press, 1995): 81-121.

<sup>225</sup> Bart Van Es, "Late Shakespeare and the Middle Ages," *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents*, eds. Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013): pp. 37-51, (p. 39)

after him, looks back to an earlier time, signaling his text's own distance from a past that is characterized by its status as authoritative space. Indicative of the contours of senex style and its shifting valuation of ancient and old, Gower's classicisms and Shakespeare's medievalisms define an authorial position based in part on the worth of the past. Noting that Shakespeare would have read Berthelet's edition, which is stubbornly humanist in its depiction of Gower as a proto-humanist, van Es advises that "For Berthelet, Gower was thus a pioneering humanist, not a semi-comic relic of the long gone past."<sup>226</sup> Having read his Berthelet and Gower, it seems that Gower's antiquarian feel in Shakespeare likely emanated not from the printed format but from something else. I would suggest that this depiction of Gower as "semi-comic relic" reads an impulse to see Gower as Gower presents both *auctor* and *amans* in Book VIII: very old men, revising and ambivalently accepting the weight of their age. Indeed, the implications of Gower's first appearance suggest this very characterization: through his role as prime mover of the narration and explicator of the "dumb shows" throughout, ancient Gower actually revises his own tale, changing it for a later time, while reinforcing its pastness. The *Pericles*-Gower does unknowingly highlight that "ancient" Gower was actually reviser Gower.

In fact, the donning of "man's infirmities," and the posture of old age assumed by the narrative Gower fleshes out the contours of an earlier rhetorical stance taken by Gower himself. In works such as "Quicquid homo scribat," Gower presents his writing with pen finished as his sight leaves him. That his own writings testify to their end, after that conclusion again suggests the hollowness of his cries of impairment, an echo of which can be found in the defensive posture he taken by the old poet. Regardless of Shakespeare's particular knowledge of that seemingly autographical accounting of Gower's revision or lack of vision, Gower does function, in fact, as a Shakespearean equivalent both of Gower of the *Confessio* and of "Quicquid." Infirm

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

and aged, Gower in all three texts—through blindness and sight—announces his end due to age, a fact he simultaneously contests.

This end to the author, always delayed or suspended in his text, makes space for the narrative structure of *Pericles*. Indeed, one obvious benefit of Gower's supernatural status in the play—*Pericles* functions as a restorative for him, renewing his life—is the continuation of his role as *vates*. Granted the insight of the play's action, Gower, with all the knowledge and vision of the action of the play that his extraspatio-temporal position gives him, is able to see beyond the accelerating pace of disguises and schemes that characterize the narrative progression of *Pericles*. *Pericles* uses dumb shows—pantomimed performances that occur onstage—to advance the narrative, and Gower stands to the side relaying with words what the audience can see. The first dumb show occurs at the beginning of Scene 5, after Gower's second speech, one which announces implicitly his otherworldly sight of the action, as he continues to drive this reworked version of his own previous tale.

I'll show you those in trouble's reign,  
Losing a mite, a mountain gain.

...

But tidings to the contrary  
Are brought your eyes. What need speak I? (5.7-8; 15-16)

This emphasis on sight throughout the play, reminiscent of Gower's own obsessive words of his own sight, Amans, and other characters throughout *Confessio*, cannot stifle what Andrew Hiscock has termed *Pericles*'s "own appetite for generating narrative, even in its closing moments."<sup>227</sup> Although here Gower acts dumb of his necessity to speak, it cannot be forgotten that the bulk of long speeches belong to him. Besides *Pericles*, he appears the most important player of the play. Yet, his dumb shows routinely impart through sight what Gower offers in

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<sup>227</sup> Andrew Hiscock, "Pericles, Prince of Tyre: Pericles, Prince of Tyre and the appetite for narrative," *Late Shakespeare: 1608-1613*, eds. Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): pp. 16-35, (p. 35).

speech, and as Hiscock has firmly noted, the play recalls that *narratio* was part of the bedrock of Tudor curriculum and the classroom.<sup>228</sup> Without repeating and rehearsing a distinction that has consumed parts of early modern scholarship—the differences between texts and performances—I will simply say here that Gower’s explanations highlight certain aspects of the medieval poet.

Indeed, Gower’s introduction of this first dumb show valorizes the visual aspects of the performance that the aged, blind, presumably biographical Gower would have necessarily lost; even brought back from the dead, this Gower depends on a sort of visual substitute, a prosthetic for his narrative verse and bodily sight. He mentions in the last lines before the stage directions for the dumb show the reversal of fortune that is to meet Pericles: that Pericles’s knowledge and discernment in discovering the incest of Antiochus has made a return to Tyre dangerous; and the voyage of Pericles must continue, as it does to Tarsus. Gower, apparently ceding his vocal authority to this show, rhetorically wonders what need of speech exists for him, when the visualization of action—in short, a re-visioning of actions apart from the world of the stage—occurs. Following the stage directions are Gower’s need to speak: for 24 lines, Gower explicates the narrative that this dumb show explains.

Shipwrecked at the end of this pantomimed performance, Pericles enters at the end of Gower’s speech, and Gower’s goodbye, for now, is pregnant with possible meanings for a resurrected medieval poet, whose own works signal the importance of textual revision. “And here he comes. What shall be next/ Pardon old Gower; this ‘longs the text.’” (5.39-40). The editors of the Norton Shakespeare are correct to point to the ambiguity in these lines. What seems perfectly clear and succinct, instead, can take on differing shades of meaning. Gower’s speech is at once perhaps too long: its length causes an expansion of the text and Gower, in this play and in his own works, is ever mindful of the text as object needed correction and reworking.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

The stopping of Gower's speech might here be read as revisionary impulse, the artistic motivation to improve and rectify the errors of a first draft. But the drafty speech of so old an author, with its archaizing meter might also give another meaning to "longs to the text." Is Gower again privileging a sight which he in his old age has lost? The wish for the audience to pardon old Gower indicates, I argue, a privileging of the visual, even as the text is performed and as a text, with visual markings on a page. The drafty voice of old Gower interferes with the visual aspects of a text and performance that is of another time.

Another shade of meaning is locatable in Gower's longing of the text. In this discussion of the prosthetic nature of text and image—the text serves as addition to the image and in its spoken form enables an author brought back from death and blindness to augment a wordless performance. This 'longs' the text might then too suggest what I locate in a meaning of prosthesis in early modern rhetoric: an addition at the beginning. Gower's lines prosthetically fill in the gaps of this silent show, even as his agency serves to collapse boundaries and spaces between the *Confessio* and *Pericles*. Gower's lines speak to what belongs, then to the text, in this context. As a bridge to a textual past and the performance of Gower's in-text insight, Gower's explication of these Gower's marriage of visual and textual culture, a corrective no doubt to a schism of texts and performances, and a union that makes clear Shakespeare's view of Gower is bound up in conceptions of creation, revision, and age. Gower's own depiction of his story and its discovery finds it, like Shakespeare's, as an old object itself.

a Cronique in daies gon,  
The which is cleped Pantheon,  
In loves cause I rede thus. (8.271-273)

Gower's own animation of Apollonius and his narrative as a story from the past reverberates in Gower's early modern appearance as an object out of time himself. Fleshing out the layers of history surrounding this narrative, a "Cronique in daies gon," and the appropriateness of the

exemplum to Gower's confession of love, "loves cause," the introduction of the Apollonius material brings to mind its historical value. Indeed, the source of the Apollonius material is explicitly called a chronicle, bringing with it the shades of meaning associated with historical time. This citation of old sources is certainly not odd for Gower; rather, as a programmatic strategy to his work, these narratorial asides, spoken or written in *Confessio*, anticipate the manner of Gower's choral work in *Pericles*. For example, in the scene in which Apollonius's "dead" wife is thrown overboard, *Confessio* uses stock phrases such "Bot now to mi matiere ayein,/ To telle as olde bokes sein," (8.1149-1150) highlighting a source, entirely untraceable, but important enough in its age to bring to the attention of the reader.

*Pericles* uses similar language, but rather than employ "olde bokes" as the subject, Gower frequently takes the place of these *corpora* of old books. "I'll tell you what mine authors say," (1.20) Gower announces, taking the role of books and pages, and proceeds to narrate the incest, committed by the Antiochus and his daughter. Gower's choral and textual position here remakes him, revises even, into a sort of old book, written on and in by old authorities.

Significant for these lines, and Shakespeare's reading of Gower as chorus is the feminizing effect of making Gower an old book. Indeed, like Gower, Antiochus's daughter is too likened to a book, her face "the book of praises, where is read/ Nothing but curious pleasures" (1.16-17) in *Pericles*. The comparison of face to book, too stretches the limits of revision, much as skin might be stretched for textual production and scraped for erasure. Building upon the meanings between skin and text, the daughter's *visio* offers the same reading over and over: nothing but curious pleasures are found there.

