

Kathryn Gleadle, 'Masculinity, Age and Life-Cycle in the Age of Reform'

I

The 1867 reform act has earned its rightful place as a landmark piece of legislation in the ongoing democratisation of the British state. However, as recent scholarship has made clear, it was a process which also crystallised contemporary notions of entitlement to the vote. As a result, the lines of exclusion were to be drawn yet more harshly around those who could not claim the status of 'householder': married women and the dependent poor especially.¹ Whilst this has been the subject of considerable discussion, one key category of exclusion remains neglected: that of age. Historians often point in passing to the fact that young single men were amongst the most significant male losers in nineteenth-century franchise reform: the rights of lodgers remained enormously difficult to exercise throughout the century and men living in their parental home were disenfranchised until 1918. They have even found class to be a secondary consideration next to age and housing tenure in determining enfranchisement

¹ Anna Clark, 'Gender, Class and the Constitution: Franchise Reform in England, 1832–1928', in *Re-Reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge, 1996); Keith McClelland, 'England's Greatness, the Working Man', and Jane Rendall, 'The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867', in Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), 71–118 and 119–178 respectively.

up until the fourth reform act.² Yet despite its clear significance, the politics of age has not received dedicated analysis in its own right.

Much recent scholarship has engaged closely with R.W. Connell's theory that hegemonic masculinity is a phenomenon which represses other, subordinate masculinities to produce a patriarchal social order.³ In a compelling assessment, Ben Griffin has pointed to the inadequacy of the model for periods before mass media, arguing that the multiple local variants in 'hegemonic masculinity' meant that there was no single dominant version.⁴ Connell's ideas have also been critiqued by queer theorists and discursive psychologists who insist that dominant masculinities are performative or adopted for specific social or interactional purposes.⁵ An examination of the parliamentary domain is certainly suggestive of the strategic nature of gendered articulations. Gendered arguments about age and life-cycle formed part of the cultural arsenal on which individuals could temporarily draw. They did not necessarily rest upon elaborated ideologies or stable subjectivities. However, what gave

² Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, 1990), 119; Marc Brodie, *The Politics of the Poor: The East End of London, 1885–1914* (Oxford, 2004), 54–69.

³ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2005).

⁴ Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge, 2012), 168–70.

⁵ John C. Landreau and Nelson M. Rodriguez, 'Queer Masculinities in Education: An Introduction', in *Queer Masculinities: A Critical Reader in Education*, ed. John C. Landreau and Nelson M. Rodriguez (New York, 2012), 3–4; Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley, 'Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices', *Feminism and Psychology* ix (1999), 335–56.

salience to such articulations was that they were interwoven with broader political discourses of cultural and social stability. Examining how these issues interrelated provides the opportunity for ongoing engagement with Connell's work. As she and Messerschmidt suggested in 2005, the concept of hegemonic masculinities might be substantially enriched by attention to the life cycle.⁶

Anna Clark, Jane Rendall and Keith McClelland have made a powerful case for the significance of gender in understanding the passage of the second reform act. They have illuminated contemporaries' preoccupation with the possibility of enfranchising the respectable artisan – typically envisaged as a family man and a moral, self-improving citizen. McClelland and Matthew McCormack have further demonstrated the significance working-class reformers and parliamentarians placed upon the 'criterion of independent manliness'. The ability of the head of the household to provide for his dependants and exert authority over them indicated his capacity for responsible citizenship.⁷ When studied through the prism of age the debates suggest the significance of another recurrent concept around which ideas of gendered citizenship cohered: the appeal to conceptions of masculine social stability. For,

⁶ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society*, xix (2005), 852.

⁷ Clark, 'Gender, Class and the Constitution', especially 233–44; McClelland, 'England's Greatness'; Rendall, 'The Citizenship of Women'; Matthew McCormack, "'Married Men and Fathers of Families": Fatherhood and Franchise Reform in Britain', in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (Basingstoke, 2007), 43–54; Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005), especially ch. 8 on the 1832 Reform Act.

paradoxically, ‘independence’ equally implied a voter anchored to domestic responsibilities. Within many scenarios it was an excess of independence which was critiqued. The sexually-free bachelor, the mobile lodger; the roving, juvenile crowd member; the unburdened, impulsive youth – such tropes proved effective tools in parliamentary debate. This was not least because they served as antonyms to the figure of the settled citizen – a category which could be interlaced with a stream of associative ideas concerning attachment to the ‘hearth’, the community, and to Anglo-Saxon heritage itself.

This essay will unpick the interlinking clusters of these ideas during two specific moments in the parliamentary reform debate: James Clay’s Elective Franchise Bill, introduced in February 1866; and William Torrens’s Lodgers’ Franchise Amendment of May 1867. We will consider how these proposals, and parliamentary responses to them, may be analysed as a discursive nexus. The multiple points of reference to age and life-cycle intersected with other, related notions, especially those of class, stability and community. This enabled a particular hegemonic norm of adult masculinity to be sustained within the parliamentary arena.

Cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has suggested that the public sphere can be the most intimate sphere of all.⁸ Tracing the webs of associative connections parliamentarians made between the sexual and family status of potential voters; their relationship to their fathers or sons; the kinds of houses in which they dwelt; and their personal decisions to delay or undertake marriage, underlines the richness of such a perspective for understanding franchise decisions in Victorian Britain. Both age and householder status were ostensibly deployed to manage

⁸ Berlant’s argument relates to Reaganite America. Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC, 1997), especially 1–24.

fears of greater democratisation in the age of reform. Yet the constellation of these overlapping ideas frequently intersected to produce a consensus that there was a ‘common sense’ relationship between age and political responsibility. Employing ‘age’ as a framework of analysis therefore enables us to plot broader shifts in the construction of the polity.