Her face as book and Gower as choral text appear alike: both announce, by their reading, the opportunity for revision. The reader of *Pericles* knows that, through custom, Antiochus and



his daughter have become accustomed to sin and incest, and her the book of her face has been revised to hide the horror of her actions. And Gower, as book, offers the source for a much-revised, rewritten, and retold story. Unlike Gower, who *appears* alive, there are other visuals of heads and faces, that as blank books and unspeaking texts show the magnitude of Antiochus's sin and its effects. He tells Pericles to view those who, having failed to guess the riddle, "Tell thee with speechless tongues and semblance pale," (1.79) that death is the only punishment for failure. Pericles's reminds the audience that "death remembered should be like a mirror,/ Who tells us life's but breath, to trust it error." Reminiscent not only of various figures of allegorical age, such as Elde in *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, seeing this *speculum mortis* reminds Pericles as the mirror of Venus will remind Amans in *Confessio Amantis* that an exit from the game of love is the only way to live.

Although the *Confessio Amantis* imagines "old bokes" speaking, in *Pericles* that role is almost totally given over to choral Gower, who calls attention both to the limitations of sight and the visual—to read presupposes seeing after—and offers to narrate what the audience can see. "Be attent," (10.11) he implores the audiences, offering to "plain with speech" (10.14) what they will with "fine fancies quaintly eche." (10.13) While this in-text Gower appears to cede his authority to narrate, it is his lines that he "plain with speech" that which is performed and visually consumed. This dumb show, in short, will be read not only by the audience but also by Gower whose revisions to the action appear in textual, albeit technically spoken, form. But this speech goes a further: its use of "eche," an archaic verb, meaning to augment, demonstrates a suggestive connection for Gower's own narrative activities in *Pericles* that I argue should be

viewed as a reflection, indirect and implied, from the *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>229</sup> The audience, Gower claims, will expand the show in their own terms, using “fine fancies” to “quaintly eche,” and he will revise not only the dumb show they can see, but with his speech make plain what the fashionable wit of the audience creates. In so doing, Gower offers his speech as both an augmentation of the visual aspect of the dumb show and a revising of the audience’s own internal construction of narrative based on the dumb show. Indeed, more than just a summation, this relationship between Gower’s *narratio* and the show theatergoers can see but not hear brings to mind the mental textual production of “Quicquid” and Amans’s inward seeing (through the “yhe” inside) as a prosthesis to powers of sight which implicitly are not adequate. The shows are not long, and like Gower’s own vision—the Gower outside of the play—the dumb shows do not last: their time, like his eyesight, is brief. A blind and aged poet, resurrected in 1608 augments the visual with his own words. This Mortal Gower is the Moral Gower of *Confessio* and of “Quicquid.”

A revision of an inward eye—held by the audience—and a visual image—narrated by Gower—finds analogue in the image of Amans and his age, given at the end of Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis*. The image of Amans, in his own assumption of man’s infirmities, forces not only the recognition of the his own old age and subsequent eviction from the game of love but also the admission of aged Gower, lamenting both his corporeal conditions and the state of the body politic of England, a discourse of debility that reflects both the aging body of Gower and the disordered state of England. Both images recall the trace of an image of Gower supplied by the enfeebled Gower, mouthing the words of new and old works, creating and revising, as the recensions of *Confessio* maintain discursive treatments of Gower’s age-driven impairments.

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<sup>229</sup> eche, (v): *Oxford English Dictionary*  
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/view/Entry/59294?rskey=SJiDX1&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>  
(Accessed June 1 2013).

The invitation by Gower to view him as the aging impaired poet is given from the beginning by Shakespeare. As the opening lines of Gower's first appearance in *Pericles* make clear, Gower's main role in that play is "to assume man's infirmities." From Macaulay's rendering of the poet's life in his late nineteenth century edition of Gower's corpus of works to very recent works that examine Gower's old age, assumptions about Gower's infirmities, their possible rhetorical constructed-ness, and effect on his writing and revisionary production drive many examinations of this artistic output. As the examination of "Quicquid homo scribat" makes clear, John Gower revised continuously his own works (or at least that is universally supposed, even by Gower's own words). Indeed, the earlier *Confessio Amantis* exists in different manuscript clusters, and presents two different recensions at the end, one highlighting Richard as object of affection and source of patronage and the other rewriting and refiguring English dynastic history to reflect the Lancastrian usurpation, changing the object of prayer from Richard to England itself.<sup>230</sup> This revisionary stance meets with Gower's own biological corpus or the reflection of it in *Confessio* and "Quicquid." Outside these texts, Gower, at the turn of the fifteenth century was an old man, by sort of cultural or biological standard. Yet in spite of an avowed blindness and seemingly failing body, a constant in Gower's appears to be his indefatigable appetite for revision and rewriting. John Gower stands at the center of the critical enterprise that viewed Gower as aging, blind poet to advance critical claims that focus mainly on the process of revision and manuscript-level revisions and emendations for his corpus of work, as this characterization of the poet as aged, infirm, and blind is one that he himself articulates and invites.

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<sup>230</sup> For one of the most recent discussions of the manuscripts of *Confessio Amantis*, see Peter Nicholson, "Gower's Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*," *The Medieval Python: The Purposive and Provocative Work of Terry Jones*, ed. R.F. Yeager and Toshiyuki Takamiya (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): pp 75-86.

*Confessio Amantis* is a long poem, with two different endings, one to King Richard, and the other to the future Henry IV. Composed of eight books, it takes the confession of a lover, Amans, to Genius, his confessor, as the central frame for the action and plot of the poem. *Confessio* almost demands either a tight thematic focus or a concentration on specific portions of the text. As a result, I read primarily Book VIII's ending, precisely because that section of the work contains the exemplum of Apollonius of Tyre, the longest single narrative of the entire work and the accepted basis for Shakespeare's *Pericles*, along with George Wilkins' own text, contemporaneous to Shakespeare. If Shakespeare read, in some form, the bulk of Book VIII, it appears safe to assume that he saw at least one version of *Confessio*'s ending and meditation on old age and narrative.

It is precisely the importance and foundation of old age in Book VIII and the revisionary endings which follow that support a tie between revision and old age which animate the chorus line of *Pericles*. As I discuss below, the portrait of an author an author—continuously revising his life and works—maps nicely onto a depiction of age at the end of the *Confessio Amantis*. For in fact, the end of Book VIII details, before “Quicquid,” before *Pericles*, the truth of the Lover's condition and body. Looking into a mirror, Amans is reminded by Venus to remember that he is old and to revise and correct his actions accordingly. That command could be a fitting one for the Gower constructed from his texts and later critical literature. Blind or old, or rhetorically constructed as such, Gower had access to revision, which like Cicero's vision of Plato, seems to carry on up to death, and in *Pericles*, after. In fact, together with Amans own re-visioning of himself in Venus's mirror, Amans also is re-visioned as the poet himself. These changes mark the text as revised in another way, as it has long been recognized that *Confessio* shows multiple revisions and emendations, especially and centrally at the end.

Amans, then caught between the quick and the dead, is relegated to the margins in this compendium of corrective love, as the narrative of his body vacillates from cautionary story of woe as he attempts to mimic the behavior of youth to tale of exemplary goodness as he embraces an exit from love. Through Amans's "swoon" and his retirement from love, *Confessio Amantis* asserts this revision of attitude toward love, as the text manages to link age and youth together through "routhe" and their common impulse to give Amans advice. Venus instructs the old to remember their age, and in doing so, remember that love is a young man's game. The lover, upon hearing this advice (given in a speech by Venus) swoons and is incapacitated, hovering somewhere between life and death. It is no coincidence that after hearing Venus' exhortation that age and love have no common link the lover then falls into a state that epitomizes indeed what old age signifies in this love game: in and out, but never a part of the main story. But this vacillation between death and life is important for other reasons, as it has proven central to views of Amans's age.

J.A. Burrow seemingly resurrected the issues surrounding Amans's adoption of age late in the poem, and the *auctor's* connection to that figure in "The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio Amantis*."<sup>231</sup> For Burrow, the "sobering-up of Amans," his swoon and the realization of age that follows is central to Burrow's depiction not only of Gower's kind treatment of the *senex amans* but also of the linkage between old lover and old poet.<sup>232</sup> Matching the exit of the lover from the game of love to the withdrawal of the old poet from the production of amatory textualities, Burrow advises that the "beauty of his ending largely derives, in fact, from a subtle parallelism which unites the two figures in what seems almost a single act of abnegation," rather than a

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<sup>231</sup> J.A. Burrow, "The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio Amantis*," *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 1983): pp. 5-24.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16/

simply change from lover to poet.<sup>233</sup> Mary Dove, responding soon after to the age of Amans, made clear that Book VIII's narrative of Apollonius of Tyre might "alert us to ways of thinking about the nature of *juventus* and about the series of ages which are particular to *Confessio Amantis*."<sup>234</sup> Dove's interesting and original conception of the role of age and schematics of ages of man in *Confessio* drives her own reassessment of the age of Amans. Referring to the "process" of age change—Aman's "swoon" in fact produces for Dove a moment during which the transition between stages of age is narrated—Dove offers that the depiction of Aman's age is "Gower's unique representation of of the way in which man experiences the ages of his life," while at the same time leaving open the possibility that the exit from the world of love might be deferred by a desire and its fulfillment to ignore Venus's command and rejoin the community of lovers.<sup>235</sup>

The silence of Amans until the end of the poem on his old age—what Burrows refers to as "cheating"—offers space to view what his age means, in light of its position, coming so soon before the largest revisions and changes that *Confessio* experiences. That we might view his age functioning as a sort of textured impression of his own experiences and life and his age-impaired body as a kind of textual revision is upheld by the moment of the confession of age. From this, it is all but impossible not to connect the age-related portrait of the old lover to the age-related portrait of the old author, a move that the poet invites through his late-in-poem adoption of the John Gower-persona once Amans recognizes his age and is cured of lovesickness. I suggest that Gower's description of age, as deterioration and biological revision presents a way to view his own relationship to his own texts and history, one characterized by infirmities and impairments, even as it is affective and textual: time revises the body, as Gower and scribes revise his own

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>234</sup> Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 126.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

work, offering at once a textually-affective relationship to old age, and a different, authorial one, affected from outside of the text.

Gower, at the turn of the fifteenth century was an old man, by sort of cultural or biological standard. Yet in spite of an avowed blindness and seemingly failing body, a constant in Gower's appears to be his unending appetite for revision and rewriting. Keeping this biographical information at hand is important, yet Gower's idealized depiction seems to frustrate the assumptions a reader could make about this age as the text also demands closer scrutiny of Carlson's accounting of the aging Gower. Beyond Burrow's insistence on the text's sympathetic treatment of old age and Dove's belief that *Confessio* rewrites *senectus* as perfect age, it is important to see that for all of the Book VIII's linkage of youth and ability, age is not necessarily equated with decrepitude.

As an allegorical construction Elde too is present in the text and the language which Gower employs to describe him and his train of followers does not allow a simple acceptance of age as infirmity. The reader meets age,

With him gret compaigne he ladde,  
Bot nocht so manye as Youthe hadde:  
The moste part were of gret age,  
And that was sene in the visage,  
And nocht forthi, so as thei myhte,  
Thei made him yongly to the sihte. (2669-2674).

Most importantly, the recognition of the age of this group is "sene in the visage," and that signal of years maps onto Aman's struggle which follows with his apparent "conforming" to Nature's law.<sup>236</sup> But as a recognition that Dove's reading of the movement from a textualized and abstract *senectus* to a "perfect age," these lines dramatize that faces are seemingly the only way one can tell Elde and his followers. Indeed, they move "yongly," that is, with all the power of the young, and the use of "myhte" in line 2673 as a modal verb also has another resonance here. Myght or

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<sup>236</sup> Burrow, p. 17.

myhte in Middle English can also refer to bodily wholeness and power, and this discourse of wholeness is present throughout Book VIII, as Cupid removes the darts from the Lover's body and sees his organs (as does the reader) shattered by old age. Here, at least, Gower gives no clue that the action of the old men are impaired. As walking reminders of the combination of impairment and ability present in the rhetorical adoption of senex style, these descriptions of youth and age together make the wholesale characterization of age as impairment untenable in the poem. Signifying the mark of age, the face of the old man merges with the bodily movements of the younger, perhaps allusive of the image of the old man as leek or the Ciceronian reflection of the best old man as one who maintains some youth. That the winter of Gower's life might be characterized by forms of revisionary activity resonates here, in the illustration of aged men who too move "yongly."

Loving "yongly," however has apparently injured Amans. Rehearsing material that is evocative of love poetry, for example *La roman de la rose*, next Amans has his love darts removed. Before he is cured by Cupid, the groups of the young and old gather round him

And thus for me thei preiden alle  
 Of hem that weren olde aboute,  
 And ek some of the yonge route,  
 Of gentillesse and pure trouthe  
 I herde hem telle it was gret routhe,  
 That I withouten help so ferde. (2738-2743).

Blurring further a distinction that the poem is apparently trying to maintain here, slippage occurs between the aged and the young, as both feel "routhe" (pity) for the condition of the Lover. Pain in love is something of an extratemporal condition, not tied to age it seems. Both the young and the old can feel the emphatic pull of the darts upon Amans heart. In spite of this momentary conviviality, Venus reminds Amans of the salient fact that he seems to have forgotten, and Gower has forgotten to mention. Venus takes the Lover to a mirror



Wherinne anon my hertes yhe  
I caste, and sih my colour fade,  
Myn yhen dymme and al unglade,  
Mi chiekes thinne, and al my face  
With elde I myhte se deface,  
So riveled and so wo besein,  
That ther was nothing full ne plein,  
I syh also myn heres hore. (2824-2831).

The Lover looks at the mirror, but it is with the eye of his heart, and sees truly what he is: old.

What Gower means here by “myn hertes yhe” is not totally clear. Is it some inward vision, or his eyes seeing what they should have seen intuitively from the beginning? Nevertheless, it is his physical appearance that prompts his change (see line 2859: “I was out of mi swoune affraied,” fear of his physical appearance causes the Lover to break out of his coma-like state), for he sees all the changes wrought by age. His eyes are dull and lack joy (2826), his face is thin and wrinkled (lines 2827-2829), and his hair has turned white (2831). The final aspect of age—the discoloration of his hair—is one that recalls a medieval discourse about age and time that ties the movement of season and the aging of man with the inexorable march toward winter. In fact in the lines that follow (2843-2857), Gower makes the connection explicit between the changing of season and the accumulation of years, and it is this salient fact that sparks the knowledge that the old have their place, and it is not at Love’s court.

These lines have other connections that are productive in their teasing out. The mention of Aman’s hair necessarily should remind every reader of Gower who has seen Gower in figure, either in Southwark or in manuscript, that his hair is usually shown (as opposed to Chaucer, often depicted with a cap), and as Yeager, quoted at the beginning, notes it is often with grey hair. Adding to these suggestive though not definitive observations is the elusive quality of Amans’s “hertes yhe.” Whether this “yhe” is some kind of emphatic method of understanding or supernatural sight, it appears close to Gower’s own inward mind, which in spite of his blindness,

continues the production of writing in “Quicquid.” Indeed, that an old man must see his old age in order to recognize it seems weighty for an author whose age is so very often tied to his diminishing sight and eventual blindness. Here, is it possible not to align Amans’ own extrasensory sight with Gower’s own supernatural revisions and mental compositions, in spite of the failure of his eyesight?

It is important to remember the tone here of “Quicquid” with its less than enthusiastic attitude toward age and ambivalent stance toward the cessation of writing. It is a farewell to writing even as it continues that writing and offers elegiac and mournful goodbyes to the world. It is possible, indeed, to see Amans in the same light. Peter Nicholson describes this sober Amans after the recognition stage as “an image at the end not of hard-won moral wisdom but of resigned acceptance of a world that has been a little less than kind,” but I think we would do well to push against this view of acceptance of Amans’s age, as we would likewise do with Gower’s.<sup>237</sup> Like “Quicquid,” Amans seems to accept this judgment of Venus, as Gower reports his decision as one of reluctant acquiescence.

And whanne y sigh non othre weie  
Bot only that y was refusid,  
Unto the lif which y hadde usid  
I thoughte nevere torne agein:  
And in this wise, soth to seyn,  
Homward a softe pas y wente. (2962-2967)

Nicholson writes, “with a strong sense of what he has left behind,” Amans is resigned to live out the remainder of his life in the only way left.<sup>238</sup> But this reading should also be contextualized within the form that this acceptance takes. I have argued repeatedly for seeing how rhetorical constructions of age demand their own seriousness as announcements of impairment while simultaneously displaying real ability, either in the text or as a text, its creation or revision, and

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<sup>237</sup> Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 390.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

here in the echoes of words used for Amans, the reader would be wise to see that perhaps Amans has not left all behind. I want to concentrate on the first and last lines of the quotation above. To the first, Amans' act of seeing reminds us that seeing was central to his recognition of age. But what vision is this, his inward heart-inflected eye or his ocular vision, which following commonplace descriptions of age and Gower's own example, might not be trusted. To the last, this description of his act of moving should recall that a "softe pas" has been used twice before. At line 2667 "softe pas" is used first to describe the approach of Elde to Venus and line 2682 records the dancing old man perform, which appears pleasing. Softe might mean slow here yet it also can mean easy to endure. In light of this range of meaning, can Elde's retreat be read both as not fully completed and also easy to endure?