II

When James Clay, the radical liberal member for Hull, introduced his Elective Franchise Bill Gladstone scornfully referred to it as ‘a young man’s franchise’.⁹ The bill proposed to enfranchise those men of ‘full age’ who were able to pass a simple educational test. It was the first occasion on which parliament had discussed parliamentary reform since the formation of Russell’s government in October 1865. Many assumed that Clay’s proposal was designed to undermine the Liberal administration’s hawing reform initiatives.¹⁰ A number of Conservative MPs supported Clay’s measure along with an additional property qualification. The bill was to fail, but an unintended consequence of the debates was to make evident the beginnings of a growing parliamentary consensus around the position of household suffrage. By 1866 this was widely viewed by working-class reformers as a realistic compromise compared to manhood suffrage.¹¹ Gladstone was staunchly opposed to household suffrage, but the discussions on Clay’s bill prompted key figures within his party, such as the

⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1481: 30 May 1866.

¹⁰ See for example the complaint of John Bright: Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1519: 30 May 1866. See also comments of Locke (col. 1531) and Stafford Northcote (cols 1534–37).

¹¹ See F.B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill* (Cambridge, 1966), 139, 145–7, 151–61, 164, 167.

conservative-leaning Attorney General, Roundell Palmer, and the leading parliamentary radical John Bright, to pronounce an acceptance of it.¹² Bright's statement that 'our forefathers were right and wise when they were willing to intrust the representation of the cities and boroughs of the kingdom to the heads of families' was widely hailed as a definitive clarification of the scope of suffrage he might support.¹³

As Bright's statement suggests, the projection of the voter as the head of a family drew upon an intricate web of discursive connections lending the idea an aura of coherence, stability and tradition. This gave weight to the strategic shift to household suffrage and provided a series of motifs which could knit together diverse groupings of politicians. Many parliamentarians were invested in an evangelical domesticity, with its associated values of piety and family cares, and this intersected with a long-standing connection between fatherhood and

¹² Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister* (1999), 21–2; Maurice J. Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution, the Passing of the Second Reform Bill* (1967), 194–99. Clay was an old friend of Disraeli. In common with the Bill's other sponsors, George Clive and W.H. Gregory, he was in discussions with Conservative party managers. Clay was instrumental in the later 'tea room revolt' against Gladstone. John Markham, *Disraeli's Fellow Traveller: James Clay, M.P. for Hull* (Beverley, 1997).

¹³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1518: 30 May 1866; Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (1967), 161–77. For Roundell Palmer on household suffrage, see Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, cols 1525–6: 30 May 1866.

citizenship.¹⁴ Throughout the eighteenth century the household and its management had formed a critical component of masculine identity and social classification. As McCormack observes, ‘the political rights of men were fundamentally based upon their domestic relationships’. During a period in which there was a steep rise in the number of prosecutions for homosexual acts, mature heterosexuality within marriage was widely thought to endow men with the qualities of independent masculinity intrinsic to responsible citizenship.¹⁵ Despite growing threats to paternal authority in the early Victorian period, Sean Brady asserts that assemblages of sexual, economic and scientific discourses came to valorise the status of the married over the unmarried man.¹⁶

In the period leading up to Clay’s proposal this notion of ‘uxorious citizenship’, in which the right to vote was linked to a man’s sexual and marital status,¹⁷ was forcefully articulated. This could be the subject of some wry commentary, as the *Leicester Chronicle* observed: ‘The newest franchise right as yet proposed in these days is that by an esteemed M.P., who

¹⁴ Clark, ‘Gender, Class and the Constitution’, especially 233–44; McClelland, ‘England’s Greatness’; Matthew McCormack, ‘Fatherhood and Franchise Reform’, 43–54; Griffin, *The Politics of Gender*, ch. 2.

¹⁵ Matthew McCormack, ‘Men, “the Public” and Political History’, in *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. Matthew McCormack (Basingstoke, 2007), 24–8; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012).

¹⁶ Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (Basingstoke, 2005), especially ch. 2.

¹⁷ For a similar argument for France see Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870–1920* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), 1–16.

thinks that every man on marrying ought to have an extra vote'.¹⁸ Many elided the distinction between the married voter and the householder, frequently drawing in further cognate tropes, such as Englishness. For example, under the radical editorship of William Farish, the *Cheshire Observer* issued a clear warning as to the dangers of enfranchising young, unmarried men. Manhood suffrage, it claimed, could result in an electorate dominated by men in their twenties, 'the age when their passions are most vehement, when their minds are most daring and reckless'. It went on to urge, 'let him "sow his wild oats;" let him marry and settle down, and it is astonishing how different he becomes,—how much wiser and steadier and better a citizen.' The paper called for householder suffrage, which it claimed to be an ancient right in Saxon law and 'a return to the Primitive faith!'¹⁹ This pride in a distinctly English form of constitutionalism drew resonance from the fact that household suffrage could be presented as a return to the 'scot and lot' franchise. Would-be Conservative MP, Edward Cox similarly argued in his open letter to Lord Derby in February 1866 that, 'A Householder is a settled citizen, contributing directly to the public funds and liable to serve public offices. In nine cases out of ten he has a wife and family.' Cox went on to observe that this was 'the old English franchise'.²⁰ As Thomas Milner Gibson had earlier urged Gladstone, 'the idea is thoroughly English of the settled heads of families being voters.'²¹

¹⁸ 'The Coming Reform Bill', *Leicester Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1866, p. 8.

¹⁹ 'The Safe and Practicable Franchise', *Cheshire Observer*, 19 Mar. 1859, p. 7.

²⁰ Edward W. Cox, *Representative Reform. Proposal for a Constitutional Reform Bill: Letter to the Right Hon. The Earl of Derby, &c.* (1866), 5, 9.

²¹ Gibson to Gladstone, 3 October 1865, Gladstone Papers, British Library, 44408, 5, cited in Shannon, *Gladstone*, 10. See also Disraeli's cynical use of the argument: 'Deputations to Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli', *Daily News*, 1 May 1867, p. 5.

The renewed emphasis on the settled, married man - exemplified by debates on Clay's bill - was strongly inflected by perceptions of age and masculine maturity. John Tosh has attested that for the Victorians 'worries about immaturity counted for much more than the fear of effeminacy'.²² Heather Ellis has further demonstrated that such concerns had been forcefully restated within elite discussions over public school reform, arguing, 'distinctions of age and maturity were more important than those of physical gender'.²³ Other historians have pinpointed the 1850–70 period as one in which the physical display of manhood, especially through the widespread sporting of beards, reached a peak.²⁴ Correspondingly, to characterise a political movement as juvenile and its followers as 'beardless' was a common term of political abuse at this juncture.²⁵ Similarly, the tactic of disparaging the youth of MPs also emerged sporadically. Until the 1830s, the enduring structures of patronage and elite networks meant that it was not uncommon for men to win parliamentary seats before they

²² John Tosh, 'What should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', in John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow, 2005), 34.

²³ Heather Ellis, 'Thomas Arnold, Christian Manliness and the Problem of Boyhood', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, xix (2014), 428; Heather Ellis, "'Boys, Semi-Men and Bearded Scholars": Maturity and Manliness in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxford', in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. J.H. Arnold and S. Brady (Basingstoke, 2011), 263.

²⁴ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, xlviii (2005), 30.

²⁵ e.g. 'Elements of Reform', *The Examiner*, 11 Nov. 1865, p. 711; 'Great Meeting of the Working Classes in Leeds', *The Times*, 9 Oct. 1866, p. 7.

had reached their majority.²⁶ Lord John Russell had himself been elected to parliament although short of his 21st birthday. By 1865 the *Aberdeen Journal* was able to mock the pretensions of Russell's son, then aged 21, as a 'juvenile politician' who had yet to successfully master political discourse and strategy.²⁷ During debates over the distribution of seats, Edward Cardwell referred disdainfully to 'the doctrine of "young men"' (that small boroughs should be retained to provide an opportunity to place young men of moderate means in parliament).²⁸ A speaker at a Bury reform meeting was one of many to deride the practice, referring to 'little men' who 'may do a large amount of mischief'.²⁹

Gladstone's disparagement of a 'young man's franchise' therefore made cultural sense to a parliamentary audience attuned to wider debates over the appropriate age of political governance. Such comments, as indicated in the exclamation of the *Cheshire Observer* that 'We don't want to be governed by "young men"', were related to a series of cultural preoccupations encompassed within the notion of the 'householder'.³⁰ The head of a

²⁶ Edward Porritt and Annie Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons: Parliamentary Representation Before 1832* (2 vols, Cambridge, 1903), i, ch. 11; Gerrit P. Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734–1832* (New Haven, CT, 1955), appendix 4.

²⁷ John Russell, *Recollections and Suggestions, 1813–1873* (1875), 1; 'Too Smart', *Aberdeen Journal*, 22 Mar. 1865, p. 8.

²⁸ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 904: 14 May 1866. For Gladstone's comments on the electoral opportunities of young men see Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, cols 488–90: 7 May 1866.

²⁹ 'Reform Meeting at Bury', *The Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*, 2 Apr. 1867, p. 6.

³⁰ 'The Safe and Practicable Franchise', *Cheshire Observer*, 19 Mar. 1859, p. 7.

household might of course be a young man, but the tenor of household suffrage debate was to imply age-based maturity. Since the early-modern period, full ‘manhood’ was often deemed not to begin until at least a man’s mid-thirties.³¹ By the Victorian era, Malthusian social thought and middle-class courtship mores supposed that an ideal man exhibited self-control in delaying marriage until he had sufficient funds to support a family, or was established in his career. By 1851 the average middle-class man was 30 years old on marriage.³² When politicians spoke of enfranchising heads of families, they typically envisaged a mature citizen. John Roebuck referred to ‘a man [who] has a settled home, in which he has lived with his family for a number of years’.³³ William Forster rejected the educational test since it would ‘admit by picking and choosing the young men who had just left school.’ He preferred the term ‘hearthstone suffrage’ – a powerful image which associated voters not only with independence and responsibility, but also emphasised a physical rootedness to the domestic site of their enfranchisement. Such men, he averred, would be ‘safer possessors of power than young men without houses or hearthstones.’³⁴ Politicians might evoke such an image for

³¹ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 246.

³² Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2012), 126.

³³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, col. 1602: 12 Apr. 1867.

³⁴ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxii, cols 1389–90: 16 Apr. 1866; ‘The West Riding Reform Demonstration’, *The Bradford Observer*, 11 Oct. 1866, p. 6. See also his comments on Disraeli’s Bill: Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, cols 1608–9: 12 Apr. 1867. Forster was to continue to articulate such views in the following years, e.g. Hansard, *Commons Debates*, ccxvii, cols 835–42: 23 July 1873. See also Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992), 310.

fleeting or contingent political reasons, and endorsing a hegemonic masculinity did not mean that the speaker himself embodied that norm. However, for many Liberal politicians (including Bright and Forster) it became crystallised as an integral facet of their broader patriarchalism – witness their outspoken opposition to female suffrage.³⁵

IV

The patriarchal household has typically been analysed in terms of male dominance over women and dependent children. Less frequently explored is the extent to which patriarchalism also implied dominance over the household's adult children. According to Leonore Davidoff, the crystallisation of the individual, rational subject 'implied mastery over others who were conceived as dependants and objects'.³⁶ The enduring hold of such notions was such that the disenfranchisement of adult men living in the parental home was rarely subject to serious scrutiny. Conservative MPs Robert Montagu and Beresford Hope attacked Gladstone's reform bill in the spring of 1866 for failing to address the issue of young men living at home, but as staunch opponents of reform their actions underline the extent to which arguments about age could often be deployed for tactical reasons.³⁷ Clay himself had originally suggested that his bill might address the issue. Announcing his idea at a meeting in his Hull constituency, he made a plea on behalf of 'the thousands of intelligent young men'

³⁵ Griffin, *Politics of Gender*, ch. 5 and 215, 221–2, 225, 278–9

³⁶ Leonore Davidoff, 'Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History', in Leonore Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge, 1995), 234.