That Amans may not be fully cured, that he may return to love, and that Gower will still write is communicated elsewhere, in the lines before Amans's soft step. At line 2869, after Elde's "softe pas," Gower writes the lover "was mad sobre and hol ynowh." It is "ynowh" to see his age, and yet in this line, Gower presents no fantasy that old age is easy. While the Lover/John Gower has been healed, it is not complete. As a limiting construction, "ynowh" illustrates that the text maintains that old age is a stage of life where the body and mind is not completely whole, but whole enough, and whole enough one assumes to continue revisionary work. One might connect this bodily revision at the end of Book VIII, to the revision of regnal endings, the first which presents the renunciation of Chaucer's own participation in the game of love, and the praise of a king (*puer rex*), who was impaired rhetorically by a recurrent discourse of tender age. The second ending, far more pessimistic than the first displays a Gower who laments the failed promises of Richard's rule, but one element that remains remarkably unrevised is Gower's own display of his age: in the lines that knit together the separate endings Gower makes one final call

to his age-related infirmities. In the earlier version, he notes that he is “feble and old,” which is changed to “feble and impotent,” in the later writing. It imagines the question of age here, I think, which is specifically articulated in the earlier version. Whether feeble, impotent, or aged, Gower was whole “ynowh,” to continue these revisions.

This clear contradiction, seeing Gower as old, impaired, and whole “ynowh,” relates senex style to Gower’s own constructed textual persona in “Quicquid homo scribat,” in three different manuscript poems. Even as Gower, the man, is constructed almost everywhere in his poetic corpus, the short Latin poem centers on the naked-autobiographical construction of Gower, envisioning him as both creator of texts and aged man. Together with the other so-called late and minor poems of Gower, “Quicquid homo scribat,” presents a glimpse of Gower brought together with the ‘Four Last Things’ that put a period of lengthy sentence of his life, and project his imagining well beyond.<sup>239</sup> Yeager’s words supply that like “Quicquid,” the Minor Latin works problematize and complicate the portrait of Gower as he’s known through the major English, French, and Latin works.<sup>240</sup> It is unknown whether Shakespeare had any familiarity with these texts, and the tenuousness of any evidence of their circulation rules out a firm connection to Shakespeare. Even so, what is true and knowable is that the poem connects to a discourse of conclusions and old age that Gower utilizes in *Confessio Amantis* at the end of Book VIII, and which Shakespeare almost certainly encountered.

The reasons for discussing a short Latin poem in the midst of a study of a figuration of a vernacular image of Gower from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century are perhaps not obvious. I have mentioned the improbability that Shakespeare read this lyric, but I contend that the structure and ending of *Confessio* makes necessary a turn to this Latin work. In the face of what

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<sup>239</sup> R.F. Yeager, “Introduction,” *John Gower: Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005): pp. 3-10 (p. 8).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

is unknown about the early modern dissemination of this text, I want to advance how similar Shakespeare and Gower read Gower. As I will demonstrate, it is likely that he would not need to in order to lift and be influenced by the senex style of Gower. In fact, Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis* rehearses and renews—before “Quicquid”—many of the salient features of Gower’s senex style. Moving from an examination of *Confessio* I will demonstrate “Quicquid” supplies another form of antic diction produced by Gower that follows many of the contours of senex style found in *Confessio*.

The *Confessio* is written in Middle English, a linguistic choice which Gower both makes and defends in the Prologue. Yet, headings exist throughout, which are written in Latin, and position the work as a type of hybrid of both English and Latin. Siân Echard, for instance, has written both about the Latin portions of the *Confessio* and has argued in the poem, Latin, “presented in the poem as poet’s helper, is in fact a focus for instability, both in the texts itself and in the manuscripts, whose variations magnify the discontinuities in their source.”<sup>241</sup> Echard’s focus in examination of these in-text Latin troubles two assumptions that modern readers and critics reproduce about medieval Latin and its role in Gower’s poem: that it is monolithic in its role as the language of control, with Latin verses signaling the importance and authority of the academic gloss. I would add that Echard and other critics are working implicitly against another assumption, one which I will problematize where I can. This third assumption is that Gower is divisible by language: that an English, Latin, and French Gower all exist quite independently of another. Whereas I am quite ignorant of Gower’s French works, I argue that especially in Book VIII, the Latin verses at the end, Gower’s in-text appearance as Amans, and “Quicquid” create a consistent picture of old age, poetry, and love. To further flesh out this breaking of boundaries

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<sup>241</sup> Siân Echard, “With Carmen’s Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*,” *Studies in Philology* 45 (1998): pp. 1-40 (p. 3).

between the English of the *Confessio* and the Latin in and which often surrounds it, a turn to Echard, again, is natural here. Elsewhere, she has advanced the role of Latin in the poem's manuscript context, noting the Latin outside and on the poem, through its Latin explicit, available in *three* different poems.<sup>242</sup> It is clear I think to discuss Gower is to discuss a poet whose work does not respect the linguistic barriers which both his poems and later scholarship produce; indeed, examining a Latin poem by Gower to flesh out the Gower of the *Confessio*'s end reads him precisely as Shakespeare and Greene did.

Echard's insistence on the Latin within *Confessio* and adjacent to it in its context introduces one final qualification before I move to the actual reading of "Quicquid." Following Roger Chartier's formulation concerning the necessity of seeing the text through its context, Echard's argues for an "account of a fundamental material level, the manuscript tradition, at which the perception of the textual tidiness of the *Confessio* is further disrupted." I am not convinced anyone actually contends that the *Confessio*, or any of Gower's works, are tidy textually; but the urge to examine material supports for these texts is a sound one, especially with "Quicquid," a poem that maintains difference in form and content like the *Confessio*, which takes at least three different forms of Latin poems as explicit. Similarly, "Quicquid," it has been argued, exists in at least three different forms, a classification reproduced by R.F. Yeager in the newest edition of the so-called *Minor Latin Works*.<sup>243</sup> Macaulay's edition, which amazingly has been refined but never supplanted as the standard edition of Gower's work,<sup>244</sup> catalogues the manuscript witnesses of "Quicquid," but concentrates both thematically and textually in his

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<sup>242</sup> Siân Echard, "Last Words: Latin at the End of the *Confessio Amantis*," *Interstices: Studies in Middle English and Anglo-Latin Texts in Honour of A.G. Rigg*, eds. Richard Firth Green and Linne R. Mooney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 99-121.

<sup>243</sup> See Macaulay's description of the manuscripts of Gower's Latin works in his "Introduction," in *Complete Works of John Gower: The Latin Works*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, vol. 4 of 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), pp. lix-lxxi.

<sup>244</sup> Echard, "Carmen," p. 1.

introduction on the *Vox Clamantis*. He includes the All Souls College, Oxford 98 MS, the presentation copy to Archbishop Arundel, and the Cotton Tiberius, Harleian 6291, and Glasgow MSS, which all contain “Quicquid.” What is missing for Macaulay is the Trentham MS, which together with the version of the poem found in Cotton, Harleian, and Glasgow present the two other versions of the poem, apart from All Souls College, which both Macaulay and Yeager later take as base text.

The form that the poem takes varies across manuscripts, and consequently, because of these textual revisions, important differences occur in the description of Gower’s reasons for ending his writing. After all, this is a poem that both celebrates writing, even as it announces the conclusion to that writing, and as a physical manifestation of the contours of senex style appears both as a plaintive farewell to writing, because of impairment, and a continuation of writing, because of impairment. Together with the recognition of old age, painted so vividly by Amanscum-Gower at the end of Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis*, the source coincidentally for Gower’s own version of Apollonius of Tyre, “Quicquid” offers a wealth of imagery for Greene’s and Shakespeare’s construction of Old/Moral/Mortal Gower. I concentrate on the base text found in All Souls College and the unique witness in Trentham MS. Critics have certainly noted, for instance, that the Trentham MS is both important and unique. Arthur Bahr recently characterizes the Trentham manuscript as a true medieval compilation, full of single-author texts. In his *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London*, Bahr notes

this conventional appearance is deceptive, however, for Trentham’s seemingly-straightforward presentation of its author (it is a single-author codex that consistently refers to Gower in detailed and personal terms) and audience (it is universally supposed to have been either presented to or imagined for Henry IV) is substantially complicated by the architectural complexity of the manuscript’s codicological form and its texts’ evocation of past history.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 211.