³⁷ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1489: 30 May 1866; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxii, col. 1694: 19 Apr. 1866.

who were unenfranchised as they lived with their father.³⁸ However, considerations of age were a rhetorical tool that he used opportunistically. Once his bill was before the House he quickly shifted position. In response to hostile comments concerning the possible age profile of voters to be admitted under his scheme, he allowed that ‘if a Committee of this House should think fit to raise the age to twenty-five years, I should see no objection to the change.’ (A point he reiterated when the House again debated the bill in July.)³⁹ His opponents were unconvinced. When Clay’s bill received its second reading, Gladstone drew upon traditional notions of family hierarchy to insist that the prospect of young men being enfranchised whilst their fathers were not ‘affords a conclusive reason against the measure’. Other hostile speakers also professed to be appalled at the generational inequalities the measure could create. Bright protested ‘at the different manner in which it would treat the young of twenty-one, and ... persons of fifty and upwards’.⁴⁰

As this suggests, wider responses to the bill frequently referenced the politics of age. When Stafford Northcote supported Clay during the bill’s second reading he defended the bill against the most common trope in reform discussion – the fear of swamping – by proposing it be accompanied by a higher age test. This would prevent ‘any undue swamping of the

³⁸ ‘Reform Meeting at Hull’, *Daily News*, 26 Jan. 1866, p. 2.

³⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxi, col. 825: 20 Feb. 1866; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiv, col. 1005: 18 July 1866. As Russell’s government had recently fallen it was clear the measure would fail.

⁴⁰ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, cols 1517 (Bright) and 1481 (Gladstone): 30 May 1866.

existing constituency by young men just fresh from school'.⁴¹ James Whiteside, the Tory MP for Dublin University, also appeared to be sympathetic to Clay's bill (perhaps using it as a device to undermine reform). However, in contrast he drew upon a positive trope of juvenile political enthusiasm, declaring that, 'Young men are often more generous and patriotic in their political sentiments and more fit to exercise the franchise than old ones.'⁴² Such claims were rare. Gladstone claimed the bill might enfranchise 'young men whose characters are immature, whose spirits are high, whose views are strong, and who have given no pledges to society.' Relating citizenship to the intimate sphere of domesticity, Gladstone made a pointed contrast with the older, family man: as 'a general rule he is a more stable and trustworthy man at the latter than the earlier period of life'.⁴³ Fellow Liberal George Denman claimed that it would 'bring within the suffrage a number of young men who had not the least responsibility, and who were as likely to be reckless in the choice of their representatives as any class of the community which could be named.'⁴⁴

The age at which the young might be deemed eligible for political responsibility, and the relative political rights and competencies of minors, were being debated from a multitude of perspectives by contemporaries. One of the more colourful figures in the reform campaign, Thomas Chisholm Anstey, argued repeatedly that all franchise restrictions were a curtailment of ancient rights. His works, influential in the women's suffrage campaign, observed that it

⁴¹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1538: 30 May 1866. For the trope of

'swamping' see Kristin Zimmerman, 'Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *EHR*, cxviii (2003), 1180.

⁴² Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, cols 1503–4: 30 May 1866.

⁴³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1481: 30 May 1866.

⁴⁴ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxiii, col. 1502: 30 May 1866.

had been common for 12 year olds to participate in local and parliamentary elections. Anstey referred to ancient legal precedent concerning juvenile competence: that ‘an infant is capable of such offices as do not concern the administration of justice, but only require skill and diligence’.⁴⁵ A Mr Moir argued at a reform meeting in Dunfermline in April 1867 that the voting age should be lowered to 18 as this was the age at which men could join the militia and both sexes could elect church ministers.⁴⁶ Far more commonly, however, the reform debates questioned the political abilities of the young. Sometimes, the theme functioned as a rhetorical strategy to mock the logic of universal suffrage, with jokes about ‘infant suffrage’ or ‘paeodocracy’.⁴⁷

In other ways too, the hierarchies of age were being reiterated. For more serious rationales for the disenfranchisement of minors were articulated at this time by parliamentarians and political commentators. Holly Brewer has demonstrated that practices of hereditary entitlement, such as office-holding, which had previously enabled aristocratic minors to exert

⁴⁵ Thomas Chisholm Anstey, *On Some Supposed Constitutional Restraints upon the Parliamentary Franchise* (1867), 27–8, 31. See also Thomas Chisholm Anstey, *Plea of the Unrepresented Commons for Restitution of Franchise, An Historic Enquiry* (1866); Sidney Lee, ‘Anstey, Thomas Chisholm (1816–1873)’, rev. K.D. Reynolds, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004); Rendall, ‘The Citizenship of Women’, 142–3.

⁴⁶ ‘Reform Meeting at Dunfermline’, *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, 11 Apr. 1867, p. 4. See also *A Report of the First Meeting of the Reform League* (1848), 15–16.