His remarks make clear that Bahr finds evidence for a certain intentionality in the manuscript's construction, as the beginning and end of the manuscript match *exactly*. The volume begins with a 7-line Latin work, followed by *In Praise of Peace*, a 358-line poem written in English. At the end, the manuscript concludes with *Traitié* (which would be 358 lines, except for the loss of a folio) and "Quicquid."<sup>246</sup> In view of this stunning symmetry, Candace Barrington, somewhat echoing R.F. Yeager's depiction of many of the late Latin lyrics as narratives of "infirmity, fatigue, the decay of strength with age at the time of their making,"<sup>247</sup> has advanced that the Trentham MS is a material object which seems obsessed with both impairment and prosthetic.<sup>248</sup> And I would agree with both Bahr and Barrington: "Quicquid," is indicative of a deceptively simple relationship both to Gower and his patrons, as well as a material signal both of impairment and prosthetic.

"Quicquid homo scribat," documents the loss of Gower's vision, and the continuing inscription of his works, a process that blindness and/or old age—there is some manuscript-level revision that troubles the agency of the cessation of his writing—has relegated to his mind.<sup>249</sup> Following, I supply the entire text of the poem, as is found in the All Souls College, Oxford 98 MS, followed by R.F. Yeager's translation, and deal with differences in the other two versions as they concern an argument of bodily and textual revision:

Quicquid homo scribat, finem natura ministrat,  
Que velut vmbra fugit, nec fugiendo redit;

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213.

<sup>247</sup> Yeager, "Introduction," p. 8

<sup>248</sup> Candace Barrington's work on the Trentham MS is not currently published or at my disposal. Luckily, I participated in a panel with her, "Enabling Access: Gower and Premodern Disability Studies," at MLA 2013, where she presented her paper, "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis: Wholeness and Disability in Lancastrian England." Any infelicities in the summation of her work are my own.

<sup>249</sup> See Macaulay's comments on the All Souls Version in his "Introduction." (p. lxi) "This MS. was certainly written and corrected under the direction of the author, and remained for some time in his hands, receiving addition from time to time." For a welcome contribution and complication to the image of Gower as reviser, see M.B. Parkes, "Patterns of scribal activity and revisions of the text in early copies of works by John Gower," *New Science Out of Old Books*, eds. Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1995): pp. 81-121.



Illa michi finem posuit quo scribere quicquam  
 Vltimus nequio, sum quia cecus ego.  
 Posse meum transit, quamuis michi velle remansit;  
 Amplius vt scribar hoc posse negat.  
 Carmina, dum potui, studiosus plurima scripsi  
 Pars tenet hec mundum, pars tenet illa deum:  
 Vana tamen mundi mundo scribenda reliqui,  
 Scriboque mentali carmine verba dei.  
 Quamuis ad exterius scribendi deficit actus,  
 Mens tamen interius scribit et ornat opus:  
 Sic quia de manibus nichil amodo scribo valoris,  
 Scribam de precibus que nequit ulla manus.  
 Hoc ego, vir cecus, presentibus oro diebus,  
 Prospera quod statuas regna futura, deus,  
 Daque michi sanctum lumen habere tuum. Amen.<sup>250</sup>

[To whatever a man writes, Nature applies a limit  
 Which flees like a shadow, nor returns having fled;  
 She placed a limit on me, so that I am unable  
 To write any longer, because I am blind.  
 Although my will remains, my ability passes;  
 It declines to write any more.  
 When I was able, I wrote many poems with zeal;  
 One part deals with the world, the other with God.  
 But I have left to the world its vanities still to be written,  
 And in a poem of my imagination, I write the words concerning God.  
 Although the act of writing externally now fails me,  
 Still my mind writes within me and adorns the work.

Thus because I can write nothing further with my hands,  
 I will write with my prayers what my hands cannot.  
 This is what I, a blind man, pray for in these present days,  
 That You make our kingdoms prosperous in the future, O God,  
 And grant that I receive your holy light]<sup>251</sup>

And “Quicquid,” as it’s presented in the Trentham MS:

Henrici quarti primus regni fuit annus  
 Quo michi defecit visus ad acta mea.  
 Omnia tempus habent; finem natura ministrat.  
 Quem virtute sua frangere nemo potest.

<sup>250</sup> John Gower, “Quicquid Homo Scribat,” in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), 363-4. All citations of Gower’s Latin works refer to this edition.

<sup>251</sup> John Gower, “To Whatever a Man Writes,” in *John Gower: The Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. R.F. Yeager, TEAMS: Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 49.

Ultra posse nichil, quamvis michi velle remansit.  
Amplius ut scribam non michi posse manet.  
Dum potui scripsi, set nunc quia curua senectus  
Turbavit sensus, scripta relinquo scolis.  
Scribat qui veniet post me discreciior alter,  
Ammodo namque manus et mea penna silent.  
Hoc tamen, in fine verborum queso meorum,  
Prospera quod statuat regna futura Deus. Amen.<sup>252</sup>

And Yeager's translation:

It was in the first year of the reign of King Henry IV  
When my eyesight failed for my deeds.  
All things have their time; nature applies a limit,  
Which no man can break by his own power.  
I can do nothing beyond what is possible, though my will has remained.  
My ability to write more has not stayed.  
While I was able I wrote, but now because stooped old age  
Has troubled my senses, I leave writing to the schools.  
Let someone else more discreet who comes after me write,  
For from this time forth my hand and pen will be silent.  
Nevertheless I ask this one final thing, the last of my words:  
That God make our kingdoms prosperous in the future. Amen.<sup>253</sup>

These twelve lines conclude the Trentham manuscript, and if disbelief of the textualized speaker is indefinitely suspended, they also signal the end of Gower as an author, as do the lines in the All Souls College copy. All evidence outside these lines, however, points to the opposite: that Gower seemingly never stops writing, and that the past to which the poem alludes is not past at all. Indeed, following Bahr who argues, "Trentham insists on the relevance of the past to both the present of its construction and the future of its reception,"<sup>254</sup> I first want to draw attention both to construction of this past, and how this poem necessarily denies and, by denying, foregrounds its own construction. Unlike the other versions of "Quicquid," the Trentham version gives a temporal frame for Gower's blindness, the reason for that loss of eyesight, and a governing verb that is past tense. In the All Souls copy and witness attested by the Cotton,

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<sup>252</sup> Gower, *Minor Latin Works*, 46.

<sup>253</sup> Gower, *Minor Latin Works*, 47.

<sup>254</sup> Bahr, p. 209.

Glasgow, and Harleian manuscripts, Gower writes of his blindness as present condition, not as the conception of a loss and lack. Although both of these later versions are contextualized with a longer, prose-like opening that offers a historical frame for the completion of Gower's work and the ailments of his body that he ties to age. The phrase "sum...cecus" brings both Gower and the reader to his present, a seemingly more logical tactic. Instead of making his blindness a historicized condition which makes this present and future composition impossible, the visual impairments of Gower in the All Souls and Cotton, Glasgow, and Harleian manuscripts allow for a more logical temporal sequence of events. Blindness and the writing of these versions of "Quicquid" are coeval, unlike the Trentham copy of "Quicquid."

While "sum quia cecus ego," [Because I am (now) blind] produces a suggestive and tantalizing portrait of Gower as old author, it also makes good the logic of the opening stanza: nature produces a limit for whatever man writes, and the limit, for Gower, is the loss of sight. All that is missing, of course, is an end of that writing. Writing, it seems, is both limited by Gower to the material act of marking a page, and expanded to the performance of creation of words in his mind. In the All Souls version, Gower ends the first stanza of "Quicquid," by noting that "Mens tamen interius scribat et ornat opus." That the adverb "tamen" governs this line is both dramatic and understandable: dramatic, because the adverb serves as a textualized proof that age-related impairments are not insurmountable, and understandable, because this line seems to paint the picture of Gower as continual author and reviser that is almost universally cited in discussions of his writing practice. Indeed, the verbs modified by "tamen" suggest both original composition and, arguably, actions that clarify and augment that work. Evocative of the mental maneuverings that continue to produce and revise (*scribit*) and (*ornat*) respectively, Gower still or nevertheless persists in writing.

This bit of information is unfortunately absent from the other two copies of “Quicquid,” but the other two texts of this poem present equally post-blindness appeals to work and text-creation, through both verbal and affective means. “Quicquid,” as it is copied in the Cotton, Glasgow, and Harleian manuscripts,” presents Gower as the *vox clamantis* at the end of his poem: “*Deprecor ergo meis lacrimis, vivens ego cecus,*” [Therefore I plead with my tears, living and blind].<sup>255</sup> The act of prayer, contrition, and complaint, it must be remembered, is one which Gower long associates with poetry, as he does not only in *Vox Clamantis*, but also in *Confessio Amantis*. Similarly, Trentham’s “Quicquid” marshals a sense of textualized activity in Gower’s final activity, both as penitent and poet: “in fine verborum” [the last of his words] asking for England’s future prosperity, he manages both to conclude “Quicquid” and to supplicate God for the health of the kingdom. Implicitly, Gower spends his last bit of life and health to guarantee the same for England.