⁴⁷ ‘Reform Meeting in Manchester’, *The Times*, 1 Feb. 1866, p. 7. For another similar debate see ‘Manhood Suffrage’, *Bradford Observer*, 25 Oct. 1866, p. 3. This drew on a long line of argument. E.g. Robert Peel’s response to the Chartist petition of 1842: Hansard, *Commons Debates*, lxii, col. 961: 21 Apr. 1842.

authority, were gradually eroded during the eighteenth century as rational consent, rather than social status, began to emerge as the basis for active citizenship.⁴⁸ This process may have been more attenuated than Brewer suggests. Debates over the privileging of birth over competency were a key feature of the age of Victorian reform. In 1861, the MP for Poole, Henry Danby Seymour, had presented to parliament his researches into ecclesiastical law in which he found numerous cases of minors appointed as registrars. ‘Infants’, Seymour concluded, ‘should not be promoted to responsible offices intended for persons of more advanced age and competent judgement’.⁴⁹ There was, by the mid 1860s, a dominant view that the decisions of the state should rest in those of ‘full age’. As *The Times* put it, ‘because it would be impossible to distinguish, even approximately, between the few youths who are fit and the many who are wholly unfit to be trusted with the franchise, the State refuses it to all below 21 years of age.’⁵⁰

These considerations occurred within a wider climate of debate concerning the public behaviour of young men. Not only was there mounting critique of the disreputable leisure and lifestyles of young, single men,⁵¹ but also, as John Gillis points out, ‘The failed revolutions of 1848 marked a turning point in the political history of youth’, leading to a climate in which

⁴⁸ Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

⁴⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxiv, col. 1389: 23 July 1861.

⁵⁰ ‘London, Saturday, March 23, 1867’, *The Times*, 23 Mar. 1867, p. 9.

⁵¹ Mike Huggins, ‘More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England’, *Journal of Social History*, xxxiii (2000), 586–92.

youthful political exuberance was increasingly subject to censure and discipline.⁵² It was also a period in which concepts of ‘youth’, ‘adolescence’ and ‘juvenile delinquency’ were making their mark on social policy.⁵³ The claim that a meeting had a large juvenile element was employed often to cast aspersions on the manliness and political legitimacy of those assembled. This was a crucial context in which MPs were making statements concerning age-related political abilities. So the *Pall Mall Gazette* described the Trafalgar Square demonstration of June 1866 as ‘composed rather of little boys and non-descript youths than of people who had any right to be called working men’.⁵⁴ *The Times*’ reporter described the assemblage as being constituted of ‘the usual slouching, shambling man-boys who constitute the mass of the ordinary London multitude’.⁵⁵ This revival of mass meetings followed two decades in which, as James Vernon has asserted, there had been increasing attempts to control and discipline the public sphere.⁵⁶ In this context ‘age’ was frequently mobilised as a political tool. To give the impression that working-class youths were forming an uncontrolled aspect of the reform movement could be deployed to bolster the argument that the electorate feared being ‘swamped’ by an irresponsible plebeian constituency.

⁵² John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770–Present* (New York, 1981), ch. 3, quotation at p. 95.

⁵³ Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, 1999).

⁵⁴ ‘Reform Demonstrations’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 June 1866, p. 1.

⁵⁵ ‘London, Tuesday, July 24, 1866’, *The Times*, 24 July 1866, p. 9. See also ‘The Reform Demonstration’, *Manchester Times*, 28 July 1866, p. 3.

⁵⁶ James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 2009), ch. 6.

As many MPs were aware, raising the age of enfranchisement – typically to 25 years – had been used to diminish the effect of wider suffrage reforms in other European states.⁵⁷ Chronological age was thus one of the ways in which an exclusionary model of citizenship might be constructed. James Manning, a radical Unitarian lawyer argued in *Thoughts upon Subjects Connected with Parliamentary Reform* (1866) that ‘the magical age of twenty-one’ was an arbitrary, feudal distinction and suggested that ‘The danger attending the lowering of the franchise might be lessened by adding to the age of the voter, and by extending the period of his occupation’.⁵⁸ Charles Bernard Gibson, an Irish Presbyterian chaplain and author agreed: ‘Another way of gratifying the voting ambition of all, would be, to confine the voting power to a particular age.’⁵⁹

Other interventions referred explicitly to the perceived relationship between the exercise of citizenship and chronological maturity. The eccentric *Rough Sketches of a New Reform Bill* (1866) asserted that the age of suffrage should be 25 years as, until then, ‘a man even with the most extraordinary endowments seldom knows his own mind’.⁶⁰ Leicestershire town-councillor, Frederick Thompson Mott, suggested that the key to the suffrage debates was ‘to distinguish between a child and a man’. Believing that enfranchisement should be based on intellectual not physical capacity, his solution was to enfranchise those over 30 years old with

⁵⁷ Robert J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in 19th Century Europe* (1983), 16–18.

⁵⁸ James Manning, *Thoughts upon Subjects Connected with Parliamentary Reform* (1866), 9, 18.

⁵⁹ Charles Bernard Gibson, *The Philosophy of the Franchise* (1867), 12.

⁶⁰ ‘A Devonshire Man’, *Rough Sketch of a New Reform Bill* (Exeter, 1866), 10.

sufficient literacy to read a newspaper.⁶¹ Similar ideas were circulating within intellectual and legal circles. The prominent Scottish lawyer, James Lorimer, briefly referenced the merits of age-based enfranchisement in *Political Progress not Necessarily Democratic* (1857).⁶² In 1865 he returned to the theme in his *Constitutionalism of the Future*. This called for household suffrage and additional plural votes based on property, but also included an ‘age test’, attesting that chronological maturity brought greater qualities as a citizen. Lorimer acknowledged his debt to an essay in the *Law Magazine*, which had even proposed that each decade over the age of 20 should earn the citizen an additional vote.⁶³ Lord Elcho was sufficiently impressed by Lorimer’s book that he sent a copy to Gladstone in 1867.⁶⁴

Clay’s suggestion that his bill might be amended to include a higher age test may therefore be located within a rich sphere of debate over the relationship between age and citizenship. A number of previous reform bills had included educational tests.⁶⁵ Clay’s own measure appears to have been based closely upon that of John Boyd Kinnear, copying many of its technical aspects. Kinnear, a Scottish Liberal MP, had first argued for the merits of an educational test in 1859. He republished his scheme in the form of a draft bill, *Principles of*

⁶¹ ‘A Common-Sense Reform Bill’, *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, 30 Mar. 1867, p. 8. Mott argued for a second vote for well-educated property holders. See also ‘The Franchise’, *The Spectator*, 13 Jan. 1866, p. 43.