Here, Gower is performing much as he will in *Pericles* and earlier in *Confessio*. Reading “Quicquid homo scribat” in Trentham and the other manuscripts reinforces the link among (re)vision, age, and writing that this chapter foregrounds in Gower’s corpus. Where Trentham differs is important, and the creation of a slightly changed poetic frame of reference matters, I believe, in this instance. Gower is markedly silent on age in the verse portion of “Quicquid” contained in the All Souls manuscript and that of the Cotton, Glasgow, and Harleian manuscripts. The lyric, as opposed to the prose-like beginning’s evocation of age, positions Gower’s end as blindness and its consequence. Ignoring this introduction, we might read his inability to write as simply a product of his blindness. In fact, blindness, in both these witnesses, is witnessed twice. For both versions, at the beginning, Gower claims blindness as a rationale for his cessation of narrative activity, signalled by the repetition of the “sum quia cecus ego” line.

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<sup>255</sup> Gower, “Quicquid,” pp. 48 and 49.

Then later, “cecus” appears at the conclusion of both poems. If the “Quicquid” of these two other manuscript traditions largely ignore age, then Trentham takes an opposite strategy.

While I could, I wrote, Gower argues in line 7 of Trentham’s “Quicquid.” The divorce of these two perfect tense verbs, “potui” and scripsit,” is affected by the onset of advanced age. Gower’s poem explicitly names this “curua senectus,” which Yeager translates beautifully as stooped old age; “curua” is a modifier of old age that any surface perusal of Middle English would find in descriptions of extreme old age. One thinks of Elde’s “crookid” old age in *Parlement of the Thre Ages*; indeed, it seems the most common of commonplace descriptions of old age. However, I want to delve a bit deeper into this line to read more into this description. “Curua” commonly connotes curve, and it is the ending of this line which evokes fully a picture of the lifecycle within writing. Because old age troubles his senses (an implicit announcement not only of his blindness, but also perhaps of other sensory defects), Gower announces that he “scripta relinquo scolis.” [I leave writing to the schools]. Recalling Chaucer’s Reeve claim to be too old to play the games of youth, and the cycle from youth to age and back, Gower’s leaving of narrative to the young is not to be taken at face value. As Yeager has argued, this posture of decrepit age is an old on for Gower, and the reader has no real reason to take this as truth beyond rhetorical flourish.<sup>256</sup> As an aside, this old man tying writing to schools references that both Maximianus, mentioned in the Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3, and the Pseudo-Cato were old authorities, old men as poetic speakers who were read in schools.<sup>257</sup> Whether a reflection of medieval education practice or of a modesty topos, Gower is, nonetheless, filling out the contours of what we might consider Gower’s personal, poetic authority with the confines of senex style. To return to *Pericles*, this posture matters from a literary point of view precisely

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<sup>256</sup> Yeager, “Winter,” p. 92

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 99, n. 17

because Gower and Shakespeare read Gower as poet in remarkable similar ways. In Gower's school of old men, Shakespeare apparently learned this lesson.

The correlation between Gower's old age and his revisionary activity seems to posit another dimension to the relationship between manuscript production and the imagery of senescence. Moving from "Quicquid," as authoritative portrait of Gower, if only because composed by the author, I find resonance between the medieval lyric and modern criticism of Gower. these pictures serve other ends other than accurate portrayals of activity within impairment—as it encapsulates the rhetorically-constructed position of author working through senex style. Indeed, Gower's complaints of his impairment actually make room for further descriptions of how this blindness equals a limit, and how Nature limits all writing, something which Gower explains *through* writing. However, the rhetorical assumption of blindness by Gower (we have no reason not to believe "Moral Gower") collides with the evidence of late-in-life revision by the author himself. So as Renaissance Gower struts and frets in his old age on the stage in *Pericles*, in his own time as a old man, he was busily writing, reforming, and rededicating his own works.

## Old Books, Again? New Media(eval)

“Words. Words. Words.”<sup>258</sup> In Act Two of the 1623 First Folio edition of *Hamlet*, Hamlet’s reply to Polonius’s question concerning the matter of his book he reads is characteristic of the Hamlet who speaks both of the “tables of his memory,” and the “book and volume of his memory.” Seemingly more comfortable in the academic exercise of plotting and rationalizing Claudius’s death than merely striking down the murderous king, Hamlet here offers further evidence of his reflection of early modern textual practices. This reply, too, is indicative of a Hamlet intending to prove his insanity and make clear that in the playing of his foolishness, he can find truth. Indeed, in the midst of this scene, in which the King, Gertrude, and Polonius attempt to trace the cause of Hamlet’s “madness,” Gertrude herself notices both Hamlet’s bookish attitude and his unhappiness. “But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading,” (2.2.165) she notices, as Hamlet walks onstage.

Pressed by Polonius, Hamlet gives a more full answer:

Slanders, sir. For the satirical slave says here  
that old men have grey beards, that their faces are  
wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber or plumtree  
gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together  
with weak hams. All which, sir, though I most  
powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not  
honesty to have it thus set down. For you yourself, sir,  
should be old as I am if, like a crab, you could go  
backward. (2.2.194-202)

The matter of the page, here, has real consequences for how old age is depicted in medieval and early modern English literature. Speaking to an old man, Hamlet highlights the negative portions of these portrayals, calling them “slanders,” and rehearsing a familiar image of decrepitude and inability. This blazon, beginning with a description of grey beards, “wrinkled faces,” and eyes,

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<sup>258</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: The First Folio (1623)* in *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds. Ann Taylor and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), pp. 172-360. (2.2.190). All citations of *Hamlet* refer to this edition, by act, scene, and line number.

oozing gum and amber, reflect a heritage of negative portraits of aged men. Remarking upon the implicit blindness of old men—they're eyes water with a rheumatic tradition that recalls the “bleryng” of an eye mentioned by the Reeve in *The Canterbury Tales* and the illustration of the pains of old age in *The Parlement of the Three Ages*, Hamlet's book sees in old men a failure of potency, both bodily and mental. Lacking wit in mind and strength in body—their “hams” are weak—Hamlet reads this portrait as both dishonesty and something which he believes, powerfully and potently, offering in his belief an opposite image of what he reads of the old man. Neither powerful nor potent, the old man in Hamlet's reading is nonetheless wronged by the image, written on the page. This twist, between inward belief and inappropriate or unbelievable writing—slander, after all—animates Hamlet's explanation of his reading, one which he nevertheless feels pertains to him.

Speaking to Polonius, Hamlet announces that the old counselor, if he could move backwards like a crab, should be old like Hamlet. Rather than imagine time and movement as progressive, this odd statement assumes that this slander of the old man, as out of strength and wit, is honest given its appropriateness to Hamlet's own condition. These descriptions, as I have demonstrated, are common to a body of literature produced from 1390-1491 or 2, and illustrate both the cyclical nature of depictions of the lifecycle and the stubborn way in which literature centered on old men imagines time not as linear but sideways, like the movement of a crab. Crabby, too, is the attitude that Hamlet takes, and one, too, that authorities from Aristotle have assigned to old men. As the Introduction makes clear, one facet of senex style is the feeble anger of old men.

This short discussion of *Hamlet* suggests something of senex style. As a stylistic pose, this writing and rewriting of old age attempts to fashion a new relationship to authority, one built



on impairment and claims of powerlessness. Hamlet both acknowledges the truth of the old man's decrepit body, even as he claims it himself as part of a strategy to enact revenge upon Claudius and avenge the elder Hamlet. This scene, then, encapsulates what is stylized about senex style: Hamlet is young, but he claims impairments and powerless, tied to age, to achieve his ends. Authority, it seems, in the play, in this scene, comes from connections Hamlet makes with those textualized figures of age.

As my discussion of *Hamlet* following Gower's poetry and afterlife in *Pericles* makes clear, senex style is a rhetorical posture that lives on after Caxton. Studies of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature would necessarily be strengthened by tracing the development of this style after Caxton. A gulf of time and words separates the father of English printing and the plays and poetry of Shakespeare. Indeed, in examining works from the death of Caxton in 1491 or 2 to the end of the sixteenth century, one would find yet another presumably sterile field that instead produces a flowering of senex style. Alexander Barclay, Stephen Hawes, and John Skelton will all benefit from future examinations that place their works in a conversation with fifteenth century works and gauge their investments in and changes of depictions of old age.

Farther into the sixteenth century, the enduring image of the old man in both the Earl of Surrey's poetry and that of Thomas Wyatt offer yet another form of corrective for an old image of the old man. Indeed, in view of the renaissance of attention being paid to *Tottel's Miscellany*, the anthologized poems of Surrey and Wyatt offer further space for senex style to catalogue and reorder the view of the old man. Wyatt's *How to use the court and himselfe therin, written to sir Fraunces Brian*," for example, could find an afterlife beyond Seth Lerer's examination of the poem and its sentiments of the "spending hand" in his *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII* to demonstrate that Chapter Three's reappraisal of the Reeve within senex style continues past the

poets of Ashby, Lydgate, and Hoccleve. Investigations of the Chaucerian engagement with age in this way could move beyond the figure of Pandarus, looming as he is over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Indeed, this reappraisal of Chaucer's poetics of age is central to the entire stylistic enterprise that is senex style. From Chaucer's Reeve to Shakespeare's Gower, these figures of advancing age offer in their presentation a model for imagining literary histories differently. What might it mean for a narrative of literary relations of late medieval authors if critics took note of the repeated use of the old body as image both sterile and generative rather than a linear progression of fathers to sons? Like the crabbed movement of Polonius from outwardly old to young Hamlet's claimed inner old age, literary history might be imagined backwards, sideways, not simply progressive. Chaucer and Gower and their construction of the aged speaker recall that Hoccleve and Caxton too invest much of their poetic output with a similar tension between aging impairment and ability, and Shakespeare's Gower makes flesh and blood medieval imagery of age and age-related complaint. It is possible to connect a different constellation of authors in a new way through the old man.

In fact, as I have demonstrated, certain reflections of age, history, and time can foreground different modes of examining literature from the late fourteenth through the late fifteenth centuries, offering a space not only to continue the reappraisal of figures other than Chaucer or Gower but also to persist in a push to show how interconnected these seminal figures are in a textual economy of influence, borrowing, and loaning. The groaning old man, while frequent, is not so frequent as to rise to unworthy of study; nor is he so rare as to impede an investigation of him through time and across author. Chapter One examined how the old man might substitute for the old text, in a century that began moving from script to print. In the midst

of a seismic technological innovation, that paradoxically also gradually supplanted its predecessor, William Caxton, Henry Scogan, and William Shirley employ depictions of old men and the diction of decrepit bodies to flesh out the old text as authoritative prosthetic for an old body, long past its prime of ability of strength. By tying the role of Aristotle in Shirley's *Secretum Secretorum* to Scogan's presumed autobiographical tale of old sins and new repentance, Chapter One asserted that Caxton's deployment of the wavering hand and worn pen was a related strategy, one that depended on a history of connection between old body and old text and their common presence as arenas for counsel and teaching.

Chapter Two demonstrated, through Hoccleve's confusing evocations of young and old Hoccleve, that he was an apt student of senex style, as it flowed from Chaucer, his "fadir" and Gower, his "maister." What an investigation of senex style in Hoccleve's poetry highlighted was Hoccleve learned to seek authorization by use of an in-text Hoccleve who occupies a position on the lifecycle opposite that which he holds outside the poem. A trajectory of his poetry within Chapter Two confirms this reversal. *La Male Regle*, accepted as an early work of Hoccleve, does document his youthful profligate ways, but centers on his old body, bereft of coin and strength. *Regiment of Princes* reflects something of a midpoint not only in Hoccleve's career, but also in his construction of old and young bodies and use of senex style. Here, in a poem dedicated to the Prince of Wales, and implicitly mindful of the older, incapacitated King, Hoccleve claims both childish wisdom to a younger patron, and furnishes a wise and abject old man. As a hybrid work—it is both autobiography and *furtenspiegel*, *Regiment* confirms that Hoccleve's use of senex style in the years 1418-1420 was characterized by an in-between position—not yet old and wise, too young to truly proffer his services to the Prince—and served as introduction for his

more mature work, in *The Tale of Jonathas* and *Lerne to Dye*, which saw the use of the young and foolish as inversions of the old Hoccleve to advance his authority.

Chapters Three and Four follow Hoccleve's lead, and traced his two masters, Chaucer and Gower. Chapter Three tied the authorial persona of several of Chaucer's later lyrics to the Reeve of *The Canterbury Tales* through the use of senex style. Both the I-persona of the later lyrics and the Reeve imagine a relationship to old age and its impairments that not only punishes them but also serves as appropriate sentence for various textual transgressions. As an addition to studies of Chaucerian influence and reception in the fifteenth century, this emphasis on the Reeve asserted that we might not only read Chaucer differently but also the Reeve. Implicitly, coming directly after Chapter Two, Chapter Three also illustrated that the lessons learned by Hoccleve might be gleaned from the Reeve, even if he misunderstands the use of old age as both site of wisdom and punishment for a life poorly lived. Indeed, unlike the Reeve, Hoccleve uses old age and youth to draw critical attention primarily to his own errant ways.

Chapter Four returned to the category of prosthesis, in order to advance that William Shakespeare's *Pericles* employs an old Gower not only as we see him but also as he very often viewed himself: as an old man, apart from his time, speaking out of rhyme and out of time. Central to this last example of senex style was the inclusion of "prosthesis" as a rhetorical term in English manuals of rhetoric for the first time in the 1560s, a decade that also witnessed the last printing of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, edited and imprinted by Thomas Berthelet. I suggested that regardless of the coincidence between these events, "prosthesis" was a useful category for plumbing the depths of the connection between Shakespeare's choral Gower and the Gower of Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis*. Reading *Pericles* makes clear that Gower's in-text revision of

Amans both as old and as a stand-in for Gower were changes that Shakespeare incorporated into the figure of the authoritative author, old and out of time, fretting upon his stage.

These chapters all presuppose an old link between the body and the book, which in the context of New Media and an ever-imminent death of the book, is worth rehearsing. In April 2012, for an edition of the *Sunday Review of Books* for *The New York Times*, Leah Price, an English professor at Harvard published a short yet deftly constructed examination of the death of the codex. Cleverly titled, “Dead Again,” the article tracked the existence of a pessimistic attitude toward the book’s survival. At Harvard, Price researches and teaches the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and fittingly, she offers anecdote after anecdote from the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrating that the supposed death of the book, or at least its anticipation, cycles, in her words, “endlessly.”<sup>259</sup> That Price is able to find so many epitaphs for book culture is not surprising. Certainly, someone like Caxton who apparently gives up script for print has been read as the herald of great change and bringer of a radical break between text technologies, even as we know that he copied at least one other manuscript after the printing of *Eneydos*. Death, resurrection, revival, and continued existence haunt and describe the history of the book, even as studies and scholars find that history a widely popular and innovative academic specialty.

Reading Price makes clear that her short revelation on the history of the book’s death carries with it a few observations germane to my examination of senex style. Writing of the image of the tiny, compressed Bible in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, Price alludes to the language of bodies in discussions of books and their death.

And four years later, Frank Herbert’s doorstep-size “Dune” conjured a “Bible made for space travelers. Not a filmbook, but actually printed on filament paper.” Like thumb drives and Palm Pilots, the book is measured against a human body:

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<sup>259</sup> Leah Price, “Dead Again,” *Sunday Review of Books* in *The New York Times*, August 10, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/books/review/the-death-of-the-book-through-the-ages.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/books/review/the-death-of-the-book-through-the-ages.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0) (accessed August 20, 2013).

thanks to a “magnifier and electrostatic charge system,” the volume takes up less space than the joint of a finger.<sup>260</sup>

The historical overtones of Herbert’s Bible are hard to miss. Printed books began with Bibles, through Gutenberg, and they are close to ending with Herbert. After all, how much smaller can the codex get? As the codex and information continue to compress, the connection between body and book grows larger. In fact, the link to which Price briefly alludes between book and body is an old one: from one corpus to another, books have been described in terms that recall the body, and I have found this link an enduring one in examinations of senex style: from Gower’s mind onward inwardly writing, the somatic and textual seem irrevocably linked.

Instead, this project asserts that textual transmission and the uneasy boundaries between manuscript and print productions, along with the history of that textual culture can be read through the embodied and affective metaphor of the old body in the works of selected works of several late-medieval English poets, with a focus upon the poet Thomas Hoccleve, the scribe John Shirley, and the printer and translator William Caxton. The particular and specific histories of these modes of textual production and transmission are read through the whole and impaired old body, where that body functions as a metaphor for history and texts, a phenomenon that can be seen through various reworkings of the categories of old and new, old and young, and the depictions, often together, of the old and young body. Nowhere does this link appear more forcefully than the beginning of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. A reading of Gower’s last book of *Confessio Amantis*, along with Shakespeare’s own reading of the same material begins this study, and in a gesture to the lifecycle which appears so prominently in depictions of human activity in late-medieval and early modern literature, this project ends with his beginning, thus completing a trajectory from old to new. The prologue to *Confessio Amantis* starts by discussing things both past and present, even as Book VIII, in ending his work, centers on old exempla of

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

lechery and incest, and pivots to a vision and revision of Amans, as old in the present, rewriting John Gower onto that figure. It is the recall of old sources, however, with which Gower opens, as he advances his rationale for writing his book.