⁶² James Lorimer, *Political Progress not Necessarily Democratic* (1857), 239 n.

⁶³ James Lorimer, *Constitutionalism of the Future; or, Parliament the Mirror of the Nation* (Edinburgh, 1865), 167–8; ‘Political Equality’, *The Law Magazine and Law Review*, xvii (Feb.–Aug. 1864), 95.

⁶⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 241.

⁶⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, 80, 187, 243, 259.

Reform, in 1865. Its opening line specified that ‘every male person at the age of 25’ who has a certificate of education was to have the vote – an idea that may well have influenced Clay’s proposed concession to this effect in the Commons.⁶⁶ Such calls to raise the age of suffrage were not implemented, but they contributed to a climate of opinion which legitimised arguments denigrating the political abilities of the young and which helped to make possible age-related political structures. The fact that there were a multitude of ideas, tropes and preconceptions which variously linked these sets of ideas meant that seemingly hegemonic notions of masculinity could rest on shifting discursive alliances. As such there was cultural space for contradictory claims, and the fractured nature of discourses surrounding masculinities could work ultimately to further secure gendered hegemony. Debates over the lodger clause illuminate how this might operate.

V

Reform organisations campaigned vociferously on the issue of the lodger franchise during 1866–7, for without it working-class men would remain disenfranchised in many areas. As a resolution of the London Working Men’s Association at Trafalgar Square declared, ‘any measure which does not include an extensive lodger franchise will not be satisfactory to the working classes.’⁶⁷ Disraeli’s original proposals had failed to include a lodger qualification

⁶⁶ John Boyd Kinnear, *Principles of Reform: Political and Legal* (1865), Appendix (p. 371).

Clay’s test was to be administered by the Civil Service Commissioners. It allowed for any man of ‘full age’ in cities and boroughs to apply to the town clerk for a certificate, subject to a six months’ residency qualification. On successful completion of a short test in writing, spelling and arithmetic the applicant could be placed on the electoral register.

⁶⁷ ‘Reform Meeting in Trafalgar Square’, *The Beehive Newspaper: A Journal of General Intelligence, The Organ of Industrial Interests, and the Reform Movement*, 9 Mar. 1867, p. 1.

and its achievement required wide-scale lobbying, agitation, and behind-the-scenes manoeuvres. On 6 May 1867, a lodger franchise amendment was introduced by the radical MP for Finsbury, William McCullagh Torrens.⁶⁸ Following fraught negotiations over the residency and rental qualifications, and obstructive counter-moves from the House of Lords, this was eventually successful.⁶⁹ In the event, the high qualification set (the £10 figure was for unfurnished rooms), the 12-month residency clause, and the cumbersome annual registration process ensured that the lodger clause benefited only a tiny constituency.⁷⁰ As Eugenio Biagini observes, ‘The legislators were suspicious of the economic and political independence of young workers’. He has even mooted that the exclusion of bachelors may have been a deliberate facet of liberal approaches to franchise reform in the late Victorian period.⁷¹ Nonetheless, there was not a stable classification of the bachelor against which the

For the impact of the reform demonstration on Disraeli’s move to household suffrage: F.M. Leventhal, *Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working-Class Politics* (1971), 90–1.

⁶⁸ Torrens was architect of the Artisans Dwelling Act (1868), see Matthew MacDonagh, ‘Torrens, (William) Torrens McCullagh (1813–1894)’, rev. Matthew Lee, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

⁶⁹ ‘The Reform League. Demonstration in Hyde Park.—The Lodger Franchise’, *The Beehive*, 3 Aug. 1867, p. 1; Hansard, *Lords Debates*, clxxxix, cols 305–9: 29 July 1867.

⁷⁰ Neal Blewett, ‘The Franchise in the United Kingdom, 1885–1918’, *Past & Present*, xxxii (1965), 40–3.

⁷¹ Biagini, *Liberty*, 309–10; he notes: *The Gladstone Diaries with Cabinet Minutes and Prime-Ministerial Correspondence*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew (14 vols, Oxford, 1968–1994), x, p. cv, n. 3.

claims of married men could be constructed.⁷² Examining the lodger clause enables us to explore this further. It also reveals the ways in which ‘independence’ operated as a finely calibrated political ideal. Here the discourses of age intersected with those of class to uphold exclusionary models of citizenship.

Enfranchising lodgers might seem to run counter to the theory of manly independence and familial domesticity which the model of household suffrage implied. But in key debates such as this, when politicians were fighting hard to establish the contours of the new, male, urban electorate the capaciousness of political definitions could readily be exploited. Roundell Palmer argued that ‘Lodgers were admitted to the franchise as householders in the second degree’.⁷³ This was a tactic Gladstone was also to adopt during the 1884 reform discussions, during which he claimed that lodger and service franchises could be seen as ‘enlargements’ of the household franchise.⁷⁴ The lodger franchise debates often bore little resemblance to the realities of the housing market. A substantial number of lodgers were elderly, and many were ‘perpetual’ – settled and long-term residents.⁷⁵ These were issues which the political debates tended to evade. Opposition to or equivocation over the issue often hinged on professing to

⁷² See Tosh, ‘What should Historians do with Masculinity?’, 42–3; John Tosh, ‘Middle-Class Masculinities in the Era of the Women’s Suffrage Movement, 1860–1914’, in Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 114; Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (Chicago, 1997), 55, 252, n. 69.

⁷³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxviii, col. 1471: 12 July 1867.

⁷⁴ *The Times*, 29 Feb. 1884, cited in Griffin, *Politics of Gender*, 269.

⁷⁵ Vicky Holmes, ‘Accommodating the Lodger: The Domestic Arrangements of Lodgers in Working-Class Dwellings in a Victorian Provincial Town’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, xix (2014), 321, 326–8.

fear that without a significant residency qualification the clause would enfranchise unsettled men without sufficient ties to a local community – men of a ‘migratory character’ in Disraeli’s words.⁷⁶ The disgruntled Liberal MP Edward Bouverie was one of many to lament that ‘lodgers were persons who had no permanent home’.⁷⁷ His colleague Thomas Headlam, acknowledged that along with itinerant labourers there were ‘young men between 20 and 30, unmarried, and who have not, generally speaking, any fixed or settled homes’, and who ‘have not yet settled down at any place to become citizens.’⁷⁸ Another regretted that ‘the very word “lodger” implied an unsettled condition’.⁷⁹ Lodgers, that is, might in some respects demonstrate an excess of independence in their freedom from domestic and local responsibilities.

Anna Clark, like Biagini, has implied that it may have been discomfiture over the figure of the bachelor which surfaced during such discussions.⁸⁰ As we have seen, marriage was itself frequently evoked as a social marker of masculine respectability during reform debates. Yet as John Gilbert McCurdy has found for the American context, ‘the burden of proof might have been higher’, but the acknowledgement of hard-working, self-improving bachelors was a significant contemporary motif.⁸¹ In British reform debates also there were attempts to

⁷⁶ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, cols 643–4: 26 Mar. 1867.

⁷⁷ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxviii, col. 1455: 12 July 1867.

⁷⁸ ‘Mr. Headlam, M.P., on Reform’, *Daily News*, 25 Dec. 1866, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, col. 613: 26 Mar. 1867.

⁸⁰ Clark, ‘Gender, Class and the Constitution’, 242.

⁸¹ John Gilbert McCurdy, “‘Your Affectionate Brother’: Complementary Manhoods in the Letters of John and Timothy Pickering’, *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, iv (2006), 518–19.

present the unmarried man as an exemplary working-class male subject. Trade unionist Thomas Wright defended well-educated bachelor mechanics in comparison to the ‘little-educated, much-harassed married labourer.’⁸² Liberal MP George Goschen suggested a variety of reasons as to why men might live as lodgers, observing, ‘surely there were such things in the world as respectable bachelors’. Yet, although he claimed it went beyond the remit of parliament to take heed of such personal matters, he felt compelled to affirm that ‘there might be greater weight and greater political virtue in married men.’⁸³

Others were content to present ‘the lodger’ as synonymous with the virtuous working man. Notwithstanding Torrens’ secret negotiations with Disraeli’s cabinet, he was a fiercely independent politician, a vice president of the Reform League and an expert in the houses of the London poor.⁸⁴ He made an authoritative case to the Commons that Disraeli’s reform bill failed to deal with the realities of metropolitan housing rates. As such, his amendment was needed to ‘extend the franchise to a loyal, intelligent, and independent class of the community.’⁸⁵ Even Gladstone came to agree ‘the lodger, rather than the householder, represents the intelligent and highly-educated workman.’⁸⁶ But debate raged as to whether the measure would in fact enfranchise many working-class lodgers. Ernest Jones was

⁸² Thomas Wright, *The Great Unwashed* (1868), 74–5;

⁸³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvii, col. 460: 13 May 1867.

⁸⁴ Cowling, *1867*, 276–7; Alex Windscheffel, *Popular Conservatism in Imperial London, 1868–1906* (2007), 115; For Torrens and reform league: Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, cols 1935–6: 3 May 1867.

⁸⁵ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvii, col. 30: 6 May 1867.

⁸⁶ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvii, cols 38–40 (quotation at 39): 6 May 1867.

scathing of a proposed £10 lodger clause, fuming that it ‘touches but few, very few, working men, but *many middle-class men* in the country.’⁸⁷

For many this was precisely the point: the £10 lodger clause might help to dilute the effect of working-class representation.⁸⁸ When Disraeli introduced his second reform bill in 1867 some remnants of Clay’s educational clause had reappeared, as part of an overt attempt to shore up the middle-class vote. Clause 5 proposed to enfranchise specific professional constituencies but also ‘a male person who has passed at any senior middle class examination of any university of the United Kingdom.’ The proposal was roundly criticised and speedily dismissed. Disraeli was happy to concede, agreeing that the unexpected passage of the lodger clause had enfranchised those who were originally targeted in this measure.⁸⁹ As this suggests, some projected the lodger not as the worthy exemplar of the working-class man, but rather as a young professional male. ‘Young men frequently change their places of abode till they have established themselves in business’, urged James P. Bourne in a letter to Gladstone.⁹⁰ Drawing on his experience of the Scottish context (where there was no distinction between lodger and tenant), the radical MP for Edinburgh, Duncan McLaren, asserted that the 12-month occupancy stipulation discriminated against up-and-coming younger men. Here McLaren, who was a supporter of household suffrage, argued nonetheless

⁸⁷ Ernest Jones to the editor of *The Commonwealth*, 21 Apr. 1866, in *The Era of the Reform League: English Labour and Radical Politics 1857–1872: Documents Selected by Gustav Mayer*, ed. John Breuilly, Gottfried Niedhart and Antony Taylor (Mannheim, 1995), 167.

⁸⁸ Clark, ‘Gender, Class and the Constitution’, 243.

⁸⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvii, cols 1232–40: 28 May 1867; *Representation of the People Bill* (1867), 2-3.

⁹⁰ ‘Reform’, *Daily News*, 9 Oct. 1866, p. 2.

that ‘there was no class more intelligent than the young men employed in offices and commercial establishments, or better qualified to exercise the right of voting’.⁹¹ In this context the evocation of bachelors might reference images of virtuous youth, rather than uncontained sexual licence. McLaren later spoke of ‘young men who were prudent and did not marry rapidly, who took lodgings and waited till they got a fixed position before taking wives’.⁹² McLaren’s case made for a reassuring argument to a Commons which had, by this stage, largely accepted the inevitability of the lodger clause. However, whilst the claims of young middle-class men were sometimes referenced, few had seriously sought to defend the political rights of the young, working-class man. Class-specific distinctions of age and lifecycle were one of the ways in which the masculine hegemony of citizenship was upheld.