Of hem that writen ous tofore  
The bokes duelle, and we therefore  
Ben tawht of that was write tho:  
Forthi good is that we also  
In oure tyme among ous hier  
Do wryte of newe som matiere,  
Essampled of these olde wyse,  
So that it myhte in such a wyse,  
Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,  
Beleve to the worldes eere  
In tyme comende after this. (Prol. 1-11)

Old books and old men: this connection has been at the intersection of senex style and literature throughout each chapter, and it seems only fitting to flesh out explicitly this link, in view of increasingly new media, from the vantage of a medieval manuscript culture. Print, it must be noted, would have been new for Chaucer and Gower, had they lived to see it, and in an era fraught with apparent change to previous models of textuality, a turn from script to print, and from print to electronic texts, foregrounds the examination of senex style in a genealogy of apparent change and doom in the history of the codex that can be traced back to the weary hand and unsteady pen of Caxton. The perceived inability of the printed book to weather centuries of change has proven gravely incorrect in view of its continuing survival. And this anxiety toward the book, as material object, and reflection of oldness in a corporeal sense is one that implicitly, I argue, recalls the contours of senex style.

In the service of looking at new media in old ways and old media in new ways, foregrounding connections one might make between bodies and texts, a return to Gower's prologue *Confessio Amantis* reinforces that the anxieties present in late capitalism about the disappearing and much-abused codex reflect even in the fourteenth century. From the beginning

of *Confessio*, Gower romanticizes the past as one in which books were more important, even as he declares himself dull and unlearned.

And natheles be daies olde,  
Whan that the bokes weren levere,  
Wrytinge was beloved evere  
Of hem that weren vertuuous;  
For hier in erthe amonges ous,  
If no man write hou that it stode,  
The pris of hem that weren goode  
Scholde, as who seith, a gret partie  
Be lost; so for to magnifie  
The worthi princes that tho were,  
The bokes schewen hiere and there,  
Wherof the world ensampled is;  
And tho that deden thanne amis  
Thurgh tirannie and cruauté  
Right as thei stoden in degré,  
So was the wrytinge of here werk.  
Thus I, which am a burel clerk,  
Purpose for to wryte a bok  
After the world that whilom tok  
Long tyme in olde daies passed. (Prol. 37-55)

This rhetorical positioning of the book, caught between the quick and the dead recalls the old body of Amans at the end of Book VIII of *Confessio Amantis* who hovers between living and dying in his old age. Looking into a mirror, Amans reads himself and sees the traces of corporeal inscription that reflect old age. Here, at the beginning of *Confessio*, Gower too reads into old age, and like Amans, seems transfixed by the past. Recalling that books were loved (levere) in “daies olde,” and filled with stories and narratives that sampled the world, Gower attempts a similar sort of temporal disjunction. Amans strives to stay young and inhabit a world of courtly love, one commanded by Venus, where the old man views his young body, which as a function of being his past body is also an old one. Gower, as not yet Amans, attempts to go back similarly into the past to retrieve something both old—the attitude of an older culture to books—and new—his newest creation follows the trace of the master paradigm. And indeed, this blurring of old and



new, and persistence of the past in the present is a facet of Gower's verse which has been studied. In "Past and Present: Gower's Use of Old Books in *Vox Clamantis*," Malte Urban traces the presence of old books and authorities in the Latin dream vision. Arguing that the *Vox* is "informed by a cultural agenda that sees the present as corrupted in the sense that it still carries at least traces of the qualities of the past" while having "lost all cultural memory of these traces."<sup>261</sup>

What these lines demonstrate, in context of Urban's argument of the past in *Vox*, is that textual objects in their newness reflect the past. From print in the age of script to electronic textual formats in the days of the endlessly-dying codex, these newer objects reflect the forms of their older, supposedly superseded forms. What senex style allows modern readers to see is that this rhetorical relationship between impairment and ability in the context of age can shed light on why a easy narrative of new media as triumphant is so easy, and yet so often not the whole story.

One might question why old media, both in this study and in others, suddenly seems in vogue. As I have argued above, Ralph Hanna's linking of book history and Middle English literature posits an unbreakable connection between material objects and study of early English literature, even for critics who do not explicitly work through manuscript context. A related and necessary question to ask in the supposed twilight of a contemporary textual technology, is how does a reader of late medieval literature account for the widespread and elusive imagery surrounding masculine old age. How does the anticipated victory of New Media trouble and complicate increasingly prevalent examinations of "late style," tied tentatively to old age and dependent upon biography, that oldest pillar of literary criticism? This question is increasing implicated in the often uneasy marriage between old media and new media. In the age of our New Media, the history of the book, an old artifact with its dust and layers of history, seems

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<sup>261</sup> Malte Urban, "Past and Present: Gower's Use of Old Books in *Vox Clamantis*," *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009): pp. 175-194, (p. 176).

more central and popular than ever. That the age of the new, the innovative, and the groundbreaking should choose as one of its frontiers, an area of study that privileges age, wear, and history is at once surprising and logical.<sup>262</sup>

As medievalists and early modernists, we are heirs to a tradition that, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, saw great promise and possibility in the materials of the dead. It is a tradition, now old itself. These scholars and their methods proved lasting—Macaulay’s 1901 edition of *Confessio* is still standard, and readers of Hoccleve rely on Furnivall’s late nineteenth century edition for readings of many of his poems—and the resilience depicted in the posture of senex style is not far removed from these editorial considerations. Looking through this lens of reflected history, it is clear that the figure of the past, as the impaired yet able old man, is not divorced from our own period of transition between media, in which an older form shows a stubborn ability to remain, and remain popular in the face of new technology. The example of Caxton recalls that while the introduction of printing possibly and radically changed the face of late-medieval and early modern textuality, it did not in fact erase the previous format.<sup>263</sup> Script culture does not disappear with the first setting of type on William Caxton’s press; nor does this happen in the decades following. This analogy is, of course, imperfect. One cannot dispute that even if manuscripts still exist in some form, the victory of print and type is complete.

The point of this rather extended meditation on time, print, and text is to emphasize the expanse of history and the past in the writing of old age from Chaucer, Gower, and Hoccleve to Shirley and Caxton. The prevalence of a discourse of old age and a rhetoric of age-related

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<sup>262</sup> Alexandra Gillespie, “The History of the Book,” *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2007): 245-277. Gillespie opens with evidence from the 2006 MLA, where Book History “had attracted the greatest number of, and the most animated, discussions...it was the matter over which the junior academics who impressed the 2006 MLA hiring committees cut their scholarly teeth.” (245).

<sup>263</sup> For a concise account of some foundation myths concerning the introduction of printing, ranging from a stasis in technologies to immediate change, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein’s *Divine Art, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impressions to the Sense of an Ending* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), especially Chapter 1, “First Impressions,” pp. 1-33.

impairments and conditions reflected by their texts of the latter suggests that senex style offers some explanations for the frequency of formal and thematic elements that emphasize old age, reflecting not only bodily age, but also historical events, places, and past authors. Surrounded by the detritus of the past in the city of London and the precincts of Southwark and Westminster together with levels of narrative, history, and sources contained in past works, certain texts from 1390-1491 or 2 demonstrate a remarkable interest in a similar discursive treatment of old age.

Impaired ability or able impairment—this paradox so central to the adoption of senex style finds expression in the material objects to which modern audiences owe their experience of medieval literature and from which literary genealogies and histories have been formed. Harley MS 7333; Ashmole MS 59; and British Library, Add. MS 5467: these manuscripts lie at the center of my study of old age imagery and common to these codices is a range of descriptors from defective to incomplete. Yet in spite of this characterization as somehow unwhole, these manuscripts remind us that central to the dissemination of medieval *and* early modern literature is the role of objects that are not complete, not perfect, not able in the fullest sense of that word.

It is from these sources that a fossilization of their form takes place. While the printing of medieval works is a topic which has been studied and interrogated at length, less attention has been given to the manner in which these printed objects lend a sense of completeness and wholeness to the more modern form of older, incomplete objects while often demonstrating that their form of prosthesis is as broken, incomplete, and impaired as the form they implicitly and explicitly augment. Older works in a new format, these objects participate in the same “middel weie” as Gower’s own book, reproducing something of the old and of the new, all in a format which in the fifteenth century both announces its ties to traditional textual making and heralds the centuries of change to come. Indeed, in this way, the presentation of these works in an early

print format troubles an easy distinction between script and print, and forces increased scrutiny on the periodization of print and textuality.

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