VI

Matthew McCormack has asserted that the way men ‘justify their political claims in patriarchal terms’ is a neglected theme within political history.⁹³ The findings here support such an approach. Recent work on masculinities has rightly focused upon the subjective experience and internalisation of gendered ideas. However, public, strategic articulations of gender are equally important. Alexandra Shepard has argued that, in the early-modern period, age and householding status were often more important than social status for contemporary masculinity.⁹⁴ It would appear this was an enduring phenomenon within political debate. As

⁹¹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvii, col. 37–8: 6 May 1867.

⁹² Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxviii, col. 1457: 12 July 1867.

⁹³ Matthew McCormack, ‘Introduction’, in *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. Matthew McCormack (Basingstoke, 2007), 8.

⁹⁴ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 246, 251.

John Tosh observes, 'Adult gender identity for men involved forming a household, maintaining it, protecting it and controlling it'. This, suggests Tosh, was a feature of patriarchal authority throughout the centuries.⁹⁵ Seemingly contingent political rhetoric delivered in ad hoc parliamentary debates served to uphold the mature, married householder as a central figure in masculine hegemony. Contra Connell, this may have been but one of many 'dominant masculinities', and it may have functioned simply as a rhetorical ideal, but it is a form which achieved ascendancy within this domain.

In the context of constitutional debate, the repeated evocation of men's relationship to hearth and the community emerged as central to ideas of a stable polity rooted in English political tradition. Against these various representations youth was repeatedly pitted as restive, rash, and rootless, in need of control and constraint: increasingly a generic symbol against which the democratising state was imagined. These were not static ideas. They could be flexibly appropriated and deployed, and at times, they were countermanded by competing discourses. This very instability enabled politicians to make claims for the enfranchisement of strikingly diverse groups (such as the young professional, or the self-denying autodidact artisan) for pragmatic political reasons. Nonetheless, the restrictions on the lodger franchise clause and the failure to tackle the political status of non-householding men (especially sons living with their parents) resulted in a reform act that enshrined a model of household suffrage and favoured mature citizens. Age-related discourses of masculinity may hinge on unstable, momentary rhetorical positions, nonetheless, when articulated within the domains of power they matter. Analysed cumulatively, longstanding and persistent strains of dominant

⁹⁵ John Tosh, 'The Old Adam and the New Man: Emerging Themes in the History of English Masculinities, 1750–1850,' in Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 66.

masculinity may therefore be identified even within a model of analysis which privileges the strategic, and performative nature of gendered discourse.

Within the scholarship on masculinities there has as yet been little attempt to consider how male identities could be constructed and experienced as distinctly 'adult'. The debates considered here often homogenised 'boys', 'youth', and 'young men' as potentially unstable political constituencies contrasted to the claims of mature adult men. As such, the second Reform Act may have functioned as a significant moment in the emerging crystallisation of 'adulthood' as a social and political category – even if it became a status which could be differently attained by separate constituencies. Significantly it was in the years immediately following the second reform act that the concept of 'adult suffrage' was first fully delineated, with the formation of the Adult Suffrage League.⁹⁶ Implicit here was that the main criteria of exclusion from citizenship should be quite simply, age. Calls to raise the British voting age persisted through to the early 20th century. Herbert Samuel argued in 1902, for example, that the lodger clause prevented the enfranchisement of young men whose judgement was 'immature' and whose 'influence would be dangerous'. He went on to moot a higher age of majority. In drafting the Liberals' reform bill a decade later Joseph Pease advocated raising the age of voting to 23 or 25.⁹⁷ Familiarity with such concepts enabled further, if initially

⁹⁶ This organisation appears to have been established in autumn 1874 and to have involved the radical journalist Adolphe Smith and trade union activist George Shipton: 'Political and Personal', *John Bull*, 21 Nov. 1874, p. 799; 'The Women's Suffrage and the Adult Suffrage Societies', *Women and Work*, 20 Mar. 1875, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Herbert Samuel, *Liberalism: Its Principles and Proposals* (1902), 242, n. 3, cited in H.C.G. Matthew, Ross McKibbin, and J.A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour

unintended, exclusionary practices. In 1918 it became acceptable to set different franchises according to age. The qualification was actually lowered to 19 for those men and women who had performed military service abroad during the war, whilst it was set at 30 for other new female voters.⁹⁸

In common with dominant identities such as race, an individual's sense of themselves as a mature, *adult* citizen tends to be rarely and obliquely voiced. Despite the centrality of such identities to the formation of subjectivity, they are often only glanced upon in the course of other, ulterior utterances. To gauge their significance it is necessary to plot the webs of ideas and cultural associations within which they are most commonly evoked. During the reform debates, the discourses of age and life-cycle were a minor leitmotif in themselves. They might have had only a fleeting resonance in some instances, but they tapped into additional ideologies and concerns. Whilst John Davis has rightly pointed to the haphazard nature of the legislation and its unintended consequences,⁹⁹ the politics of age was a recurring mode through which MPs or reformers made their case. These occasional avowals drew upon deep-seated psycho-cultural motifs, but also upon broader developments concerning a whole multiplicity of age-related debates and concerns. Cumulatively the effect was startling. The process of democratisation was one in which, for fifty years, the hierarchies of age became more entrenched.

Party', *EHR*, xci (1976), 748–9; D.H. Close, 'The Collapse of Resistance to Democracy: Conservatism, Adult Suffrage, and Second Chamber Reform, 1911–28', *HJ*, xx (1977), 914.

⁹⁸ Nicoletta F. Gullace, '*The Blood of our Sons*': *Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2002), 177.

⁹⁹ John Davis, 'Slums and the Vote, 1867–1890', *HR*, lxiv (1991), 375–88.

